

[Home](#) | [Log-in](#) | [Cart \(0\)](#) | [Customer Service](#) | [Sign Up for E-Newsletters](#)

REQUEST A CATALOG

INDIVIDUALS

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

AMA ADVANTAGE

MY AMA

Online Training

Women's Leadership Center

Podcasts

Most Popular

[Home](#)

Training

Articles & White Papers

The Myth of Generational Differences in the Workplace





The Myth of Generational Differences in the Workplace

Share

Like 2



The conventional wisdom about generational differences in the workplace is mostly wrong, according to Jennifer J. Deal, a research scientist with the Center for Creative Leadership.

The shorthand used to describe the four generations that now make up our nation's workforce goes something like this:

- **The Silent Generation** (born before 1946) values hard work
- **Baby Boomers** (born between 1946 and 1964) value loyalty
- **Gen Xers** (born between 1965 and 1980) value work-life balance
- **Generation Y** (also known as Millennials) values innovation and change.

Or, in terms of negative stereotypes, the Silents are fossilized, the Boomers are narcissistic, the Gen Xers are slackers, and the Gen Yers/Millennials are even more narcissistic than the Boomers.

Not so, says Deal. She argues that the generations now of working age value essentially the same things. Her findings, based on seven years of research in which she surveyed more than 3,000 corporate leaders, are presented in her book, *Retiring the Generation Gap: How Employees Young & Old Can Find Common Ground* (Jossey-Bass).

“Our research shows that when you hold the stereotypes up to the light, they don’t cast much of a shadow,” says Deal. “Everyone wants to be able to trust their supervisors, no one really likes change, we all like feedback, and the number of hours you put in at work depends more on your level in the organization than on your age.”

Clearly, people of different ages see the world in different ways. But Deal says that's not the primary reason for generational conflict. The conflict has less to do with age or generational differences than it does with clout—who has it and who wants it. “The so-called generation gap is, in large part, the result of [miscommunication and misunderstanding](#), fueled by common insecurities and the desire for clout,” says Deal.

Summary of Deal's Findings

- **All generations have similar values.** For example, family tops the list for all of the generations. The most striking result of the research, Deal says, is how similar the generations are in the values that matter most.
- **Everyone wants respect.** Everyone wants respect, but the generations don't define it in the same way. In the study, older individuals talked about respect in terms of “giving my opinions the weight I believe they deserve,” while younger respondents characterized respect as “listen to me, pay attention to what I have to say.”
- **Leaders must be trustworthy.** Different generations do not have notably different expectations of their leaders. Above all else, people of all generations want leaders they can trust.
- **Nobody likes change.** The stereotype is that older people resist change while younger people embrace it. These assumptions don't stand up under the research, which found that people from all generations are uncomfortable with change. Resistance to change has nothing to do with age; it has to do with how much you stand to gain or lose as a result of the change.
- **Loyalty depends on context.** It is said that younger generations are not as loyal to their organizations as older workers. But the research shows, for example, that the amount of time a worker puts in each day has more to do with his or her level in the organization than with age. The higher the level, the more hours worked.
- **Everyone wants to learn.** Learning and development were among the issues brought up most frequently by people of all generations. Everyone wants to learn and to ensure they have the training to do their job well.
- **Everyone likes feedback.** According to the research, everyone wants to know how they are doing and to learn how they can do better.

For additional information, visit the Center for Creative Leadership Website at www.ccl.org

The next generation of consumers is here. Learn about Generation Z consumers and workers with this [free AMA webcast](#).

[Show All Products in Management and Supervisory Skills](#)

- [Self-Study](#)

[Show All Products in Management and Supervisory Skills](#)

You Might Also Like



[How to Flex Your Communication Style](#)



[Generation Z](#)



[Becoming the Boss](#)

[Sign Up for E-Newsletters](#)



[Print this page](#)



[Tell-A-Colleague](#)

Tags

[Management and Supervisory Skills](#)
[Human Resource Management](#)

- [Executive Conference Centers](#)
- [AMACOM Publishing](#)
- [Terms of Service](#)
- [Sitemap](#)
- [Privacy](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [AMA Worldwide](#)
- [Become an AMA Reseller](#)
- [Careers](#)

©2017 AMA—American Management Association. All rights reserved.

