

Building Bridges: Navigating the Generational Expectations of Colleagues and Clients in the New Era

Much in society has changed in the short amount of time that has followed the Covid-19 pandemic and we now are living in its aftermath. Most of the business world shut its doors to customers and even employees in 2020. When the doors reopened and people returned to offices, the old ways of connecting with clients and colleagues had changed. Many of those changes persist and as more members of the Traditional and Baby Boomer generations retire and Millennials and Generation Z workers dominate the numbers of employees in the work force, few if any expect the workplace to return to the norms of 2019 and before.

As far back as 2008, generational differences were already noticed, as detailed in Anick Tolbize's article, *Generational Differences in the Workplace*, published by the University of Minnesota, attached as Exhibit A. Tolbize noted four generations of workers preceding Gen Z, commenting on the generational changes in attitudes toward work expressed as a decline in work ethic with attendant expressions of desires for a better work/life balance. Data suggested the older generations felt younger workers' expressions of loyalty to the employer decreased among members of Generation X as compared to the earlier Baby Boomer generation, although statistical data suggested Gen Xers and Millennials (also known as Gen-Yers) were not seen to change jobs any more frequently than older people had done at the same age. Since many older workers tend to blame all changes on Millennials, it is worth noting people of the Millennial generation were born between 1981 and 1996, so the youngest of that generation are now almost 30 years old and the youngest generation entering the workforce is now Gen Z, born from 1997 to 2012, so the oldest of that generation are themselves in their late 20s.

In Tolbize's paper, younger workers' expressed desires for new training styles and techniques were mentioned as presenting a challenge to the older generations' way of doing. The Traditional and Baby Boom generations preferred training in their areas of expertise while Gen Xers and Yers wanted more leadership training. The differences in expectations for training from one generation to the next has continued with younger workers today wanting more mentoring and feedback on their performances whether in crafting written work product, handling witnesses in depositions and hearings, trial work or even business development.

The concept of loyalty to an employer has shifted over generations as well. Traditionalists' demonstration of loyalty to companies meant only working for a single employer or possibly two in their careers. *Understanding and Managing Generational Differences in the Workplace*, Camille Kapoor and Nicole Solomon, C.N. Hilton college, University of Houston, Houston, Texas, USA, Exhibit B, at page 312. Gen Xers consider loyalty giving two weeks' notice when leaving. Tolbize, Exhibit A, at page 6. Millennials are said to desire

more frequent contact with their managers, less forgiving of ineptitude and so have higher expectations than any prior generation. Exhibit B at 312-13.

Success in the workplace is also perceived differently among generations, according to Tolbize. At Page 10 of Tolbize's article, Traditionals indicate success is dependent upon meeting deadlines while Yers, Xers and Boomers emphasized abilities with computers, citing a 2007 Randstad Work Solutions publication. As is seen by such states as Florida requiring technology credits in CLE reporting cycles, competence in technology has only become more of a requirement and the younger generations are more adept at change, having lived their entire lives around personal computers, tablets and smart phones.

With all the differences among people of generations, there is inevitable conflict in the workplace based upon the different expectations and viewpoints. In examining those generational differences to assist managers in making employment and maintaining multi-generational staff, Ali B. Mahmoud authored a research paper published in the International Journal of Manpower, Vol 42, No. 1 in 2021 based on data before and including Covid-19 finding workers among Generation Z are more sensitive to amotivation than prior generations while Gen X and Millennials value identified regulation as a source of overall work motivation. See Exhibit C. The practical implications of the research was to encourage organizations to create inclusive and understanding multigenerational working environments by communicating strong branding through social media networks, utilized better by Millennials and Gen Z workers than earlier generations, with suggestions to adopt new measures of workplace agility to survive interminable disruptions. See *id.*

Within the workplace, employees' expressions of a desire for remote work opportunities have been present for a number of years and before the Covid pandemic, many employers considered the issue to be off limits. Coming out of the lockdown, remote work is now a reality in many companies. The technological transition to paperless offices with remote access to files has made the opportunity for remote work possible. With a remote office, there is the loss of community and mentorship opportunities, so companies are now finding creative ways to bring teams together and approving budgets for team-building activities never possible prior to the pandemic.

It is noted that as workers have returned to office settings after the Covid-19 shutdowns, people's discussion and consideration of workers' personal lives outside of work have gone from being off-limits to becoming an essential consideration for structuring job expectations. For example, workers' needs to be present to care for a family member are now part of the consideration for structuring the worker's job description.

Of significance, all generations share such goals as living their lives in such a way as to benefit society and contribute in important decision-making, demonstrate leadership and have high status and prestige, work within teams with friendly and congenial associates, earn a high salary and engage in satisfying leisure. See Exhibit A at 11.

Also disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic was the interaction among companies and their outside counsel relationships. Where law firm business travel to see clients in order to maintain relationships and to market for new areas of practice has long consisted of in person visits to company headquarters, the changes to remote work and discouraging in-person visits has required re-thinking of long-established practices. Panel counsel value the relationships engendering confidence and trust and view the need to maintain those connections as vital. Again, technical competence becomes essential in using video conferencing for the occasional remote meetings but creating opportunities for in-person visits is important for the attorney-client relationships just as the in-person team meetings within corporate law departments and insurance claims teams are vital to the mission of those entities to deliver value to their clients and companies.

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