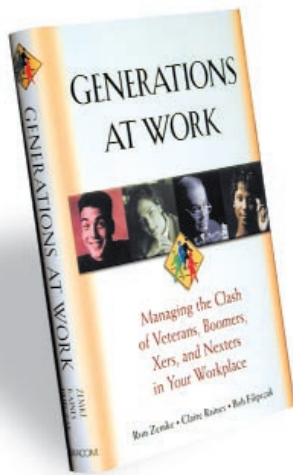


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By Ron Zemke, Claire Raines
and Bob Filipczak

Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers and Nexters in Your Workplace

GENERATIONS AT WORK

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Today's American work force is in a unique state. Never before has there been a workplace so diverse in so many ways, particularly in the range of ages that coexist on the job. The result: a generational diversity that can frustrate and challenge the work force as much as it enriches it. A gulf of misunderstanding exists between older, not so old, and younger employees — a gulf that grows more problematic with the passing of time.

Managing this mélange of ages, faces, values, and views is an increasingly difficult duty. In *Generations at Work*, Ron Zemke, Claire Raines, and Bob Filipczak identify the players, problems, and potential solutions with which every manager of a cross-generational work force will need to be familiar as their employee pool matures and new faces join older ones.

In their exploration of this topic, the authors provide the following:

- ✓ **Specific, incisive profiles of four distinct generations.** We meet the Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters, and discover their motivations, desires, and life-shaping events in an attempt to find common ground between them.
- ✓ **Distinctions within the generations.** Why do “second-half” Boomers look at the workplace differently than “first half” Boomers? How are Nexters really a lot like Veterans? Why are such distinctions important?
- ✓ **Valuable tips for recruiting and retaining cross-generational employee pools.** Discover a host of insights into each group's work ethic and the forces that drive them to take positions and stay in them.
- ✓ **Successful strategies.** Discover what successful companies do to create and nurture work environments that are generationally comfortable and conducive to focusing their people's energies on the business of their businesses. Your guide to managing the clash of the generations is just a page away ...

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GENERATIONS AT WORK

by Ron Zemke, Claire Raines and Bob Filipczak

— THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

Introducing the Players

The four generations who occupy the American workplace in these early days of the 21st century span a remarkable slice of American and world history. Over a period of nearly 80 birth years — from 1922 to 2000 — the formative forces, values, and views; workplace aspirations and dreads; hopes and fears; and delights and disappointments of each of these four generations have colored (and continue to color) the workplace with a distinct hue that is all their own. These four groups are as follows:

- **Veterans (1922-1943).** The last of the gray flannel suits, this group (all but the youngest of whom were born before World War II) are the classic “keepers of the grail” of yesteryear and all the values that period espoused — civic pride, loyalty, and respect for authority among them. While most of this group have passed into retirement, their ranks in the CEO slots in most major companies dictate that they’ll be a force in business well into the 21st century.
- **Boomers (1943-1960).** This is the cohort group that invented the 60-hour work week, the group that is passionately concerned about participation and spirit in the workplace, the one whose ability to become engrossed in their occupations made the business of business the most dramatic story of the last quarter of the 20th century. Their attitudes toward the office, the family, and themselves, have unquestionably shaped the workplace as we know it, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.
- **The Xers (1961-1980).** Adept, clever, resourceful, discouraged, disheartened — is there a cohort group with a soul more dark or with such an edgy skepticism about them? Their need for feedback and flexibility, coupled with their distaste for micromanagement, makes them a perplexing lot for employers to deal with. They work to live, not (like their Boomer predecessors) live to work; their correlated striving for balance in life and work have made Xers the most conflicted and conundrum-prone generation currently in the marketplace.
- **The Nexters (1980-2000).** This confident, achievement-oriented group is barely in the work force yet, but is already making an impact with its optimism,

goal focus, and technical know-how. It will be interesting to see where this group takes the work force as the new century stretches out before it. ■

The Veterans

The mind-set of Veterans has so dominated our culture that every other set of beliefs is compared to theirs. When managers complain about young employees’ work ethic, they are, in fact, comparing that ethic to that of Veterans. Their influence runs even deeper, deep into the value system of our nation. The moral and ethical foundations of our country (or the perception thereof) are based on their perspective — a perspective so pervasive that a large percentage of all generations continues to embrace (or rebel against) it today.

Veterans tend to act and react in certain ways in the following workplace situations:

Leadership. In leadership roles, Veterans tend to be more directive, which was standard operating procedure in the workplace of the 1950s (see article next page). They can be expected to take charge, delegate, and make the bulk of decisions themselves; in fact, it is surprising how many Boomers and Gen Xers appreciate such a take-charge manner.

Teams. Although Veterans make fine team members, the changing structures of teams might give them pause. Veterans grew up working as a team (in World War II and its aftermath); they saw the power exerted by labor unions and the impact collective action can make in the workplace.

Veterans have worked in many teams, under strong leaders who told them exactly what to do, as well as

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Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries (ISSN 0747-2196), 10 LaCrue Avenue, Concordville, PA 19331 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corporation. Publisher, George Y. Clement. Publications Director, Maureen L. Solon. Editor-in-Chief, Christopher G. Murray. Published monthly. Subscription, \$89.50 per year in the United States and Canada; and, by airmail, \$95 in Mexico, \$139 to all other countries. Periodicals postage paid at Concordville, PA and additional offices.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to **Soundview, 10 LaCrue Avenue, Concordville, PA 19331**. Copyright © 2000 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries.

The Veterans

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how and when to do it. Today's teams, however, do not resemble the "command and control" teams of old. Teams can be community sized, with no defined leadership. They can even be virtual, with each team member working on their role without even seeing any other team members.

Management. While Veterans tend to be pleasant and at ease with customers, they can also be prone to buck the authority of younger managers or get mired in the "we've never done it that way" mentality. If you are a younger manager and have Veterans reporting to you, take the time to learn from their experience and discover what their preferences and personal needs are. However, be aware that respecting their experience does not mean being intimidated by it. Remember that you are the boss — the one who must take hard stances when those stances are needed. Don't let your respect for your Veteran workers get in the way of managing effectively.

Technology and training. Much of your training efforts with Veterans will likely focus on technology. Unlike Gen Xers or Nexters, Veterans didn't learn about computers in school, and often find technology intimidating and confusing. Do not rush the training. Keep your efforts as loose and stress-free as possible. One way of accomplishing this is by finding older instructors to conduct your training, or finding younger trainers who understand Veterans and speak their unique language.

It is also important to refrain from stereotyping all Veterans as technophobes — remember, their generation invented the electromechanical and telephonic concepts and structures that made your computers possible! Once

How do I Recruit a Veteran?

1. Keep in mind that if your customer base includes a good percentage of seniors, your work force should, too.
2. Don't limit your consideration of older employees to full-time employment only; many of them are not interested in leaving the work force entirely, preferring part-time positions in which they can play a useful part of an organization's efforts.
3. Let them know their age and experience will be considered assets, not liabilities. If you can use their help and experience on a project, tell them so.
4. Use clear enunciation and good grammar when communicating with Veteran recruits. Include "please" and "thank you" and avoid profanity at all costs.

The Workplace of the 1950s

To best understand Veterans in today's workplace, it is helpful to keep in mind the workplace they first entered and how that shaped their lasting impressions of their profession:

- **Division of labor.** Executives were the brains of the operation; workers were the brawn.
- **Rank and status.** Seniority and age correlated.
- **Structure and advancement.** Positions were hierarchical; people knew where they stood and were able to move up the ladder through perseverance and hard work.
- **Relationships.** Formal relationships were de rigueur; employees called those above them on the chart by their last name, with "Mr." or "Mrs." in front of it.
- **Authority.** There were clear distinctions between bosses and workers.
- **Conversation.** Personal topics were not up for discussion.
- **Boundaries.** "Work life" and "family life" were separate.
- **Speaking up.** There were certain unwritten rules that dictated what junior members could say about their own careers. Asserting an opinion on the topic was frowned upon.

trained, many Veterans will take to the new technology and continue learning. ■

The Baby Boomers

From 1946 (almost nine months exactly after VJ Day) through 1960, the Veterans gave birth to a truly revolutionary generation — 76 million children who would form the central bloc in perhaps the greatest period of social (and, eventually, professional) change in the history of the United States. This "Baby Boom" would also oversee a great period of growth and expansion and a push toward individualism over teamwork.

Indeed, Boomers are seen as the generation of achievers, concerned more with raising fortunes than consciousness, and with finding ways to increase their status, prestige, and power. They have an almost Pavlovian tendency toward being driven; this is, after all, the generation of the Yuppie, responsible for many of the stereotypes now commonly associated with the Baby Boom — ruthlessness, Rolex watches, designer glasses, and second homes in Aspen.

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How Boomers Differ from Their Parents

Veterans: Followed traditional roles (male/female, ethnic, etc.)

Boomers: *Redefined roles and promoted equality.*

Veterans: Were loyal (to their marriages and their companies).

Boomers: *Left unfulfilling relationships to find more fulfilling ones.*

Veterans: Were willing to be disciplined and patient, waiting for their rewards.

Boomers: *Sought immediate gratification.*

Veterans: Played by the rules.

Boomers: *Manipulated the rules to meet their own needs.*

The Baby Boomers

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“Second-halfers”

While every member of the Baby Boom generation can say there are aspects of their generation’s perceived personality that are not reflected in their own lives, there is no greater dichotomy within the generation than that between the Boomers born in the first half of the “boom” and those born in the second half.

“Second-halfers” find “first-halfers” to be more idealistic and more likely to put career first, family second. “Second-halfers” do not have quite the same attachment to the 1950s as do their “first-half” counterparts, and their participation in such “movements” as Vietnam, free love, and women’s lib was more relegated to observer’s status.

Late Boomers tend to be more laid back and cynical, particularly where professional matters are concerned. They got the first taste of downsizing the country had experienced since the Great Depression, making them considerably less gung-ho about management than the early Boomers. They recognize that good work habits and positive attitudes are not always rewarded, and often they are not enough to save a job, regardless of how well it has been done.

So how does one manage such a diverse generational group today?

1. Find out how they want to be managed. Boomers are the first generation to be asked how they wanted to be managed. Determining this is both strategically and tactically important to your business.

2. Expect a reaction if things don’t go well.

Boomers tend to make life hell if you’re mismanaging them. They do not suffer in silence, but may not choose to confront issues directly. Be prepared to deal with problems, particularly if the Boomers on your staff make “boss” a four-letter word.

3. Give them opportunities to succeed. Teach your Boomers the politics of information; give them the inside edge on your company’s know-how. Stress learning and improvement in the opportunities you give them, and be prepared to show them how that improvement has value not only to them, but to your organization as well. In other words, show them how they can make a difference.

4. Motivate them. Give your Boomers lots of public recognition (inside and outside your company) and perks (a company car, an expense account, etc.). Get them involved in decisions when this is possible; Boomers thrive on participative management and consensus. Give them a chance to prove their worth, and

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How do You Keep Boomers from Feeling Stagnant?

Many Boomers place job enrichment high on their list of priorities, yet many companies wonder how well they’re doing at enriching (as opposed to enlarging) their jobs. They want to know whether their workers of this generation are feeling stagnated and, if they are stagnating, what can be done to combat that.

Companies must recognize that work is a critical issue in the personal satisfaction quotient for most Boomers. Many of them have lost jobs to the downsizing trends of the last decade, losing not only their major means of financial support, but also their personal foundation. As befits a generation so dichotomous, many other Boomer workers have found their span of control increased.

When considering the stagnating of the Boomer generation, recognize that Boomers have the tendency to keep themselves challenged, sometimes to the point of over-commitment, and they should be recognized for that. Tell them regularly that you and your organization appreciate the work they do and the hours they put in to do that work. Reward their work with stress-reducing perks — comforts and conveniences that make, for example, traveling easier. Such rewards as business class upgrades, quality hotel accommodations, and the occasional afternoon off during a busy week serve two purposes: 1) they allow employees to decompress and refresh themselves during stressful periods; and 2) they let the employees know they have enriching, important jobs, and that their efforts on behalf of their employers are appreciated.

The Baby Boomers

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reward them when they do.

5. Mentor them. Keep the following in mind when acting as a mentor or coach for your Boomer employees:

- **Be tactful.**
- **Find opportunities for agreement and harmony.**
- **Ask questions to get to the bottom of issues.**
- **Let them tell you how they're doing.** When an opportunity for input presents itself, discreetly coach for improved performance.
- **Think of yourself as a friendly equal.** Ask permission at every turn when discussing performance and improvements.
- **Show respect, but do not burden your dialogue by referring to them as “sir,” “ma’am,” “Mr.,” or “Ms.”** ■

Generation Xers

Generation “X” might well have been called Generation “I” for “invisible” or Generation “L” for “lost.” Living in the long shadow of the Boomers, this is the generation that has only really registered recently. Like the middle child in a family, the group has passively resisted anything its older sibling embraced. It is often defined by what it is not.

GenX’s collective psyche has been shaped by a survivor mentality and can be summed up by the question “Just tell me, is this going to be on the test?” Critics see that sentiment as a sign that the generation does not care for the big picture; indeed, they may care for nothing but themselves. This is an inaccurate critique. The question really asks “What does this have to do with my survival?” GenX has developed an almost myopic concern with survival, both economic and psychological, stemming from their early sense that no one was going to hold their hands in life — they’d have to take care of themselves.

Work Ethic and Motivation

This sentiment translates differently to authority figures (teachers, parents, bosses), who note and perpetuate the label “slacker” for much of the “X” generation, denoting a questionable work ethic. While Veterans viewed work as a means of survival and Boomers turned to work as a means of self-fulfillment, Xers have learned that work is no guarantee of survival. Corporations can terminate you without warning, apology, or logic, and their entry-level positions are often mindless, dull, and exhausting. The prevailing attitude that all work is “just a job” is unlikely to change.

But Xers can be motivated to do good work, if presented with the right package, including the following:

Flexibility. The more flexible your work environment, the better the work you will receive from your Xers. Flexible hours, an informal dress code, and just the right amount of supervision are great places to start.

Technology. The generation reared on television, video games, and computers knows that having the best technology available to you at your desk is as good as having a corner office with a window and a door. Xers must know that their companies are willing to invest in their work; if you only provide them with an old, outdated computer that someone else discarded, your ability to retain these tech-savvy workers will be compromised.

Multitasking. Give Xers lots of simultaneous tasks and projects, let them prioritize them in their own way, then stand back and let them do their work. Xers like to feel that they have control over their own work, even if that control is illusory.

Feedback. Xers need constructive feedback to do their jobs more effectively, just like any other employee. Some have even suggested that Xers need it more, noting that the generation grew up with at least one absentee (Boomer) parent. That lack of attention in their formative years has them craving positive, sincerely offered feedback in their professional lives.

Evenly disseminated recognition. Xers may not be all that anxious to receive perks, but they resent it when others get visible, expensive recognition; it smacks of the worst kind of corporate, “good old boy” office politics, and it’s likely to send your Xer staff running for the exits. ■

How Xers Differ from the Previous Generation

Boomers: Fought against authority.

Xers: Go around authority or turn it in their direction.

Boomers: Media darlings.

Xers: Avoid the media and the limelight and, above all, don’t let the media label them.

Boomers: Workaholics.

Xers: Prefer to “have a life.”

Boomers: Political.

Xers: Politics never solved anything.

Boomers: Political at work.

Xers: Corporate politics wastes time we could spend doing something we enjoy.

Motivating Xers: Dorothy's Pep Talk

Dorothy is a Veteran who uses pep talks to fire up her mostly GenXer staff. She's conducted these talks for 30 years, recalling the inspiring pep talks her favorite manager used to give her and her fellow employees when she was younger. Those talks breathed fire into workers, as her manager ranted, raved, challenged, and motivated his employees into doubling their productivity. Unfortunately, Dorothy's speeches are not clicking with her twentysomething staff; in fact, she fears she's flunking the "snicker test" and actually demotivating her troops. What can she do?

- **Know how they see you.** Pep talks are outmoded; Veterans' values were kindled by fiery speeches that

Keeping the Fires Burning

If you're managing a team of bright, enthusiastic Xers, how do you provide direction without putting out their fire? The answer: a strategy that includes five key elements:

- **Working with your Xers to create a picture of what you want to accomplish together.**
- **Breaking that vision down into tangible, results-producing steps.**
- **Building in milestones and celebrating when you reach them.**
- **Giving individuals and the team lots of positive feedback about their creativity.**
- **Making certain that you are genuinely validating their ideas and accomplishments, while continuing to assist them in laying down achievable tracks that get results.**

Take Mindy McCune, for example. As operations manager for Motorola's Phoenix, Ariz., design center, she has 105 Xers reporting to her. Once she has given people the high-level outcomes of what she wants accomplished for a certain project, she lets them come up with specifics for their game plan to complete the task. Together, they schedule checkpoints, reporting methods, and project reviews, allowing her to steer projects back on track if they derail. If a report does not meet her expectations, she asks what she can do to help, avoiding the typical "this is what you do" response. Her approach of letting people direct their own efforts, combined with positive feedback, gives her employees the confidence and fire they need to succeed.

tapped into "can do" attitudes and resulting behaviors. You must recognize that younger associates, however, react cynically to such inspirational efforts. Even the most well-intentioned pep talks are usually seen as insincere.

- **Find different inspiration.** Younger generations are increasingly task-centered, requiring a different approach to inspiration. Rally your troops around their work, inspiring them around the task and importance of finishing a project, delivering a service, or shipping a product.
- **Be honest.** If the task is an unpleasant one, be honest about it. Back up that honesty with motivation, scheduling some fun activity as a reward after the job is done.
- **Switch it up.** Consider assigning different staff members to lead meetings, and allow the team to decide as a group upon their goals and how to measure them. ■

Generation Next

The most carefully studied generational group has yet to make an impact on the workplace, but the anticipation of their full-on arrival in professional circles leads many to believe that impact will be significant. These "Nexters" were/are born after 1980 to both late Boomers and early Xers.

Whereas their parents' parents placed work before family, Nexters' parents have paid pinpoint attention to almost every facet of child rearing in the all-out pursuit of bringing up well-educated, well-adjusted children.

Savvy in the particulars of digital technology as no generation before them, the Nexters are expected to have an impact on the dynamics of the family as well. Today, as never before, kids actually know more about technology than their parents. Boomers and Xers who (by choice or lack of ability) cannot keep up with technology will find themselves standing on the edge of a generation gap wider than any they could imagine.

Yet, in many ways, Nexters are more like their pre-World War II Veteran forebears than either group would like to admit. Early Nexters seem eager to subscribe to a stricter moral code. Reacting to excesses they perceive in their parenting generation (such as the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal), they will, experts agree, have a much stricter moral center. Manners also seem to have been recently reborn in many of the Nexters' families. Parents have been vigilant in insisting their progeny say "please," "thank you," "sir" and "ma'am."

Since the initial vanguard of Nexters is only now

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Generation Next

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reaching the workplace, many of their traits as employees are, at present, speculative. We'll be spending the next couple of decades learning how to recruit, motivate, and retain this newest generation. You will, however, need to keep the following principles in mind:

- **Budget plenty of time for orientation.** Create a clear picture of your work environment — what's good about it, what's not, your expectations and long-term goals. At the same time, learn about each new employee's personal goals and develop strategies for interweaving those goals with job performance.
- **Forget gender roles.** If you still have preconceptions about gender roles, discard them. Nexters will redefine them as men take on more household tasks and women take on more traditional male tasks such as home repair.
- **Focus on teams.** Consider expanding the size of your teams and appointing a strong team leader in areas in which you have many Nexters.
- **Mind the gap.** Be sensitive to the potential for conflict between Xers and Nexters when they work side by side. The gap between these two generations may end up making the one between the Boomers and Xers look tame.
- **Grow your training department.** Nexters will want to continue their education and develop their work skills.
- **Establish mentor programs.** Consider matching your young workers with your most seasoned people with whom they say they resonate. ■

The ACORN Principles

Companies that successfully nurture cross-generational workplaces exhibit five common approaches to making their environments generationally comfortable and focusing their people's energies on the business of their businesses. These five approaches successfully accommodate differences, exhibit flexibility, emphasize respectful relations, and focus on retaining talented and gifted employees. These potent precepts form the acronym ACORN:

Accommodate employee differences.

In order to retain employees, the most generationally friendly companies treat their employees as they would customers — they find out everything they can about them, work to meet their specific needs, and serve them

Two Keys to Successful Intergenerational Work

There are two keys to creating a successful intergenerational workplace. The first is aggressive communication. Companies shouldn't ignore generational differences. Instead, they should take the time to communicate with the different groups, uncover their needs and preferences.

The second key is difference deployment, which means placing workers in positions and jobs that best fit with the generational characteristics.

according to their unique preferences. There are tangible ways of doing this by making the effort to accommodate scheduling needs, work-life balance issues, and nontraditional lifestyles. Each generation's icons, language, and precepts are acknowledged, and language is used that reflects generations other than those in power.

For example, the St. Paul, Minnesota-based West Group (a leading supplier of legal information) is in the midst of changing its Boomer culture to meet the needs of Xers and Nexters. One of its efforts is called Café.com — a Caribou Coffee shop located inside West Group's main headquarters. In the café, employees can man one of the eight Internet workstations or bring their own laptop and hook into one of the dozens of modem connections located throughout the lounge. There are comfortable chairs and sofas and collaborative workspaces, allowing employees greater flexibility in choosing where to do their work. They are not chained to their cubicle workstations.

Create workplace choices.

Generationally friendly companies allow the workplace to shape itself around the work they do, the customers they serve, and the people they employ. Dress policies tend to be casual, bureaucracy is decreased, and the atmosphere is relaxed and informal.

Ben and Jerry's (the Vermont-based ice cream manufacturer) is a fine example of this approach. One of the company's teams — called "The Joy Gang" — is tasked with making work fun by scheduling events that encourage relaxed participation and creativity. There's Elvis Day, in which employees dress up like the King, and (more tellingly) Corporate Dress-Up Day, the one day a year in which employees are encouraged to wear corporate attire, just for the novelty of it.

Indeed, the company attracts iconoclasts from three generations: Xers are drawn by its lack of corporate pretensions; Boomers appreciate the relaxed atmosphere

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The ACORN Principles

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and the organization's ties to the Boomer culture of the late 1960s; Veterans who bucked authority see their corporate ideal come to life. Ben and Jerry's employees' organizational disdain for formal corporate culture transcends the generational tensions that arise in other, more staid companies.

Operate from a sophisticated management style.

Generationally friendly managers have little time for circumlocution. They give those who report to them the big picture, specific goals and measures, then they turn their people loose, giving feedback, rewards, and recognition as warranted. There are seven distinctions that characterize their flexibility:

- 1. Their supervisory role is not fixed; control and autonomy are a continuum, not solitary options.**
- 2. Their leadership style (consensus-based or autonomous) is situationally varied.**
- 3. They depend less on positional rather than personal power.**
- 4. They know when and how to make exceptions to policies.**
- 5. They can thoughtfully match individuals to a team or assignment.**
- 6. They balance concern for tasks and concern for people.**
- 7. They understand the elements of trust and work to gain it from employees.**

Respect competence and initiative.

Generationally friendly companies assume the best of their people, treating everyone (from the greenest recruit to the most seasoned veteran) as if they have a lot to offer and are motivated to do their best. In the most successful companies, this approach becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Lucent Technologies created IdeaVerse, a training center that allows employees to have the space and time to play with ideas and creativity without having to worry about the understood boundaries or censure of the workplace. In the center, the walls are purple, vice presidents color with crayons, employees attend seminars with titles like "Wholeness in the Workplace" and "Life, Paint, and Passion," and just about anything goes. Company officials readily admit that some Boomers and Veterans may scoff at the idea of sitting side-by-side with colleagues and superiors, painting scenes on a large canvas. That, offi-

cially argue, is the kind of self-censorship they want to break free of at Lucent. When the cross-generational work force gives in and buys into the ideas behind IdeaVerse, true creative energy can be allowed to flow, with resulting improvements in their product development and service innovations.

Nourish retention.

When you think of how difficult it is to find good, conscientious employees in today's job market, you realize why many companies treat work force retention with the same focus as they do finding and retaining customers. Generationally friendly companies concern themselves constantly with retention, and with making their work environments magnets for excellence. They encourage lateral movement throughout the organization and have broadened assignments.

One excellent example is the national restaurant chain TGI Friday's, which encourages employees to enroll in its Passport Program. Under the program, an employee's "home" restaurant gives the employee a "passport" allowing him or her to travel around the country for six months, working at other Friday's restaurants along the way. At the end of the employee's stay at a different restaurant (whether it's a month, a week, or just a shift), the general manager of the restaurant stamps the employee's "passport," freeing the employee to travel off to the next destination. In order to be eligible for the program, employees must have at least six months' tenure, must be well trained, and must have no record of unsatisfactory performance. Through the Passport Program, TGI Friday's allows its best employees to indulge in their wanderlust without losing them in the process. ■

The Future

The authors postulate the following about the future of cross-generational relations in the work force:

- As Veteran executives retire, Boomers will replace them and create for themselves a sort of guru status among decision makers, allowing them to sit quietly atop the corporate mountain and be consulted from time to time for business wisdom.
- The outlook for Xers who want to slide into management positions is hazy right now. Small start-up companies may be the primary sanctuary for Xers who want managerial roles and responsibilities. Then again, the cohort group's propensity for multitasking may be perfect for the Fortune 200 companies of the future. As leaders, they will likely be much more concerned about getting work done than just about anything else. ■