

*"The biggest challenge facing businesses today is generational differences. Jeff Havens has nailed the problem, the challenges, the frustrations and has the fixes to work through them. Your business can't survive without this information."*

—LARRY WINGET, Best-selling author of  
*Grow A Pair: How To Stop Being A Victim and Take Back Your Life, Your Business and Your Sanity*

# US



# THEM

REDEFINING THE MULTI-GENERATIONAL WORKPLACE  
TO INSPIRE YOUR EMPLOYEES TO LOVE YOUR COMPANY,  
DRIVE INNOVATION, AND EMBRACE CHANGE

J E F F   H A V E N S

## Praise for *Us vs. Them*

“The biggest challenge facing businesses today is generational differences. We either learn how to work with each other, or we can close the doors. Jeff Havens has nailed the problem, the challenges, the frustrations, and has the fixes to work through them. Your business can’t survive without this information.”

—**Larry Winget**, six time *New York Times/Wall Street Journal* best-selling author, social commentator, and television personality. Author of *Grow a Pair: How to Stop Being a Victim* and *Take Back Your Life, Your Business, and Your Sanity*

“With a dash of wit, pinch of irreverence, helping of data and analysis, sprinkle of snark, and hint of anecdotal flavor, Jeff Havens has provided a straightforward set of strategies that supports a clear pathway of understanding and success for all in the workplace. *Us vs. Them* is the perfect antidote to the Me vs. You syndrome and delivers a framework where we all really can just get along and thrive in the workplace.”

—**Cindy Cisneros**, Vice President of Education Programs,  
Committee for Economic Development

“In *Us vs. Them*, Jeff Havens helps bridge generational gaps with his witty insight in this hilarious, helpful, and refreshing book.”

—**Ashley Rhodes-Courter, MSW**, International and *New York Times* best-selling author of *Three Little Words* and *Three More Words*

“In his book, Jeff Havens provides supervisors with much simpler guidelines than the current, more complicated literature on generations. *Us vs. Them* makes sense! It also avoids the negative messages that some generational literature presents. It delivers strategies and easy low-cost to no-cost ideas that will really work.”

—**Angela S. Kemp, SPHR & GPHR**, 32-year HR and communications professional

“Multi-Generational Workplaces may sound like the name of a Seattle grunge band, but once you read *Us vs. Them*, you’ll be the one holding the drumsticks.”

—**Tim McEachern**, co-author, *The New, New Economy*

“*Us vs. Them* covers a very important topic for our management team. We have developed a class specifically on this topic and the ideas I am getting from this book will prove invaluable in training our managers. I find Jeff’s approach to this subject very refreshing as he uses real world examples that everyone can relate to.”

—**Johnny Carcioppolo**, Director, Corporate Learning Solutions,  
Jack Henry & Associates, Inc.®

“Jeff’s book is written in a light-hearted and conversational tone, which makes it easy and enjoyable to read. It’s like sitting at the kitchen table with a friend having a chat about practical ways to work and how to get along with lots of people. His examples are real, and his suggestions are down to earth and applicable to anyone, no matter what their background.”

—**Becky Ropp**, Director, Talent Management, GROWMARK, Inc.

“Jeff Havens is, in a word: freaking hilarious...ok, two. Seriously, not many writers can make me laugh out loud, but this guy is SERIOUSLY funny. In *Us vs. Them* Jeff cleverly weaves insightful real life case studies about loyalty, work ethic, mentorship, complacency, innovation, and change, with sprinkles of Yoda-like generational wisdom that are designed to help you achieve greater results in business, as well as in life. If you’re managing people, hiring people, or are looking to get hired—this book is a must-read. Trust me, the footnotes alone are worth the price of admission!”

—**Ross Bernstein**, best-selling sports author and  
award-winning business speaker

“In the workplace there are still minefields to conquer, language to temper, and management styles to avoid. Luckily, you’ve got Jeff Havens as your tour guide, and he takes his readers on an entertaining and intergenerational journey of how to make work a little less painful, a lot more profitable, and maybe even fun.”

—**Steve Culbertson**, CEO, Youth Service America

Us vs. Them

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# Us vs. Them

Redefining the Multi-Generational  
Workplace to Inspire Your Employees  
to Love Your Company, Drive  
Innovation, and Embrace Change

Jeff Havens

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*To Occam and his glorious razor*



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The author of any book owes a debt of gratitude to a number of people. In my case, dozens of personal and professional acquaintances helped me with the stories that populate *Us vs. Them*. However, as they were promised anonymity in exchange for their unvarnished honesty, I'll have to settle for thanking them poorly here and more properly the next time we get together for a drink and (if they were really nice to me) an appetizer combo. I'd also like to thank everyone at the Bureau of Labor Statistics for painstakingly compiling decades of workplace data that has turned out to have some quite surprising information. A special thanks to Robin Dunbar, whose fascinating research is especially incredible because almost nobody seems to know about it. And while I'm at it, I feel I should thank all those folks who built the Internet. I've found it to be somewhat helpful.

# About the Author

**Jeff Havens** has spoken to hundreds of companies and associations on issues of generational tension, leadership, communication, and change management. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Vanderbilt University, he has also worked as a teacher, stand-up comedian, and street performer. The author of several books, he lives in Michigan with his wife, Laura, and their dog, Pancake. For more information, visit [www.jeffhavens.com](http://www.jeffhavens.com).

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# Introduction: Why This Book Needed to Be Written

Greetings and congratulations! By choosing to buy or steal this book, you have made an incredible decision, one that is going to help you address some of the most fundamental issues currently affecting your professional life. In a few short chapters, we discuss all of the following:

- How to more effectively motivate your youngest employees to avoid high turnover
- How to prevent your oldest employees from coasting their way into retirement
- Why your career might not be advancing as fast as you think it should and what you can do about it
- How to frame changes to your business in language that everyone can understand and get on board with
- Why many of your colleagues think differently than you and what you can learn from them
- How to build and maintain a corporate culture that will inspire enthusiasm, loyalty, and a higher level of productivity from *everyone*

This is a book for professionals at every level: managers, employees, young workers, older workers, C-suite executives, students of business management and human resources, and even jobseekers. It might even help parents understand their children better—and vice versa. If you've ever had problems with people who were either

significantly older or younger than you, this book is going to make your life happier and easier.

But maybe you haven't bought or stolen this book yet. Maybe you're standing just outside an airport bookstore, suitcase in one hand and a bagel sandwich in your mouth while you search for something to help you kill time until you can finally board your next flight. If that's the case, then at this point you might be wondering, "Why should I buy this book? Why should I even bother stealing it? I've already read a few books about generational issues at work. How is this one going to be any different?"

Those are great questions, and I'm glad you hypothetically asked. There are indeed thousands of books on generational issues. So how is this book different? Because the current prevailing conversation about generational issues in the workplace is a needlessly complicated and profoundly *unhelpful* way to look at the subject. The goal of this book is twofold: first, to undo several decades of bad practice regarding generational differences in the workplace; second, to put the generational issues you're currently facing into a simple framework that will remain eminently sensible, immediately actionable, and relentlessly relevant for the rest of your life. We don't talk about how to "manage Millennials" or "get along with your Boomer bosses." We discuss strategies that will help you resolve *every* generational issue you will *ever* face. That's what this book is going to do.

But first, let me take a step back. I've been using the word *book* to describe what you're reading, but I realize that might not be the right word. It's possible that you're holding an actual book, and if you are, it's most likely because you like the feel of a real book or because nobody has ever bought you an e-reader.

It's also possible, however, that you're reading this on your tablet, or on your phone, or on the computer monitor that has recently been implanted in your eyeball. If that's the case, I'm sorry for using the word *book* so often. In case you don't know, they were kind of like papyrus scrolls that didn't need to be rolled up when you finished. You might have accidentally seen one in the mall on your way to the Apple store. Indeed, it's largely because I don't know how you're looking at these words that these words needed to be written.

Now ordinarily this would be the part of a book about generational issues where I should say something like, “The world of today is a lot different than it used to be.” I’m fairly certain you’ve heard this sentence a hundred thousand times. And on the surface, it almost sounds like a useful thing to say. After all, when I grew up, there were approximately 12 channels of television,<sup>1</sup> and if you wanted to call someone on the phone you had to actually know his or her phone number. How anyone ever got hold of anybody is a total mystery. Now the entire corpus of human knowledge is in your pocket wherever you go, and you can become a millionaire by making weird movies alone in your basement.

So obviously things are different now, and that’s what I’m supposed to tell you right here. Then I’m supposed to point out that those differences are causing you to ask questions you never thought you would have to ask yourself—questions such as

- How do I inspire loyalty in my employees when the very idea of employee loyalty seems to no longer exist?
- How long can my current business model survive when things seem to be changing literally every second?
- Are young people today really less motivated than they were in my time, or am I being unfair?
- Why do some people insist on sticking with outdated practices when there are new and better things coming out every day?

There are just three problems with that approach. First, the “things are different now” argument is implicitly speaking *to* older workers *about* younger workers. In fact, that’s what most books about generational issues do, which is why most books about generational issues are really, really annoying.

---

<sup>1</sup> Along with a U channel that never seemed to do anything. Why were you there, U? What was your dark and mysterious purpose?



**Summary of Far Too Many Generational Books,  
Keynotes, and Articles**

*“Today’s young people  
are different. Deal with it.”*

Predictably, this “message” only serves to make every older person even more resistant to the idea of looking at the world from another point of view because there is absolutely no hint of a compromise. I’ve sat in on those talks before and listened to multiple audience members say some version of the following: “Why should I have to be the only one making any changes? *I’m* employing *them*; why don’t *they* have to deal with the way *I* like to do things?” Which, by the way, is exactly how you should feel when the message you’re receiving is “Deal with it.”

Resolving generational differences will never, *never* work if any one group of people feel like they’re the only ones who have to make any concessions.<sup>2</sup>

The second problem with this approach is that the “things are different now” argument is wildly misleading, albeit unintentionally so. By saying things are different *now*, there is the implication that what we’re experiencing today is somehow unique in human history, that this is the *first* time things have truly been different from one generation to the next. But that simply isn’t true. The rise of computers and the Internet is the defining difference of our time. They have presented us with a massive shift in the way the world operates, and we talk throughout this book about the different effects that the Internet in particular, and our technological revolution in general, have had on the people who established themselves before their advent and those who were born and raised entirely under their influence. But the fact of something new coming along and creating a schism between people of different ages is a fairly common occurrence. You could

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<sup>2</sup> And just in case you doubt the truth of this statement, go tell your spouse that from now on you’re done listening to his or her thoughts and ideas. You are no longer going to make any concessions to his or her feelings and aspirations because from now on your word is law. Give it a shot! I’ll buy you a drink when you get kicked out.

say the same for the British Invasion and its effect on generational attitudes in the 1960s, the automobile and its effect on people during the Gilded Age, or the printing press and how it polarized Europeans in the late 1400s. Simply saying “things are different now” doesn’t help resolve anything because the differences we’re facing now aren’t affecting generational tensions in a fundamentally distinct way from what has happened multiple times in the past.

And the third problem, which is related to the second, is that the questions you’re probably asking yourself today—Why do your younger colleagues seem to be so capricious and disloyal? Why do some of your older colleagues seem so stuck in their ways? and so on—are the same questions people have always asked. In almost every way, the generational issues you’re facing today are the same issues that have plagued the professional world for centuries. The vast majority of today’s conversation about generational issues encourages the attitude that the problems you’re dealing with are novel and therefore require novel solutions. For years you’ve been told that there are four teams competing against each other, that we have somehow evolved into a *multigenerational* workplace. But that simply *isn’t true*. It isn’t true now, and it’s never been that way. Since the dawn of civilization, there have only ever been two generations. It’s always been Us vs. Them.

Fundamentally, our world is a world of human beings and the interactions between us. Throughout all of recorded human history, technology has always changed things, and so have political decisions and local economics and global trade and cultural attitudes. It’s important to understand what today’s issues are so that we can address them with the right tools instead of trying to solve today’s problems with strategies and attitudes that are designed for the world of 50 or 100 or 3,000 years ago. For that reason, a portion of our discussion will focus on computers and the Internet and 24/7 media and the various effects those institutions have had.

But those discussions will be a minority of what this book is. If you want to successfully navigate the world today, tomorrow, or at any other time in your life, the most important thing to do is not to understand *what* the issues are but rather *why* the people around you are acting and reacting the way they are. Fortunately, those answers are rooted in basic human psychology, which has done us the favor of

staying more or less constant since our cave-dwelling days. So by the end of this book, I guarantee that you will know *everything* you need to know in order to understand the different motivations of *everyone* you work with, whether they're 18 or 88. That might sound like a bold statement, and it is. But as you'll see, there aren't many differences that separate us from one another. So if you want to have happier, healthier, more productive relationships with *everyone* you work with—and if you want to have a happier, healthier, and more productive career as a result—then this book will give you exactly what you need.

To put this another way: Most generational books make the issue more complicated than it needs to be, and *Us vs. Them* will make it simple again.

However, I realize that parts of this book come dangerously close to reading like a treatise, and I certainly don't want to bore you. Those of you who have seen my keynote presentations, read my other books, or participated in our various training programs know that I always make a particular effort to be as entertaining as possible, and so I promise I'll be doing the same in this book. You'll end up getting a lot of answers, but you'll also get to laugh while you read this. I know it's not supposed to be that way; you're *supposed* to read this book because somebody gave it to you or because you want to impress your boss or because every so often you have trouble getting to sleep and business books are often better than Valium or cyanide or whatever pill you usually take at night. But I figured you might forgive me if I decided to do everything possible to make this discussion as entertaining as possible. I'm doing this in part because of a recent groundbreaking survey, which discovered that people enjoy fun things more than boring things.

So let's first prove that you actually do have some issues with people from a different generation than your own because you might be reading this and thinking, "I admit that there are generational tensions where I work, but I don't personally harbor any negative stereotypes about people from different generations than my own. I am a paragon of objectivity."

If this describes you, then let me just say two things: First, I doubt you thought the word *paragon*. And second, you're a big fat liar. And I will prove it to you with a pair of thought experiments.

### Thought Experiment #1: Proof That You Do Indeed Harbor Stereotypes About Different Generations

I want you to imagine that you're a parent. You have a son and daughter, both in the single digits, and it's bedtime. At least, *you* think it's bedtime. Your son and daughter, however, have a different idea. They don't want to go to bed, and they're making their disagreement known. You have a conundrum on your hands, a generational difference of opinion. What do you do?

- A.** You sit your kids down and have a long, rational, calm, and quiet conversation about the merits of an early bedtime. You listen patiently to your children's arguments, validating their ideas with phrases such as, "I see what you're saying," and "That's an interesting perspective." You each write down your needs on separate sheets of paper, along with potential solutions to the issue, then compare notes to find where your ideas overlap. Then, with a firm desire for collaboration and mutual happiness established on both sides, you find a compromise that leaves both parties feeling like they've been heard. Happiness reigns forever, and the argument about when bedtime should occur immediately disappears from your family discourse.
- B.** Taking your cues from the stock market, you treat the issue like a matter of shareholder debate. You assign shares to each family member based on their financial contribution to the whole family enterprise. When your kids protest that federal labor laws prohibit them from working, you agree to assign them household chores that will serve as their contribution. After tense negotiations about the relative pay due for services such as cleaning their rooms and putting their dishes in the dishwasher, you convene a shareholder meeting where objections and ideas can be heard. Eventually the issue is put to a vote, and all parties agree to abide by the outcome of that vote

until the next shareholder meeting, which will occur in three months (as per your charter) or as changing conditions merit.

- C.** You shove your kids in their footie pajamas and throw them in bed. You know you can't reason with them, so you don't even try. They'll probably whine and cry about it, but who cares if they cry? It'll just make them tired, and they won't remember it in the morning anyway.

So, which one did you pick? Oh, wait, *that was a trick question!!!!* Because I know you chose C. It's the only choice that makes any sense. And although I'll admit you probably don't treat your younger colleagues and employees in quite this fashion, I'm also confident you have occasionally viewed them and their ideas with varying levels of dismissal and disbelief.

But wait—there's more!

## Thought Experiment #2: Proof That You Do Indeed Harbor Stereotypes About Different Generations

You're in a grocery store, and you're stocking up on everything. It's late at night, and there's only one checkout lane open. There is a do-it-yourself lane, but you have a lot of produce that doesn't have barcodes on it, and you don't want to scroll through that stupid digital menu to find 16 different prices. However, as you're wheeling your overflowing cart into the line, you see an elderly gentleman in front of you. He's just set his groceries on the conveyor belt, and just as you're wondering why he's not already in bed, you see him pull a checkbook out of his jacket pocket. You realize with horror that the poor old man still thinks it's 1956. What do you do?

- A.** You wait patiently behind him, realizing that different people do things in different ways and that none of them is better than any other. At some point during your wait, you experience a moment of poignant nostalgia for simpler days, when everyone paid with checks and bagboys escorted everyone to their cars and America was unquestionably ascendant. When he finishes

paying, you thank him for the trip down memory lane and offer to walk him to his car so you can put his groceries in the trunk for him. He thanks you for the service, and you then return inside to pay for your own groceries, imbued with a sense of civic pride.

- B.** You have a brief, informative conversation with him about the ease and utility of debit cards. He expresses wonderment and then fear because he just doesn't know if he can trust the bank not to steal from him; after all, he's been reading a lot lately about people getting their passwords stolen. Understanding his concern, you invite him to an early lunch where you show him the various security protocols that banks use to ensure that their customers' money is well protected, and you also provide him hard copies of several independent reviews of debit cards to help put his mind at ease. You then provide him with some basic financial planning, putting him on a sound financial footing for retirement before recommending to him a trusted professional. He thanks you by offering to set you up with his neighbor's grandchild.
- C.** You go to the do-it-yourself lane so you can get home before bedtime. Seriously, why are old people always so slow?! They don't have as much time left, so why aren't they in a hurry? But they're not, are they? *They never are!!!!*

And the winner is C again! You know what you would do in that situation probably because you've almost certainly been in that position already. And again, I've hyperbolized because it's entertaining to do so, but I'm certain you've experienced some amount of frustration with the speed, style, and sheer stubbornness of your older colleagues and employees.

Here, in a nutshell, is what you're going to find in *Us vs. Them*:

- We begin by destroying once and for all the four-generation model and replace it with an easier and more intuitive two-generation model.

- You learn to which generation you belong, as well as the common stereotypes each generation harbors about the other.
- We then discuss each of those stereotypes in turn, focusing specifically on *why* each generation thinks and behaves the way it does and how that knowledge will help you construct a true compromise between both generations that everyone will not only understand but also agree is a workable strategy.

I want to thank you for choosing to read this book. It's becoming something of an obsession of mine to simplify the current confusion revolving around generational issues in the workplace. We sometimes like to make things more difficult than they need to be, and doing so is rarely in our best interests. So I'm hopeful you'll walk away from *Us vs. Them* with an approach to your own generational tensions at work that will be profoundly and permanently successful.

So what are you waiting for? Turn the page or swipe left or do a downscroll eyeblink, and let's get going!

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# 1

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## Destroying the Four-Generation Myth

You're forgiven if you've gotten tired of hearing about generational issues in the workplace. Amazon lists more than 1,100 books with the words *generation* and *workplace* in the title. That's the equivalent of a new book on generational issues in the workplace being published every 6½ days for the past 20 years. If you're fatigued, it's because you should be. Talking about the same issue in the same way and with the same language over and over and over again is exhausting.

Indeed, it's precisely because of this avalanche of literature that I've been compelled to write this book. The way we have been thinking about generational differences in the past two decades—the central premise behind those 1,100 books and the uncountable others with cleverer titles that talk about the same thing—is making it harder for us to find workable solutions. We've been complicating the problem rather than solving it.

Fortunately, things are much easier than they seem.

It's not that there aren't significant differences between generations; there are. For example

- You might have grown up listening to record albums—and not as an accoutrement to your retro lifestyle but because it was the only form in which music came. If you did, it's possible you also grew up drinking phosphates, lounging on the davenport, wearing derby hats, and hoarding lamp oil.
- You may never have seen a pay phone. Perhaps you wonder if they were phones that paid you.
- You may have all but forgotten that the English language has vowels and rules for proper spelling, and that things r rllly hrdr if u brk th roolz all th tim.

- You might have grown up without the Internet, which necessarily means you spent your entire childhood being bored. What did you do for fun? Nobody knows.
- You might still have a fake ID in your dresser.
- You might have fake teeth sitting on your dresser.
- You might have children who learned things in fifth grade that you yourself didn't learn until high school or college.
- You might be worried about your pension.
- You might not be quite certain what a pension is—or, more accurately, what a pension *was*.

It's a safe bet that some of these descriptions remind you of you, and some of them make you shake your head at the people to whom those descriptions apply. We are undoubtedly different. But we've allowed ourselves to categorize those differences in a thoroughly unhelpful way. We take as axiomatic the following sentence:

*For the first time in history, there are four distinct generations operating side by side.*

Every speaker, book, lecture, infographic, or TED talk that addresses generational issues is founded on the premise of this four-generation workplace. It's so ubiquitous that you've probably never questioned it. Instead, you've asked yourself, "How am I supposed to get anything done when there are so many people with so many different needs, motivations, desires, goals, and issues? How can I balance all these conflicting desires against each other in a way that works for everyone and somehow doesn't consume my every waking thought?"

Again, if you have ever felt overwhelmed by the multigenerational workplace, it's not your fault. You've simply been persuaded by an endless stream of "generational experts" telling you how crazy and difficult and unprecedented the working world is today. In fact, some of them *want* you to feel overwhelmed. They *want* you to be scared. That's how they sell you things: by making these issues seem bigger than they really are and then offering "solutions" to those artificially inflated problems.

But not me. I don't want you to be scared, except maybe of sharks and botulism and close talkers and other things it makes sense to be scared of. When it comes to your career, however, I want you to feel secure. The challenges facing today's workforce are not unprecedented. In many ways, they are the same challenges that have been facing professionals for centuries.

The point of this chapter is to banish once and for all the notion that there are four generations in today's workplace. The four-generation model is entirely unworkable if you want to create loyalty, dedication, and runaway success. Thinking of your workforce as multigenerational creates more problems than it solves. Fortunately for us, there are *not* four generations operating side by side. That's a lie whose time has come, and this book is going to bury it once and for all.

## Generational Differences Throughout the Ages

Strictly speaking, the length of a *generation* is the amount of time it takes for an infant to get old enough to have children of his or her own. Historically this has ranged anywhere from around 13 years (please don't have kids when you're 13, by the way) up to 40 years—although it's hard to say exactly how our ancestors measured the length of a generation because there's decent evidence to suggest that nobody paid it even the slightest amount of attention. I've typed every possible permutation of “generational differences” into every search engine there is,<sup>1</sup> and there are exactly *zero* mentions of generational differences being an issue that anyone talked about in any form whatsoever before about 1960.

This means that for the majority of human history, generational differences either didn't exist (which is seriously unlikely) or were framed in different terms (which we'll be discussing in greater detail shortly).

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<sup>1</sup> Except Bing. But I'm not counting that against me.

The most common argument used to explain why we have a four-generation workforce for the first time in human history is that—you know what’s coming, don’t you?—the world today is different than it used to be. These are the two platitudes we always trot out when discussing generational issues: *For the first time in history, there are four distinct generations operating side by side, and the world today is different than it used to be.* But let’s put this into a proper perspective. The Revolutionary War was as comprehensive and world-altering for early Americans as WWII was for the so-called Silent Generation; the French and Russian revolutions were significantly more volatile and transformative than the 1960s and Vietnam were for the Baby Boomers; and the printing press was easily as colossal a technological innovation for 15th- and 16th-century Europeans as the Internet has been for today’s Generations X and Y (and the rest of us, too). There is nothing so unique about our world today that we can’t find parallels from earlier eras. And yet our ancestors didn’t talk about the travails of negotiating a multigenerational workforce, and we do.

To be sure, people tended not to live as long as we do today (yay for toilets and medicine and antibacterial soap!), so there would have been fewer instances of 20-year-olds working alongside 40- and 60- and 80-year-olds. But it certainly happened. For example, the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence ranged in age from 26 (Edward Rutledge, South Carolina) to 70 (Benjamin Franklin, Pennsylvania). In addition to them, there were 2 other signers in their 20s, 17 in their 30s, 21 in their 40s, 8 in their 50s, and 6 in their 60s. By today’s measure, these men would absolutely represent a multigenerational workforce, and yet none of them ever made mention of thinking along those lines, despite the fact that many of them were both business owners and prolific writers. Neither did a single factory owner in the first 200 years after the start of the Industrial Revolution. No one *ever* talked about a multigenerational workforce—not *once*—until 40 or 50 years ago.

So what happened?

The answer, which will surprise you for only a moment if indeed it surprises you at all, is that we have changed the way we market ourselves. Over the past several decades, marketers have systematically worked to create a hyper-complicated picture of our generational

differences, specifically so that they could sell “solutions” in the form of books, products and consulting, and a host of other services.<sup>2</sup> Today’s “multigenerational workforce” is not a *real* issue; it’s a *marketing strategy*. And I’ll prove that in the next few pages.

## How Marketing Created the “Multigenerational Workforce”

When the Industrial Revolution really got going, it didn’t take the producers of goods and services very long to figure out that they needed to have markets in which to sell those goods and services—and the more markets they could find, the more goods and services they’d be able to sell. So they hired marketers to go around inventing new markets.

And those marketers were very, very successful:

- George Frederick Earnshaw, president of Earnshaw Knitting Company in Chicago, published the children’s wear industry’s first trade journal in 1917, titled *The Infants’ Department*. Its aim was to help clothiers increase their sales by targeting infants as a distinct market, which had previously been an ill-defined or non-existent demographic.
- The term *toddler* was coined to describe a distinct demographic around 1936 to distinguish between infants and children—again as a way to sell more clothes.
- In 1997, the book *What Kids Buy: The Psychology of Marketing to Children* identified the *tween* as a demographic distinct from childhood and adolescence and, therefore, a new market

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<sup>2</sup> By the way, you’re totally forgiven right now if you think I’m being hypocritical. After all, I’ve written a book about this very subject, so maybe you think I’m the same as everyone else. But I promise that’s not true. I’m trying to simplify this issue, not add to the confusion. My goal is to make this book the last word on generational issues that you ever have to read. I don’t plan on writing another book about generational differences in the workplace because my goal is to ensure that by the end of this, you’ll realize that there’s really nothing else to say. I want to *kill* the industries that thrive on creating artificial generational differences, not help expand them.

for companies to target. (There's a good chance, by the way, that the word *tween* was first used by J.R.R. Tolkien to describe hobbits. In case you, like me, find that kind of thing interesting.)

I could go on, but you get the point. As recently as a century ago, there were exactly three stages of life: infancy, childhood, and adulthood. Now, we've broken it down something like this:

- **Infant**—0 to 12 or 24 months.
- **Toddler**—1 to 3 years old, according to the CDC
- **Child**—3 to 10-ish years old
- **Tween**—8 to 12 years old (or 10 to 12, depending on the source)
- **Junior teen**—13 to 15 years old
- **Teen**—Technically 13 to 19 years old, but National Miss America says 16 to 18, and other groups have different age ranges
- **Young adult**—10 to 20 years old, or 12 to 18, or 14 to 21, or even 20 to 40 if you go by Erik Erikson's stages of human development

That's *eight* overlapping stages of life, and unless you go by Erik Erikson's definition for *young adult*, we haven't even made it out of college yet. If I kept going with all the stages of adulthood that we've created—*young professional*, *parent*, *middle-aged*, *retired*, *old age*, and so on—we'd easily get this list up to 15 categories. Is human life truly five times as complicated and nuanced now as it was a century ago? Or have we segmented ourselves into ever smaller cohorts in order to make it easier to target specific ideas, products, and services to particular populations?

We can also look at music. According to the Music Genres List, there are 23 types of rock music (acid rock, alternative rock, American traditional rock, arena rock, blues rock, British invasion, heavy metal, death metal, hair metal, gothic metal, glam rock, hard rock, noise rock, progressive rock, jam band, psychedelic rock, rock 'n' roll, rockabilly, roots rock, singer/songwriter rock, southern rock, surf rock, and tex-mex). I'm not sure many people would be able to describe the difference between hair metal and glam rock, and yet there are undoubtedly some music aficionados who would be quick to

point out that some important genres are missing. And I haven't even mentioned the 12 brands of country, or 16 genres of dance music and 14 flavors of electronic music, nor the fact that inside the alternative rock label there are 9 *further* divisions, each one more and more difficult to distinguish from the others. Dr. M. Duffett, commenting on Simon Reynolds' analysis of indie music for *The Guardian*, puts it very well: "It is as if popular music criticism is now a laboratory which dissects the genetic codes of the tunes in order to guide packs of hungry consumers."

The upshot of our relentless push toward more and more segmentation is that it has the tendency to make *marketing* easier but *living* harder. Take clothing, for example, which is really where this process began. We all know what section to visit in every store or on every website in order to find the things we want, and that's enormously convenient. And at the same time, parents often lament that their children aren't simply *children* anymore; now they belong to subcategories of childhood that seem to be changing on them every time they buy their kids a new outfit. That's worse than inconvenient—it's destructive. Today's children are being placed into categories that didn't exist for the parents who are raising them. Are children magically different today than they were in the 1940s or 1970s? Or are we making things more complicated than they need to be?

## So How Does This Relate to the Generational Question?

I have no problem whatsoever with the marketing world's tendency to create finer and finer consumer segments for the purposes of selling products. If a company knows its cameras are extremely popular with 23- to 27-year-old Irish men and creates commercials to attract this audience, that makes perfect sense. If a band bills itself as "countrified acid steampunk with a dash of EBM" and that somehow speaks to their audience, they should do what works.

But people aren't products, and the generational question deals fundamentally with people and the interactions between them. Unfortunately, we've been segmenting various facets of society for

marketing purposes for so long (toddler, teen, young professional, and so on) that we've extended the process to people themselves. The term *Baby Boom* was never intended to describe the personality of a generation but rather to indicate the explosion of births following World War II. It wasn't until the 1970s that *Baby Boomer* assumed the connotation it has today; once it did, we became enamored of the belief that every new group of people was somehow fundamentally different than everyone who had come before or who would come after.

Again, this segmentation into Traditionalist, Boomer, Gen X, and Gen Y<sup>3</sup> seems to satisfy our need to understand things. But the more segments we create, the harder it is for us to actually know what we're supposed to do.

There have been several interesting studies about this phenomenon, which for lack of a better term can be called the "poverty of choice." Very basically, the hypothesis goes like this: The more choices we're given, the more indecisive we become, and the more likely we are to do nothing. One of the classic examples of this phenomenon is the famous jam study of 1995.<sup>4</sup> Researchers placed various jams in a display sample at a grocery store. Every few hours, they changed the number of offerings from 6 varieties to 24 varieties. On average, customers tried two samples at both the large and small displays. However, while more people stopped by the larger display (60% at the large display versus 40% at the small display), they made significantly fewer purchases (3% bought something at the large display versus 30% at the smaller display). Several other studies have been conducted with different products and different parameters, but the results tend toward the same conclusion: The more choices we're given, the harder it is for us to know what to do with all those choices.

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<sup>3</sup> You're now starting to hear some "authorities" describe a new generation, Generation Z, which is distinguished primarily as being "even more technologically oriented" than Generation Y. It seems that as we create more and more generations, we also require fewer and fewer distinctions between one generation and the next. Which begs the question—why are we bothering to create new generations in the first place?

<sup>4</sup> I'll give you a pass if you've never heard of the famous jam study of 1995. It was called the "famous jam study" in the research I found. *Fame*, apparently, is a really, really subjective term.



And this is *exactly* what we've done with the generational question. In creating four distinct generations, we've made our workplaces seemingly *easier* to describe but actually *harder* to manage. If you've ever despaired of figuring out how to work with all the different kinds of people in your office or factory or secret laboratory at the center of the Earth or wherever you work, it's because it feels like a problem too complicated to solve.

But it isn't. We just need to return to thinking about generational issues in a simpler, more natural way—the way all of us did up until a few decades ago.

However, because you've been hearing about four generations since you've been old enough to care about generational issues in the workplace, let's cover what you've heard before.

### ***The Four (Totally Invented) Generations in Today's Workplace***

Following is a brief description of each so-called “generation.” I've taken the liberty of describing them in slightly different terms than you're used to, but I think you'll agree that my descriptions are not only accurate but also a whole lot more fun than what you're used to reading. Here goes!

#### ***Generation #1: The Traditionalists—1922 to 1946***

First we have the Traditionalists, also sometimes called The Matures, the Veterans, the WWII Generation, or the Silents. Whatever you decide to call them, they were born roughly between 1922 and 1946, which explains why they make fun of anyone who complains about the state of today's economy. Their favorite medicines growing up were whiskey and cod liver oil, and many of them still maintain the belief that medicine can't possibly be effective if it tastes like anything you would want to put inside you. Seriously, you could get them to eat sand if you told them it would promote their digestive health. They're generally very loyal workers and good rule-followers, and their favorite pastimes are complaining about various physical ailments (often caused by eating too much sand) and yelling at children who run across their lawns, although sadly many of them now live in

gated communities and so no longer have lawns to get mad at children for running across. To compensate for this, many of them now yell at their TVs instead. They always drive 18 miles an hour below the speed limit, and they let everyone know that they're turning 7 miles before it's going to happen and about 32 miles after completing the turn. If you've ever been caught behind a Traditionalist driver on the interstate in a single lane of traffic while the other lane is blocked off for the next 23 miles by orange construction cones, then you have a decent idea of what the afterlife is like if you don't make it into Heaven. Traditionalists typically go to bed at 8 p.m., and every year their glasses get a tiny bit thicker. But don't think they're weak! This is the generation who decided three martinis for lunch was a good idea. They can drink the rest of us under the table. Don't underestimate them.

### *Generation #2: The Baby Boomers—1946 to 1964*

Next we have the Baby Boomers—or as I like to call them, the Dirty Filthy Hippies. Born between 1946 and 1964, they were the transitional generation between black-and-white and Technicolor. Instead of whiskey and cod liver oil, their favorite medicine growing up was LSD, which some of them actually tried to get added to our drinking water. They're generally very goal-oriented and sometimes workaholics, which is hard to believe since many of them made it entirely through college without taking a shower. And how can I say that? Because the Baby Boomers were the first group of people since the Vikings to believe that razors and deodorant were somehow part of the oppressive establishment, which means they should have been barred from any decision-making position anywhere. They are notable for their conspicuous consumption and responsible for the absurdly optimistic phrase, "50 is the new 30!" which can be true only if you honestly expect to live to be 134 years old. They invented disco, for which they can never truly be forgiven. And perhaps most importantly, they *also* invented Generations X and Y, although many of them have tried to pretend that they had nothing to do with it.

### *Generation #3: Generation X—1965 to 1980*

After the endless debauchery of the Baby Boomers came Generation X, so named because somewhere in the mid-1970s people apparently ran out of words. This is my generation of people, born between 1965 and 1980. We were famously called the “slacker” generation, which I personally find hilarious considering the generation that comes after us. In a radical departure from our forefathers, our favorite medicine is angst, which isn’t even a medicine—it’s just a whiny, pouty-faced way of looking at things. Our basic attitude is thus: “Show us your proudest accomplishment, and we’ll show you our crushing indifference.” We’re typically more informal than our elders and have an instinctive distrust for authority, which is hardly a new concept since “distrust of authority” is one of the foundational principles of the American psyche. We’re generally described as self-starters, and it’s quite evident that we weren’t interested in listening to anyone else when we created the fashion sensibilities of the 1980s, which could actually qualify as a crime against humanity. We are the reason for the hole in the ozone layer because we decided it was more important to have big hair than to avoid death by sunburn. Generation X was the first generation in the history of human beings to decide that nobody really understood us, including our friends and family, and that the less people understood us, the cooler we really were. There is really no good explanation for how any Gen Xers survived into adulthood, except that cynicism ultimately isn’t fatal. Oh, and we also gave the world rap music. You’re welcome.

### *Generation #4: Generation Y—1980 to Four Minutes Ago*

And last but not least—in fact they’re the biggest generation in the country, slightly bigger than the Baby Boomers and about twice as large as my mopey Gen Xers—we have Generation Y, so named because by the mid-1990s people were too lazy to even care that X isn’t the first letter of the alphabet. They’re also known as Millennials—presumably because they were all born on the Millennium Falcon. Born between 1980 and four minutes ago, these people are

barely old enough to shave. Their favorite medicine is Ritalin, which has probably been put into their cereal at this point. The proliferation of ADHD diagnoses has happened in large part because this generation, cognizant of the increasing cost of higher education, has chosen to get diagnosed with hyperactivity disorder so that they can pay for college by selling all their extra pills to their friends as “study aids.” They’re comfortable with new technologies and rapid change because they have never known a time without new technologies and rapid change. This is significant for three reasons. First, it means they’ve never developed film and been disappointed when 90% of their pictures turned out to be crap. Second, they’ve never made a mixtape for anyone, painstakingly arranging the songs in the proper order to best express their love for whoever they were going to give it to. And third and perhaps most importantly, they occasionally walk into trees and parked cars and walls and other people when they’re texting their friends because they can’t be bothered to watch where they’re walking. Seriously, they’re barely even people.

So there you have the four generations, as I like to think of them. Traditionalists, Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y. That’s what you’ve heard. That’s the only version you’ve ever heard.

And it’s wrong.

## The Two Major Problems with the Four-Generation Model

It would be natural to think that these four generational designations make sense. After all, we’ve been talking about the four-generation workplace for so long that it might be hard to think of it in any other way. You might be saying, “There really do seem to be significant distinctions between each of these groups of people.” And you’re right: There *are* significant distinctions between people. I’m not saying there aren’t. I’m just saying that those differences can be explained in *much* simpler terms than by putting everyone into one of four categories.

And here's why. For one thing, there isn't even much agreement on who belongs in which group. Depending on whom you ask, the Traditionalist Generation begins as early as 1909 or as late as 1925, and it ends sometime between 1940 and 1946. The earliest Baby Boomers were born as early as 1940 or as late as 1946, and they finished up either in 1960 or 1964. Generation Y is *either* the group of people born between 1980 and now, *or* it's a much smaller group (say, between 1979 and the mid-1990s) so that we can apply the unfortunately fashionable Generation Z label to cover anyone born between the mid-1990s and today.

But in terms of imprecision, no "generation" is more obstinately unwilling to be pinned down than Generation X, for whom each of the following explanations has been used:

- Because Generation X is the tenth generation in America (This, by the way, isn't at all true.)
- Because photographer Robert Capa used the term to describe people he was photographing in the 1950s (This means he was actually taking pictures of post-WWII Traditionalists or their Baby Boomer children.)
- Because of Jane Deverson and Charles Hamblett's 1965 book *Generation X* (The authors were certainly interviewing people we would now call Baby Boomers.)
- Because Billy Idol was in a punk band called Generation X in the late 1970s, which was then referenced in Douglas Coupland's 1991 book *Generation X: Tales of an Accelerated Culture*, as the genesis of the term (Huh?)

As you can see, Generation X is a term designed to apply to returning WWII vets, *or* British hippies, *or* Billy Idol, *or* the people we now consider to be Generation X. Even now the best that can be said of Generation X is that they were born sometime in the 1960s and stopped being born (depending on the source) in 1975, 1980, 1981, or 1982.

This is as close to a consensus as we've come, which isn't much of a consensus at all. So the first problem is this: With such fluid designations, how are the millions of people on the edges of a given "generation" supposed to properly self-identify in order to know how to act and interact with others?

The logical counterargument to this criticism is that these years aren't meant to be hard and fast. Instead, they're supposed to function like convenient markers to make sense of the chaos. America didn't suddenly crave independence and decide to go to war in 1776, but we use that year as an easy way to simplify the decades-long process that transformed America from a collection of subservient colonies into its own nation. In the same way, the argument goes, we've picked logical but admittedly arbitrary years to make it easier to talk about the different generations.

But this leads to the second and much, *much* larger problem with the four-generation model. Theoretically, the whole point in having a four-generation model is to make it easier for you to identify and then interact with people from different generations. However, it actually does the opposite. In an effort to justify that there really are significant and fundamental differences between the members of these four "generations," people have created truly exhaustive lists that detail dozens of divergent qualities. I know you've seen those lists before (I'm going to reproduce one for you in couple pages, which I truly, sincerely hope you don't take the time to read), and on most of them there is absolutely no overlap. On the lists where there is some overlap, it's kept to a bare minimum in order to make each generation seem distinct from every other. As a result, the so-called four generations have been presented in a way that makes it look as though the people in each group are rigidly distinct in literally every way imaginable from the people in every other generation—all despite the fact

that millions of people hover on the edges of these loosely defined categories and thus might be identified as completely different types of people, depending on which “generation” their age would assign them to.

So here’s what you’ve seen, I’m certain, in every book and keynote presentation about generational issues that you’ve ever endured. The author or presenter tells you for the millionth time in your life that for the first time in history, there are four distinct generations operating side-by-side in the workplace. He or she then goes on to outline the differences between those “generations.” This is the core of the book or presentation, designed to create order out of chaos. After this, you’re given various strategies to deal with members of each generation. I’m certain that every one of these authors and presenters is genuinely well intentioned and confident that their advice will be helpful to you. You’re then left to take that knowledge and put those strategies into practice. It sounds fairly simple.

But it’s not, because the charts they use to delineate their four-generation model make the entire picture too complicated for their well-intentioned advice to have any practical effect.

I’m going to give you one of those charts here. Table 1.1 is a compilation of several of the various generational charts I’ve seen. I’m certain you’ve seen something very much like this chart before. And I truly hope you don’t read it; the only reason I’m putting it here is so you can be reminded of how the four-generation model is typically structured. You’ll understand my subsequent arguments whether you read this chart or not. However, if you *do* choose to read it, I promise I made a few small embellishments that should entertain you.

**Table 1.1** The Four-Generation Model

	<b>Traditionalists</b>	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Generation X</b>	<b>Generation Y</b>
<b>Birth years</b>	1900–1945	1946–1964	1965–1980	1980–2000ish
<b>Famous people</b>	Charlie Chaplin	Cher	Jeff Havens	Ashton Kutcher
<b>Number of members</b>	40 million	80 million	51 million	75–100 million
<b>Chief influences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great Depression</li> <li>• WWII</li> <li>• Korean War</li> <li>• A bunch of other sad things</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civil Rights</li> <li>• Vietnam War</li> <li>• Cold War</li> <li>• Moon landing (unless you're a conspiracy theorist)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dual-income families</li> <li>• Single parents</li> <li>• End of Cold War</li> <li>• First generation expected not to be as financially successful as their parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital media</li> <li>• The Internet</li> <li>• Portable technology</li> </ul>
<b>Core values</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rule followers</li> <li>• Conformers</li> <li>• Dedication and sacrifice</li> <li>• Discipline</li> <li>• Duty before pleasure</li> <li>• Hard work</li> <li>• Loyalty</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal rights</li> <li>• Equal opportunities</li> <li>• Personal gratification</li> <li>• Personal growth</li> <li>• Spend now, worry later (or, better yet, let your kids worry about it!)</li> <li>• Team-oriented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial</li> <li>• Independent</li> <li>• Informality (after all, they popularized the mullet)</li> <li>• Pragmatism</li> <li>• Self-reliance</li> <li>• Cynicism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overconfidence</li> <li>• Fun!</li> <li>• Tolerance</li> <li>• Social</li> <li>• Technologically savvy</li> <li>• Street smarts (despite the fact that most of them have never played outdoors)</li> </ul>
<b>Attributes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committed to employer</li> <li>• Financially conservative</li> <li>• Ethical</li> <li>• Organized</li> <li>• Strong work ethic</li> <li>• Task-oriented</li> <li>• Thrifty</li> <li>• Trusting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambitious</li> <li>• Challenge authority</li> <li>• Competitive</li> <li>• Avid consumers</li> <li>• Live to work</li> <li>• Loyal to careers and employers (how this sits in the same box alongside “challenge authority” is beyond me, but there you go!)</li> <li>• Political correctness</li> <li>• Willing to take on responsibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptable</li> <li>• Angry but don't know why (I like this description of us!)</li> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• Focus on results</li> <li>• Free agents</li> <li>• Results driven</li> <li>• Self-starters</li> <li>• Strong sense of entitlement</li> <li>• Work to live</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attached to their technology and parents</li> <li>• Multicultural</li> <li>• Have never lived without computers</li> <li>• Even more entitled than Gen Xers!</li> <li>• Global in their thinking</li> <li>• Overindulged by their Baby Boomer and Gen X parents</li> <li>• Innovative</li> <li>• Tech-dependent</li> <li>• Loyal to friends</li> <li>• Open to new ideas</li> <li>• Self-absorbed</li> </ul>
<b>Education</b>	A dream	A birthright	A necessity	A calculated risk



	<b>Traditionalists</b>	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Generation X</b>	<b>Generation Y</b>
<b>Approach to finances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put it away</li> <li>• Pay cash</li> <li>• Save everything</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buy now, pay later</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cautious</li> <li>• Conservative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Earn to spend</li> </ul>
<b>Work ethic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated</li> <li>• Pay your dues</li> <li>• Work hard</li> <li>• Company first</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driven</li> <li>• Work long hours to establish identity</li> <li>• Quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balance</li> <li>• Work smarter, not harder</li> <li>• Self-reliant</li> <li>• Want structure and direction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambitious</li> <li>• Already bored with what they're doing now because they want to know what's next</li> <li>• Multitasking</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial</li> </ul>
<b>Technology</b>	Adapted	Acquired	Assimilated	Integral
<b>View on respect for authority</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authority is based on seniority and tenure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Started off skeptical of authority but now like it since they're in the positions of power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Still skeptical of authority figures</li> <li>• Will test authority repeatedly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often seek authority figures when looking for guidance</li> </ul>
<b>View on time at work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Punch the clock</li> <li>• Get the job done</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workaholics</li> <li>• Invented the 50-hour work week (if, you know, you completely ignore farmers and everyone who worked in 19th-century factories, coal mines, railroads...)</li> <li>• Visibility is the key</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project-oriented</li> <li>• Get paid to get job done</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gone at 5 p.m.</li> <li>• Work is a "chore" or something that fills the time between weekends</li> </ul>
<b>Opinion of work/life balance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What the hell is work/life balance?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worked too hard so they could buy multiple vacation homes they never have time to use. As a result, imbalance between work and family.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on clearer balance between work and family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flex time, job sharing, and sabbaticals</li> </ul>
<b>Desired work environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hierarchical</li> <li>• Top-down management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratic</li> <li>• Equal opportunity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Functional</li> <li>• Efficient</li> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• Informal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative</li> <li>• Creative</li> <li>• Positive</li> <li>• Diverse</li> </ul>
<b>Think work is...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An obligation</li> <li>• A long-term career</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An exciting adventure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A difficult challenge</li> <li>• "Just a job"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Like, really hard</li> </ul>

	Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y
<b>What they bring to the workplace</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experienced</li> <li>• Consistent</li> <li>• Disciplined</li> <li>• Dependable</li> <li>• Detail-oriented</li> <li>• Stable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenge the status quo</li> <li>• Good at seeing the big picture</li> <li>• Good team players</li> <li>• Mission-oriented</li> <li>• Go the extra mile</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapt well to change</li> <li>• Direct communicators</li> <li>• Determined</li> <li>• Good task managers</li> <li>• Highly educated</li> <li>• Multitaskers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consumer mentality</li> <li>• Great at collaboration</li> <li>• Fast</li> <li>• Optimistic</li> </ul>
<b>Major problems they have at work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't adapt well to change</li> <li>• Hierarchical approach can annoy others</li> <li>• Typically avoid conflict</li> <li>• Everything is either right or wrong</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expect everyone to be workaholics</li> <li>• Don't like change (anymore)</li> <li>• Can be pretty judgmental</li> <li>• Not good with finances</li> <li>• Self-centered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their cynicism can get really, <i>really</i> tedious</li> <li>• Dislike authority so much they sometimes ignore great ideas</li> <li>• Impatient</li> <li>• Lack people skills</li> <li>• Sometimes reject rules simply for the sake of rejecting them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distaste for menial work (or anything that doesn't look at least a little bit like a video game)</li> <li>• Inexperienced</li> <li>• Need a <i>lot</i> of supervision</li> <li>• Unreasonable expectations</li> <li>• Did I say Gen Xers were impatient? Just wait until you see <i>these</i> guys!</li> </ul>
<b>What you need to know to work with them</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't expect work to be fun</li> <li>• Need to know procedures</li> <li>• Want a disciplined working environment</li> <li>• Consider their feelings</li> <li>• They appreciate personal touches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to know that their ideas matter</li> <li>• Because their careers define them, acknowledging the value of their work is important</li> <li>• Easily annoyed by unproductive routines</li> <li>• Need to know why their work matters, how it fits into the big picture, and what impacts it will have and on whom</li> <li>• Tend to like team assignments</li> <li>• Respond well to attention and recognition</li> <li>• Tend not to take criticism well</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crave independence and informality in the workplace</li> <li>• Appreciate flextime so they can pursue other interests</li> <li>• Need to be able to have fun at work</li> <li>• Want the latest technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Want to work with bright, creative people</li> <li>• Want you to take time to learn about their personal goals</li> <li>• Want to work with friends (even when those friends are not bright or creative)</li> <li>• Need to know the rationale for the work you've asked them to do</li> <li>• Want variety</li> <li>• Need help navigating work/life issues</li> <li>• Make work personal</li> </ul>

	<b>Traditionalists</b>	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Generation X</b>	<b>Generation Y</b>
<b>Opinion of authority</b>	Respectful	Impressed	Unimpressed	Indifferent
<b>How to communicate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One-on-one</li> <li>• Write a memo</li> <li>• Present yourself in a formal, logical manner</li> <li>• Show respect for their age and experience</li> <li>• Use good grammar</li> <li>• Use formal language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Call me anytime!”</li> <li>• Use a direct style of communicating</li> <li>• Pay attention to your body language</li> <li>• Answer questions thoroughly and expect them to grill you for more information</li> <li>• Include them in decisions</li> <li>• Okay to use first names</li> <li>• Emphasize the company’s vision and mission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Call me only at work.”</li> <li>• Email</li> <li>• Use straight talk and present facts</li> <li>• Learn their language and speak it</li> <li>• Informal communication style</li> <li>• Don’t micromanage (like there’s any group of people on the planet who LIKE being micromanaged...)</li> <li>• Avoid buzzwords and jargon</li> <li>• Connect your message to results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Text me.”</li> <li>• “Or send me a picture.”</li> <li>• “Does a phone have another function besides texting and picture sharing?”</li> <li>• Use positive, motivational language</li> <li>• Use action verbs</li> <li>• Be funny</li> </ul>
<b>Feedback and rewards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No news is good news</li> <li>• Satisfaction is a job well done</li> <li>• Want private recognition without fanfare</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Like monetary rewards and often display all awards for public view</li> <li>• Like praise</li> <li>• Like title recognition</li> <li>• Want something to put on the wall</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Want to be rewarded with time off</li> <li>• Prefer regular feedback on their work</li> <li>• Need constructive feedback to be more effective (duh!)</li> <li>• Want structure and coaching</li> <li>• Like a hands-off type of supervisory style</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need frequent feedback</li> <li>• Need clear goals and expectations</li> <li>• Need frequent communication</li> <li>• Want recognition</li> <li>• Like flex-time, work-from-home, and other creative arrangements</li> </ul>
<b>Messages that motivate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Your experience is respected.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “You are valued.”</li> <li>• “You are needed.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Do it your way.”</li> <li>• “Forget the rules.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “This place is fun.”</li> <li>• “You will work with smart, creative people.”</li> </ul>

	Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y
<b>How to mentor them</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investment in long-term commitment</li> <li>Show support for stability, Security, and community</li> <li>Allow the employee to set the “rules of engagement”</li> <li>Ask what has worked for them in the past and fit your approach to that</li> <li>Respect their experience</li> <li>Avoid saying they’ll need to undergo radical change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledge that they have “paid their dues”</li> <li>Teach them work/life balance</li> <li>Show them how you can help them</li> <li>Pre-assess their comfort level with technology before new projects</li> <li>Emphasize that their decision is a good one</li> <li>Follow up, check in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer a casual work environment</li> <li>Lighten up</li> <li>Be more hands-off</li> <li>Listen and learn</li> <li>Let them know they work <i>with</i> you, not <i>for</i> you</li> <li>Appreciate that they have a life</li> <li>Provide learning and development opportunities</li> <li>Provide opportunities to try new things</li> <li>Be prepared to answer “why” often</li> <li>Present yourself as an information provider, not “The Boss”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage them to explore new avenues</li> <li>Acknowledge their self-worth</li> <li>Welcome and nurture them</li> <li>Challenge them</li> <li>Offer a custom plan specific to them</li> <li>Be impressed with their decisions</li> <li>Use their peers as testimonials</li> </ul>
<b>Attitude toward training and development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training should contribute to the organization’s goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training helps the organization but is also a path to promotion and additional compensation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training enhances their versatility in the marketplace</li> <li>Not necessarily loyal to the company that trained them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Willing and eager to take risks</li> <li>Everything is a learning opportunity</li> </ul>
<b>Attitude toward retirement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Put in 30 years, retire, and live off of pension/savings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If I retire, who am I?</li> <li>Haven’t saved enough money so probably need to work at least part time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hope to retire early</li> <li>Might want different experiences and may change careers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expecting to develop a killer app and retire a multimillionaire by the time they’re 32</li> <li>Delusional</li> </ul>

This is what you’ve heard. This is what you’ve seen. And it is almost completely useless.

Honestly, what manager has the time or even the *ability* to put a chart like this into practice? Who can afford to sit at a desk, putting everyone she manages or works with into this chart, analyzing their supposedly rigid attitudes about a couple dozen different elements of

work, life, and the balance between them—and *then* devise solutions tailored to each person's incomprehensibly specific needs and motivations? And even if you could somehow find the time to do such an exhaustive independent analysis, the larger question remains: With so many glaring and seemingly insurmountable differences between the members of so many different generations, who can even hope to find successful managerial techniques, change management strategies, or anything else when it looks as though everyone 15 years older or younger than we are is essentially a completely different type of person?

In the interest of making it easier to describe people based on their age, we've made it enormously *more* difficult to develop real solutions for a diverse workforce.

### In His Own Words: Matthew S. on Managing a Four-Generation Workforce

Matthew S. is 32 years old and works as a manager for a large financial services company. He is relatively young for a manager and works primarily with people older than he is, but most of the people he manages are younger than he. This has put him in the privileged position (if you can call it that) of being able to witness firsthand how frustrating it is to try to work with four generations at once. In his own words:

Our company was in the process of expanding into a new metropolitan area. The person overseeing the operations, who was a Baby Boomer, spent a lot of time talking about how to set the right culture for this new operation. Those of us on the leadership team had been relocated from across the country, but the majority of the people we would be leading would be brand new to the company, and for many of them, this would be their first professional job.

In conversations about setting the right culture, we spent weeks discussing professional dress. Our supervisor was intent on setting a professional culture and believed we could not expect excellent work if we did not dress professionally.

Many others felt the same, although some wanted to allow for relaxed standards for employees who wouldn't be customer facing. Many of the Baby Boomers and Gen Xers had grown accustomed to dressing business casual and were happy to keep it that way. Some of the oldest people on our leadership team expressed frustration that we were even having this conversation, which wouldn't have happened 20 years ago, and didn't see any need to cater to Millennial sloppiness. There was one Millennial on our leadership team, and he pointed out that it was Baby Boomers and Gen Xers who started the trend toward "dressing down" in the first place, which everyone admitted was a good point but didn't do anything to change the opinion of our supervisor. His vision of professional dress finally prevailed, and we spent many meetings trying to relay this message to other areas of the leadership team as we prepared to launch.

Then, one day, someone brought in a photo he had taken on his way into work. It was a billboard for our company, displayed prominently along a highly trafficked interstate and highlighting our arrival to the area and the career opportunities available. The woman in the picture who was to represent our "workforce" was wearing a sleeveless tank top with tattoos covering both of her arms. It was the ultimate backfire. Obviously some of the people at headquarters had been having a similar conversation to ours but had come to a different conclusion. So we were forced to reverse our plans, and our director changed his tune quickly. He went as far as to show up in jeans the next day. He later told us he'd had to go buy a pair because he hadn't owned any.

It's time for a better way. It's time to think about generational differences the way we used to before we needlessly complicated the issue and turned simple issues like how to dress for work into grueling, heated arguments between multiple factions. This book is for anyone who has grown tired of our current method of discussing generational differences. It's for anyone who has sensed that this problem may

not be as difficult as we've made it out to be. And it's for anyone who thinks that we might all be a little more alike than we are different.

So say goodbye to the four-generation model because I won't be referencing it again. I might occasionally use terms like *Baby Boomer* and *Gen Xer* while making various points, but I'll only be doing so as part of the process of reframing our current four-generation model in the terms of the two-generation model we'll be discussing from here on out. If you think it arrogant or audacious to try to overturn several decades of established theory about generational differences in the workplace and replace all that with a new model, I understand why you might think so.

But to be perfectly honest, the two-generation model you're going to be reading about is not new at all. Not by a long shot.

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