



# Welcome to the 4G Workplace!



*For the first time in history, we have four generations employed simultaneously.*

*By Nancy L. Clark*

Pose a simple question—how did Kennedy die? And you will hear a variety of answers in today’s workplace. “He was assassinated in Dallas by Lee Harvey Oswald.” “He died in a private plane crash off Martha’s Vineyard.” “Who’s Kennedy?” These varied responses may indicate that you are working in a 3G (three generation) or 4G (four generation) environment.

With so many generations working together, the benefits can be great, but so too can the challenges. Within one generation the experience and approach to work can be very different; spread among four generations, we may not even seem like the same species.

“This new generation thinks differently.” “They don’t have the same work ethic.” These comments may seem like complaints, yet research is supporting that there are differences. And, I suspect those or similar comments are made about every new generation. We are all different and we should be. Our experiences, life events, etc. are all different. The challenge for organizations is how to leverage those differences and optimize the benefits.

The first step is to understand the differences. This simple table may be a good starting point:

<b>Generational Considerations</b>				
	1922-1945	1946-1964	1965-1980	1981-2000
<b>Referred to as:</b>	Veterans, Silent, Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Generation X, Gen X, Xers	Generation Y, Gen Y, Millennial, Echo Boomers
<b>Work is...</b>	An obligation	An opportunity	A difficult challenge	A means to an end; fulfillment
<b>Work ethic</b>	Hard work; respect authority; sacrifice; duty before fun	Workaholics; work efficiently; personal fulfillment; question authority	Eliminate the task; self reliance; skeptical	What's next; tenacity; entrepreneurial; tolerant
<b>Leadership style</b>	Directive, command and control	Consensual; collegial	Everyone is the same; challenge others; ask why	TED
<b>Work &amp; Family</b>	Work, work, work	No balance; work to live	Balance	Balance or I'll leave
<b>Applicants</b>	Want to be part of the company	Want to move up and grow	Want to know what the company will provide them	Want to know the role they will play; what the future path is
<b>Feedback</b>	No news is good news	Feedback once a year with lots of documentation	Sorry to interrupt, how am I doing?	Feedback whenever I want it at a push of a button
<b>Retention</b>	Job changing carries a stigma	Job changing puts you behind	Job changing is necessary	Job changing is an advantage

- The Veteran Generation was born/lived through the Great Depression and World War II.
- The Baby Boomer Generation was born/lived through the Post-War Growth, Civil Rights Movement, and Vietnam.
- The Gen X Generation was born/lived through Iran Hostages, Three-Mile Island, and Jonestown Massacre.
- The Gen Y Generation was born/lived through the Clinton White House Sex Scandal, Yemen Terrorist Explosion, and Mad Cow Disease.

Given the different world events when each generation was born, it is no surprise our perspectives are very different. It is not a good or a bad thing; it just is. The key question is how to use this information.

What is your workplace doing to leverage the generational differences?

Share your comments and thoughts on [Nancy L. Clark's blog](#).