



The Modern Business' Multigenerational Guide:

Bridge Generation Gaps in Your Workplace



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Managing a Multigenerational Workforce

The planets have aligned in the 21st Century with five generations of Americans—Silent, Baby Boomer, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z—working side-by-side in the workplace.

If you are a business owner with employees ranging in age from early 20s to late 70s, you may find it challenging to adopt a one-size-fits-all management style because there are noticeable differences in generational expectations, communication styles, technological know-how, and perspectives. However, if you channel the diverse strengths of your employees into a multigenerational company strategy, you position your business for success and provide your employees, particularly the younger generations, with invaluable experience that will stay with them throughout their careers.



“We all want our organizations to succeed. We will all face challenges/uncertainty in the workplace in the future. We all want the same thing from our leaders. We all want some measure of success in our careers. We are all aging. It’s not what divides us that makes us great, it’s what we have in common.”

— Tracy Winn, SPHR, SHRM-SCP,
Senior HR Manager for G&A Partners



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What is a Multigenerational Workplace?

Generations are a popular way to classify large groups of people born in a designated period who share common characteristics and life experiences. A generation typically spans 20 years—from birth through young adulthood—before the next generation begins. Of course, there are people of infinite types in any given generation. Still, inevitably there is a group of general characteristics they collectively develop during childhood primarily based on external factors, such as major national and world events, technological developments, and cultural influences.



The Five Generations in Our Workplace Today

- ▶ **Silent Generation (1928-1945)**
- ▶ **Baby Boomers (1946–1964)**
- ▶ **Generation X (1965–1980)**
- ▶ **Millennials (1981–1996)**
- ▶ **Generation Z (1997–2012)**

*No official commission is assigned to designate generational parameters. Dates cited here represent a consensus of generational research conducted for this guide.

Employees in each generation bring distinct values, attitudes, behaviors, and life experiences to the workplace. When those don't align, it can create conflict, confusion, and frustration for your employees. According to SHRM and AARP's [Harnessing the Power of a Multigenerational Workforce](#), 60% of workers report generational conflict at their companies, with more than 70% of older employees and nearly 50% of younger colleagues dismissing the abilities of co-workers in alternate generations. This intergenerational tension leads to issues in the multigenerational workplace.

It's left to you as a business leader to deal with these misunderstandings, and it's worth the effort. Managing the diverse needs of a multigenerational workforce can reap great rewards. Each generational cohort offers a range of experience and creative problem-solving skills that can be harnessed to help reach your organization's goals. There's no one-size-fits-all employee management strategy or solution but understanding each generation's unique qualities and what they value is an excellent place to start.

"Generations have more success working together, in the workplace and in society, if they can see eye to eye,"

— SHRM and AARP's *Harnessing the Power of a Multigenerational Workforce*



1928-1945

Silent or 'Traditionalist' Generation

The Silent Generation was first named in Time Magazine's November 5, 1951, cover story titled, "The Younger Generation."

An Excerpt:

By comparison with the Flaming Youth of their fathers & mothers, today's younger generation is a still, small flame. It does not issue manifestoes, make speeches or carry posters. It has been called the 'Silent Generation.'

The youth referenced in that article are now in their golden years.



Who They Are: A Traditional, Steadfast Generation



Born after World War I, members of the Silent Generation (Silents) grew up during the Great Depression and World War II (1928-1945). Theirs was a generation sandwiched between two powerhouse generations—the Greatest Generation and the Baby Boomers—and during an era when children were to be seen and not heard. Generally speaking, the Silent Generation is known for its traditional family values, conservatism, patriotism, simplicity, and patience.

Because of the financial hardships they watched their parents endure, many are frugal and, throughout their lives, have viewed financial security and secure, long-term employment as top priorities. Technology did not become a driving force until later in their lives, so they have been slower to adopt the latest tech trends. Although the majority are retirees in 2021, some continue to work.

How Silents Work: Loyal Employees with a Strong Work Ethic

Silents were born and raised in wartime America. If they did not serve in the military, they were likely raised or influenced by relatives who did, and they likely worked for hierarchal organizations for the majority of their careers. For this reason, they are characterized as rule-following, stable, engaged employees who rarely question authority. They believe job tenure dictates promotions, raises, and rewards in the workplace and that timeliness and productivity are core work values.

They were not raised with smartphones, laptops, and voicemail, so they struggle with technological tools at times. But this is not necessarily to their detriment. Most Silents have excellent interpersonal skills and excel at one-on-one interaction in the workplace. Overall, they are hard workers, outstanding team players, and they are highly loyal to employers. The majority of those who work today do so because they aren't ready to "settle into retirement."

Optimize Your Silent Generation Talent

About 9% of Silents are spending their golden years in the workplace, so there's a good chance you have a member of this generation on your payroll or may have one in the future. If so, you are in luck. You have a valued employee with a lifetime of training from the school of hard knocks that is probably more than willing to share their insights.

Here are some tips to help you optimize your Silent employees' talent:

- ▶ Prioritize face-to-face meetings and interactions with your Silent employees instead of communicating through emails and text messages. Virtual meetings are a good alternative, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ▶ Be crystal clear about the goals and expectations you have for the specific role(s) they have in your company.
- ▶ Schedule (ahead) regular employee evaluations and provide them detailed feedback about their job performance. Regularly ask them for feedback as well.
- ▶ Provide tailored technology training sessions to advance their skills and remain flexible—allow them to use offline options to perform tasks when appropriate.
- ▶ Encourage opportunities for them to share their knowledge and expertise with colleagues, as well as interesting flashbacks about the “good old days.” This is the “Mad Men” generation, after all.



1946-1964

The Baby Boomer Generation

Initially tagged with a host of nicknames like the Rock-and-Roll Generation and Generation Jones, the Baby Boomer tagline took hold after it first appeared in an essay in The Washington Post's Outlook section in 1977. The name stuck because it made sense. There was a generation of children born after World War II when soldiers returned home, and the nation saw a spike in its birthrate. In other words, they are the result of a baby boom.

Those bouncing babies are now edging past middle age and into their golden years.

Who They Are: A Prominent, Influential Generation



The Baby Boomer generation is large in population size and sphere of influence. Born in the period starting immediately after World War II to right before the U.S. entered the Vietnam War (1946–1964), Baby Boomers are known to be industrious, optimistic, opinionated, self-assured, goal-oriented, and particularly in their youth, free-spirited. They grew up in the “flower-power” era and played pivotal roles in social justice movements in the 1960s and 1970s.

Baby Boomers have gone through many stages of evolution, from their idealistic “Leave it to Beaver” childhood to rebellious “hippie” adolescence, to harried and hard-working “yuppie” adulthood. Boomers are moving into a more settled phase of their lives as grandparents and seniors, but still represent a sizeable segment of the U.S. workforce at 23%, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020).

How They Work: Loyal Employees Who Value Their Careers

Like their Silent Generation predecessors, Baby Boomers launched their careers at a time when companies were more hierarchal in nature and success was measured by the number of hours spent at the office. Starr Harry, G&A Partners Client Advocate, said Baby Boomers believe relationship-building—or networking—and teamwork are critical to a company’s success. They are characterized as being competitive, decisive employees who equate authority with work experience. They believe it is essential to give 100% to the job, be visible, and demonstrate loyalty to coworkers. It’s estimated that 40% of Boomers plan to work long past the traditional retirement age.

Boomers were not raised with high-tech communication gadgets and social media but started using computers, printers, and inter-office email around the mid-point of their careers. They don’t struggle with technological tools as much as they are exasperated by them but can quickly adopt them once they learn their intrinsic value. Overall, they are self-reliant employees who are willing to put in a hard day’s work and they seek recognition for their experience and accomplishments.



Optimize Your Baby Boomer Talent

The Baby Boomers are among the largest generations in U.S. history but no longer dominate the workforce because many have retired. But with 46% still in the workforce, there's a chance your business may employ Baby Boomers for some years to come.

Here are some tips to help you optimize your Boomer employees' talent:

- ▶ Consider them for leadership positions in your company and on project teams where appropriate as Boomers possess the extensive interpersonal skills and acquired knowledge needed to thrive in a teamwork environment.
- ▶ When communicating with Boomers, choose one-on-one interactions when possible as they often view tech communications as impersonal.
- ▶ Publicly recognize their achievements so that they can share the experience with family, friends, and coworkers.
- ▶ If your business follows a hybrid work schedule, don't assume your Boomers want to split their time between work and remote offices. Many prefer a structured, formal work schedule, so allow them more time in the office if that works for your business.
- ▶ Provide opportunities for technology training, but accommodate, where possible, their preference for traditional tech tools such as email and PowerPoint presentations.



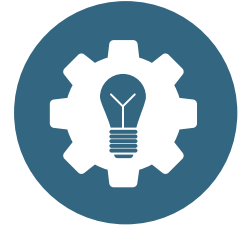
1965-1980

Generation X or “13th” Generation

Originally called the “13th Generation,” the relatively small cohort that grew up in the wake of the Baby Boomers adopted the name Generation X after a 1965 book by that title and a 1991 Douglas Coupland book titled *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. In their youth, they witnessed their parents suffer through the Stock Market Crash of 1987, feared the Soviet Union and nuclear war, and adopted a general “carpe diem” attitude that permeated their music, movie, and fashion choices.

Gen X kids are now firmly entrenched in middle age.

Who They Are: An Independent, Entrepreneurial Generation



Gen X is considered the last generation of kids who enjoyed unfettered freedom in their youth. More relaxed parenting styles in the 1970s and 1980s meant that many Gen Xers returned home from school to empty homes, leading to their “latchkey kids” label. But those sometimes lonely, unsupervised kids grew into a generation of independent, entrepreneurial multitaskers responsible for launching many of today’s leading business and technological innovations. Think SpaceX (Elon Musk), Google (Larry Page and Sergey Brin), and texting (Neil Papworth).

Gen X experienced many “firsts” growing up, including video games, music television (MTV), personal computers, and (early) mobile phones. Gen Xers are firmly entrenched in today’s workforce as they have mortgages to pay, kids to put through college, and retirement plans to fund.

How They Work: Employees Who Work Smarter, Not Harder

Generation X was the first to view work as a means to an end rather than their reason for being. They watched their loyal, hard-working parents lose jobs they thought they’d have for life and suffer for it. For this reason, many Gen Xers adopted the mantra, “work smarter, not harder,” and started viewing their careers as a journey with the possibility of several jobs along the way.

Starr Harry, a Client Advocate for G&A Partners, said Gen Xers were also the first to push for more flexibility and freedom with work schedules and open communication in the workplace regardless of position, title, or tenure.

Gen X is the first to be tech-savvy while also remembering the days of rotary phones, answering machines, and computers and printers large enough to overtake your office. They quickly adopt new technology but place equal value on interpersonal communication in the workplace. Overall, they are innovative employees who bring balance to the workplace and value the hard-work ethic reminiscent of previous generations.



Optimize Your Gen X Talent

Generation X is a smaller “sandwich” generation like the Silent Generation and comprises only 20% of the workforce in 2020, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. As a business owner, you may be a Gen Xer or employ them in leadership and managerial positions.

Here are some tips to help you optimize your Gen X employees’ talent:

- ▶ Outline your expectations for Gen X employees but give them space to carry out their responsibilities as they value autonomy and trust in the workplace.
- ▶ Gen Xers are equally comfortable with electronic and face-to-face interactions so employ both in your communications with them.
- ▶ Provide Gen Xers with workplace options that support a work/life balance because they value flexible schedules, remote work opportunities, and employee benefits that support their family’s needs.
- ▶ Demonstrate appreciation for the work experience they have acquired by promoting them to managerial and leadership positions when appropriate.
- ▶ Don’t overlook Gen Xers’ technological skills in favor of younger generations. They’ve had to quickly adapt to changing technologies and carry those skills with them today.
- ▶ Recognize the balance that Gen Xers bring to your workplace. They can serve as a bridge between older and younger generations because they share commonalities with both.



1981-1996

The Millennial or ‘Gen Y’ Generation

The post-Gen X generation started as Generation Y until a moniker from the past gained popularity. In their 1991 book *Generations: The History of America’s Future, 1584 to 2069*, co-authors Neil Howe and William Strauss dubbed America’s then youngest generation the “Millennials.” These young adults are optimistic, curious, and determined to make positive changes in the world and workplace.

The children referenced in that book are now a large cohort of adults who make up most of America’s workforce at 40% according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



Who They Are: An Outspoken, Collaborative Generation

As children, Millennials grew up during a period of drastic change and rapid technological modernization. Depending on the Millennial's birthdate—between 1981 and 1996—they could have experienced a childhood like Gen Xers, roaming the streets until their parents flickered the porch lights, or they lived a sheltered youth. Their collective experience translated to a refreshing group of young adults who are collaborative, outspoken, and intent on achieving reforms in society that they believe are long overdue, including a solid work/life balance.

The Millennial generation came of age in the Information Age and are comfortable using digital technologies in their everyday life. As all young generations have done before them, they battle negative stereotyping but forge ahead in pursuit of their goals. They make up almost half of the modern workforce, and many plan to retire earlier than those in previous generations because they work to live – not the other way around.

How They Work: Employees Who Lobby for Change and Value Feedback

Most Millennials grew up during a time when instant gratification became the norm. Hence, they value constant feedback from managers and business owners to ensure they are on the right track.

“It’s not all about the paycheck for Millennials,” said Traci Winn, Senior HR Advisor for G&A Partners. “They push for corporate social responsibility, prefer to learn by doing rather than being told what to do, and want to know the ‘why’ behind their job duties. It’s important to communicate clearly and often with your Millennial employees.”

Most Millennials prefer to use electronic communication methods and technology-driven applications to do their work instead of more traditional methods. They value efficiency. Hence, many Millennials work with earbuds in (listening to music) because it allows them to better focus on the task at hand. Overall, they are curious, optimistic employees who embrace positive change in the workplace and strive for growth through mentorship and advancement opportunities.



Optimize Your Millennial Talent

As a business owner, your Millennial employees are your future managers and leaders, if they are not already in those positions.

Here are some tips to help you optimize your Millennial employees' talent:

- ▶ Offer them training programs focused on leadership training, skills development, and career advancement.
- ▶ Because Millennials value mentorship over the more traditional boss-employee relationship, consider adopting management techniques that provide them with the guidance they need to grow and thrive while accomplishing your organizational goals.
- ▶ Communicate your company's vision, mission, and goals with Millennial employees and their role in achieving them.
- ▶ Provide them with ongoing feedback instead of annual or quarterly employee reviews and communicate what they are doing well and what they need to improve.
- ▶ Seek feedback about your business from your Millennial employees. They love to share constructive ideas and recommendations.
- ▶ Millennials like perks, rewards, and flexible work options. If feasible, incorporate those into your company culture.



1997-2012

The Gen Z or ‘Net’ Generation

Our youngest generation in the workplace has earned the most significant number of nicknames to date: Gen Z, iGen, Net Generation, Homelanders, ReGen, and Founders, among others. But Gen Z has stuck. This generation outnumbers that of its parents—primarily Gen Xers—because many were the result of a minor fertility boom during the 2007-2008 U.S. financial crisis.

“Carefully raised by hands-on Gen X parents, who don’t dare let their own kids take the same risks they themselves took, ‘Homelanders’ literally spend more time at home (with their multiple digital platforms) than any earlier child generation in history,” according to Life Course Associates’ *Generations in History*.

Gen Z is a group of diverse, open-minded, and relatively conservative digital natives who are constantly seeking the next innovation. Though teetering on the cusp of adulthood and ready to take on the workplace, most of these children are still children or young adults fresh out of college.

Who They Are: An Introspective, Open-Minded Generation



Babies of the new millennium (1997- 2012), Gen Z has never known a world without computers, mobile phones, video games, and 24/7 entertainment options. On the downside, round-the-clock news coverage on television and social media has exposed many Gen Zers to the darker aspects of society. On the upside, the same technological tools have opened the world to Gen Zers, who can communicate instantaneously with friends down the street and across the globe. This innovative generation is both highly connected and independent, and Gen Zers promise to proactively push older generations' boundaries as they move into adulthood.

There is no disputing that Gen Z is comfortable with electronic communications and digital applications. Many older generations believe they have become too reliant on technology and need to brush up on interpersonal skills. They respectfully disagree as they have never known a world without tech tools and would probably find it hard to work, communicate with friends, and learn about the outer world without them.

How They Work: Employees Who Innovate and Self-Direct

Only about half of Gen Zers are in the workplace in 2021, but they are already exhibiting a strong entrepreneurial spirit. They are quick learners, comfortable working independently and on teams, and demonstrate a remarkable sense of confidence and ease around older colleagues, perhaps because many spent a great deal of their childhood interacting with their parents and other adults.

They eagerly embrace and prefer to use the latest communication tools at work. Because they have never lived in a world without the Internet, they are used to getting information at lightning speed and expect the rest of their colleagues to move at a similar pace. Work/life balance is a top priority for Gen Zers—so much so that many are willing to work part-time or on a freelance basis if it means pursuing their preferred career. Overall, they are creative, introspective employees who quickly assess situations and process information, making them a vital member of your intergenerational team.

Optimize Your Gen Z Talent

Gen Z employees comprised 12% of the workforce in 2020, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. As a business owner, it may appear that your Gen Z employees are not listening to you or paying attention to the world around them, but rest assured that they do not miss anything.

Here are some tips to help you optimize your Gen Z employees' talent:

- ▶ When communicating with Gen Zers, keep your messages short and to the point, and use visual content (videos, infographics) when possible. Still, it never hurts to throw in a good, old-fashioned face-to-face meeting with your Gen Z employees now and then.
- ▶ Use your Gen Zers' digital capabilities to test new technology in your workplace but remember that they are young and relatively inexperienced so set firm ground rules on the professional use of tech tools in the office.
- ▶ Like Millennials, Gen Zers look to their superiors for mentorship and constructive feedback. They prefer collaborative management relationships and work best when they know the company's mission, vision, and goals, and what part they play in the big picture.
- ▶ Like their elder Silent Generation, Gen Zers are being raised during a time of global crisis and economic uncertainty, so they crave stability. They prioritize a competitive salary and financial perks such as student loans and tuition reimbursement assistance over other employee benefits.
- ▶ If possible, provide them with flexible workplace options such as remote workdays and flex schedules.



2013-2025

Gen Alpha

Credited with naming Generation Alpha (2013-2025), Mark McCrindle said he came up with the nickname when researching his book, *The ABC of XYZ: Understanding the Global Generations* in 2005. He said after Generation Z took the final letter of the alphabet, it made sense to start anew, so he looked to the Greek alphabet for the name of the next generation.

“Generation Alpha kids will be more racially and ethnically diverse than their Generation Z counterparts,” McCrindle stated. “Members of Generation Alpha will also be more likely to go to college, more likely to grow up in a single-parent household, and more likely to be surrounded by college-educated adults. ...When they have all been born (2025), they will number almost 2 billion—the largest generation in the history of the world.”

As a business owner, it will be a few years until you hire a Gen Alpha employee, but it never hurts to be prepared. Practically born with a smartphone in their hands, Gen Alpha will be the most technologically savvy generation yet. They will seek a workplace that incorporates technology in all aspects of its environment. And, like the two generations before them, Alphas will search for employers whose values align with their own.

Gen Alpha may be the generation most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of work/life balance expectations. According to McCrindle Research’s article, [How COVID-19 will shape Generation Alpha](#), 84% of adults surveyed believe that the pandemic will significantly shape this young generation. However, we won’t know the full extent until they are older.

Create Your Multigenerational Company Strategy

“The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers.”



— *Kenneth John Freeman wrote this excerpt in his Cambridge dissertation published in 1907, [“Schools of Hellas: An essay on the practice and theory of ancient Greek education from 600 to 300 B.C.”](#)*

➤ In this passage, Freeman was referring to behavior exhibited by generations dating back to 600 B.C., which shows that some things never change. Older generations view younger generations as lacking in basic manners and skills, and younger generations view their elders as out-of-touch and overly pessimistic. This divergence is known as the generational gap.

If your employees are running into obstacles caused by competing beliefs and values, consider creating a multigenerational company strategy that works to close the generational gaps. Your multigenerational plan should incorporate umbrella strategies that unite all generations, as well as micro-strategies that seek to bridge the gaps between individual generational cohorts.



High-level Tactics for Your Company's Multigenerational Strategy

1

Recognize each generation's strengths/weaknesses.

Each generation has inherent strengths and weaknesses. Millennials, for example, are known to be tech-savvy and quick on their feet, both valuable traits, but reliance on technology and the tendency to rush to action can sometimes be detrimental to their success. Baby Boomers tend to be somewhat more cautious. Being aware of generational trends helps your managers figure out the best approach to take when working with members of each generation and can help them determine which tasks to delegate to which employees.

2

Be conscious of communication preferences.

People are products of their times, and this is true when it comes to communication styles. Managers should use different communication tools depending on employees' preferences. For example, Gen Zers prefer shorter text messages, while Gen Xers are open to one-on-one, email, or text communications.



3

Develop recognition/bonus programs that reward productivity and longevity.

It's customary for employers to recognize and reward employees differently based on tenure, but in a multigenerational work environment, this might make highly productive, newer employees feel that their contributions aren't as valued as those of their older or more senior counterparts. Having multiple incentive strategies will ensure that every employee feels like they have an equal opportunity to be rewarded for their work.

High-level Tactics for Your Company's Multigenerational Strategy

4

Create multigenerational teams that work together on specific projects as well as long-term company programs.

Employees that work as a team build connections and collaboration methods. It gives them a chance to learn from and motivate each other. Also, people who know each other are less likely to view each other as stereotypes and more likely to see each other as unique individuals. Your company will benefit from the innovative and creative solutions that diverse teams often generate.

5

Develop a multigenerational mentorship program.

Traditional programs involve older generations mentoring younger generations, but a [multigenerational mentorship program](#) goes both ways. Your Silent, Boomer, and Gen X employees can mentor Millennials and Gen Zers in developing leadership and interpersonal skills, and Millennials and Gen Zers can help older colleagues become familiar with the latest technology and working with younger generations. It's a win-win!



Micro-level Tactics for Your Company's Multigenerational Strategy

	SILENT GENERATION	BABY BOOMERS	GEN X	MILLENNIALS	GEN Z
SILENT GENERATION	Support each other.	Silents help train Boomers to succeed them in leadership positions. Boomers listen to and support Silents when they face age-related challenges.	Silents provide Gen Xers career advice that stands the test of time. Gen Xers serve as a mediator between Silents and younger generations.	Silents help Millennials improve interpersonal communication skills. Millennials inform Silents about younger generations' push for change in the workplace.	Silents help Gen Zers develop interpersonal communication skills. Gen Zers tutor Silents on the latest tech tools and trends.
BABY BOOMERS	Boomers recognize Silents for their achievements and contributions. Silents mentor Boomers.	Support each other.	Boomers help Gen Xers develop leadership skills. Gen Xers serve as a mediator between Boomers and younger generations.	Boomers mentor Millennials. Millennials bounce ideas off Boomers. Despite age difference their generations share similarities.	Boomers share lessons learned from the "good old days" with Gen Zers. As tech innovators, Gen Zers tutor Boomers in the latest technology.
GEN X	Gen Xers support Silents on project teams and other work efforts. Silents help Gen Xers with leadership skills and career development.	Gen Xers support Boomers on project teams and other work efforts. Boomers prepare Gen Xers for leadership positions.	Support each other.	Gen Xers and Millennials work to strengthen interoffice relationships and to bridge gaps between the two generations.	Gen Xers mentor Gen Zers. Gen Zers keep Gen Xers informed about the latest technology developments.
MILLENNIALS	Millennials encourage Silents to participate in company activities. Silents offer long-term career advice and support to Millennials.	Millennials exchange ideas with Boomers and offer to work with them on team projects. Boomers mentor Millennials.	Millennials support Gen Xers on project teams and other work efforts. Gen Xers work with Millennials to advance company flexibility policies.	Support each other.	Millennials mentor Gen Zers. Gen Zers support Millennials on project teams and other work efforts.
GEN Z	Gen Zers tutor Silents on the latest tech tools and trends. Silents provide Gen Zers career advice that stands the test of time.	Gen Zers share younger generational insights with Boomers. Boomers help Gen Zers develop leadership skills.	Gen Zers share younger generational insights with Gen Xers. Gen Xers help bridge the gap between Gen Zers and older generations.	Gen Zers work with Millennials to promote good corporate works. Millennials exchange ideas with Gen Zers and work together on team projects.	Support each other.

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