

Avoid World War Y



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As a member of Generation Y, I am well aware of the stereotypes that we face. We were the last generation to be born before the popularization of texting, and the first to experience social media in our youth. We have a unique lens that allows us to understand the spoken word as our Generation X predecessors, as well as an expertise in the virtual world similar to Generation Z. However, despite this beneficial lens we are critiqued for our lack of loyalty, real-life experience, and our addiction to technology. Overcoming these stereotypes as well as understanding the diverse needs of the different generations are essential steps to take in order to avoid a workplace World War (Generation) Y.

On The Defensive: Understanding the Risks of Generational Tension

The first step to preventing World War Y is to recognize the risks of unmanaged generational conflict in the workplace. If you can't cultivate an atmosphere that is suitable for diverse workers, then you might face the following challenges:

- **Interpersonal Conflict** – Unnecessary conflict is bound to arise when there is obvious workplace tension between generations. Though some conflicts may lead to an increase in creativity and problem solving, unmanaged tension will breed resentment, harmful discourse, and possibly even discrimination among peers.
- **Stereotypes** – Though the differences in the values and skills of each generation should be understood, do not assume that everyone from one generation is the same. The biggest challenge of overcoming generational tension is often getting people to see past generational stereotypes so they can effectively work together towards a common goal. Boxing your employees into prescribed generational roles will only limit their talents.

Did You Know?

According to a poll conducted by the [Society for Human Resource Management](#), managers' top concerns about younger workers are inappropriate dress (55%) and poor work ethic (54%). In contrast, younger workers feel as though their older managers are resistant to change (47%), have low recognition of their efforts (45%) and micromanage (44%).



Data source: United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment status of the civilian non-institutional population by age, sex, and race, 2009 annual average.

On The Offensive: Attacking the Generation Gap Head On

Consider adopting the practices below to encourage cross-generational teamwork and learning at your nonprofit.

- **Adopt a Diverse Management Style** – Leaders must have the ability to employ different management styles to compliment each generation and to bring a sense of togetherness to the workplace. To manage your unique employees the right way, you must first try to understand their distinct values and motivations.
- **Attract Generation Y Frontrunners** – Some people worry about the nonprofit sector struggling to retain talented workers due to lower compensation than the private sector. Offering alternative benefits such as loan forgiveness may make lower paying jobs more appealing to recently graduated leaders who might otherwise venture into the for-profit world. Other workplace perks that often attract Millennials include a powerful mission, the chance to make a difference in the world, and flexible hours and dress.
- **Create a Mentorship Program** – Partner newly employed Millennials with experienced Gen X workers or Baby Boomers as often as possible. Diverse teammates will have opportunities to break down generational stereotypes together; for example, a Millennial who teams up with a Baby Boomer might be surprised to learn that the Boomer is quite comfortable with modern technology. Or, if the Millennial and the Boomer do possess vastly different skill sets, they can learn and grow from each other. Leaders should draw from a selection of all generations when setting up teams, while also choosing team members based on diversity of skills rather than *just* age. Better yet, leaders can encourage teams to form organically and promote diversity as a means for achieving the most productive and creative collaboration.

Whether it is the twenty-something resisting criticism or the veteran avoiding new technology, it often comes down to the fact that people are uncomfortable with change. The truth is, the stereotypical resentment towards the newest generation is nothing new. When Generation X first entered the workforce, they were seen as cynical slackers, and similarly, the Baby Boomers were viewed as the radical long-hairs of their time. Before stereotyping the new Millennial staff member or the retiring Veteran, remember how wrong the last generation was about your generation. It might just save your nonprofit from a battle of the ages-literally!

Additional Resources:

For more tips about managing multiple generations in the workplace, read the Center's article, [My Generation: Reaping the Rewards of a Multigenerational Workforce](#). Refer to the following resources as well:

- [Managing People from 5 Generations](#), *Harvard Business Review*
- [Winning the Generation Game](#), *The Economist*
- [How to Manage Different Generations](#), *Wall Street Journal*
- [Generations: Demographic Trends in Population and Workforce](#), Catalyst.org

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