

Diversity Dialogue

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Action Steps to Generational Diversity

by Victor Gray

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When we think of diversity, our attention is often drawn to those characteristics which are most visibly obvious—gender, age and ethnic heritage.

The reality of today's workplace and our business environments suggests, however, that much of the diversity that we must be sensitive to is, in fact, "invisible." It cannot be easily detected or known in advance of our interactions with a particular person or group.

Values, both those we bring with us from our family of origin and those that we obtain through our socialization as members of society, are significant contributors to workplace diversity.

First, we need to recognize that we, as leaders, have certain values which influence and affect our view of the world, as well as our view of the people we work with and provide leadership to. While our values help define who we are, they can, at the same time, create unintentional "blind spots".

Second, we need to be aware that generational values can have a significant impact on motivational factors with those we lead.

Industrial psychologist, Morris Massey, in his theory of values acquisition, proposes that values are programmed into each person. Massey says that programming begins around age ten. This is the age at which people integrate the cultural, family, media, and global influences around them. Massey also says that by examining the values and ideas that existed when a person was ten years old, one can fairly accurately predict what kinds of values that person will hold throughout life.

Massey developed his model of Value Programming Analysis by studying groups of people. In each group, the members were about the same age. Massey noticed that people who were near in age tended to hold similar values and world views, and he hypothesized that this was because they were imprinted at approximately the same time.

Massey found that people ". . . locked in on their basic gut-level values" at around age ten; this is the age when children truly begin absorbing the stimuli and messages of the world around them. Because groups of people were influenced in the same general way, programmed through the same activities, events, and experiences, we may look at a group and understand why particular clusters of employees in the workplace react as they do. If we can determine the basic core values held by the majority of the group because of their similarities in programming experiences, then we can gain a better understanding of what employees want from organizations and leaders.

Definitions of Today's Generations (Howe & Strauss)

Generation's Name	Years of Birth	Age in 2004
G.I. Generation	1901-1924	80-103
Silent Generation	1925-1942	62-79
Baby Boomers	1943-1960	44-61
Generation X	1961-1981	23-43
Generation Y	1982-2002	22 and younger

According to Dr. Carol Martin and Bruce Tuglan, in their book, *Winning the Talent Wars*, the action steps that leaders should take to make our workplaces more desirable are as follows:

- Silent Generation
 1. Leaders should respectfully assert authority and demonstrate their own track records.
 2. Teach Silents in a safe environment and engage them as teachers.
 3. When Silents retire, re-hire them as part-time project leaders and coaches.
- Baby Boomers
 1. Leaders should become coaches who facilitate, not dictate.
 2. Offer Boomers flexibility, authority and respect.
 3. Challenge Boomers to keep growing (in their own way).
- Generation X
 1. Leaders should always be answering the GenX question: "What's the deal?"
 2. Manage Xers with coaching-style, fast feedback and credit for results.
 3. Push Xers to keep learning "just-in-time" for every new mission.
- Generation Y
 1. Leaders should get to know Gen Yers' capabilities and put them in roles that push their limits.
 2. Treat them as professional colleagues and they will act like professionals.
 3. Keep Yers focused with speed, customization and interactivity.

In order to get the best from every employee, leaders should ask themselves, When was this individual "value programmed?" Considering the factors that influenced their upbringing may be important in how we choose to motivate them and in turn how they perform.

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