

# **The Great Resignation and Managing a Multigenerational Workforce**

Elizabeth M. Fraley, Stephen L. Rispoli, and Daniella McDonagh<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth M. Fraley, Professor of Law and Co-Director of the Executive LL.M. in Litigation Management, Baylor Law School. Stephen L. Rispoli, Baylor Law J.D. '12, Texas Law LL.M. '18, is the Asst. Dean of Student Affairs and Strategic Initiatives and Director of Scholarship and Innovation in the Executive LL.M. in Litigation Management at Baylor Law School. Daniella McDonagh grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area. She graduated from the University of San Diego in 2019 with a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and English with a concentration in Gender Studies. She is currently entering her third year at Baylor Law School.

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## **I. Introduction**

Research projects the United States workforce to reach 159.8 million in 2022 and includes conservatively five to six decades of workers born and reared in very different settings. Divided in to roughly four generational groups, researchers have labeled these groups Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z.<sup>2</sup> The impact that the different beliefs and backgrounds of the disparate generations bring to the workforce produces challenges for those managing them. Moreover, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number employed is changing at a rapid rate as workers leave their jobs at unprecedented rates. This trend or movement has been dubbed “the Great Resignation.” To slow the Great Resignation and mitigate against its impact on our economy, leaders must understand the similarities and differences in the characteristics of these generations’ characteristics, work attitudes, and trends.

While some use generational differences to drive wedges with younger work colleagues, there is tremendous potential to embrace these differences and leverage strengths to make the entire team better. There are also many similarities among the generations that can be focused upon to give everyone common-ground and understanding, which also enhances collaborative and creative teams. With the understanding of similarities and differences in mind, leaders can – and should – implement management techniques that acknowledge these generations while also celebrating the individuals within them to manage and retain a successful multigenerational workforce.

### **A. The Generations**

People born between 1946 and 1964 are known as Baby Boomers or, more colloquially,

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<sup>2</sup> Aaron O’Neill, *Employment in the United States 2022*, Statista (Nov. 23, 2021), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/269959/employment-in-the-united-states/>.

Boomers.<sup>3</sup> Monumental historical events and movements (the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War, the Kennedy and King assassinations, the Cold War, and space travel) influenced this generation.<sup>4</sup> This group is described as “workaholics” who are competitive, driven, independent, and achievement-oriented in both their professional and personal lives.<sup>5</sup> Boomers grew up in a very prosperous age and sought to raise that bar of prosperity with hard work.<sup>6</sup> Boomers witnessed the greatest economic expansion and consequentially, are optimistic and positive about their opportunities and abilities.<sup>7</sup>

Generation X (“Gen X”) consists of people born between 1965 to 1980,<sup>8</sup> who were raised by Boomers and nicknamed the “Latchkey Generation”<sup>9</sup> since career-focused Boomer parents frequently left their children home alone after school. Due to their parents’ preoccupation with work, Gen X often experienced broken families and absentee parents.<sup>10</sup> Cultural influences for Gen X included the AIDS epidemic, Watergate scandal, fall of the Berlin Wall, and Margaret Thatcher’s being named the first female British Prime Minister.<sup>11</sup> Because of their upbringing and cultural influences of their time, Gen X is considered self-reliant, independent, resourceful, informal, family-oriented, and pragmatic.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, Gen X saw many of their parents’ risks pay off creating another generation of risk-takers who seek greater achievements.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Age Range by Generation*, Beresford Research, <https://www.beresfordresearch.com/age-range-by-generation/> (last visited May 28, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> *Generational Differences Chart*, Univ. of San Francisco, <https://www.usf.edu/hr-training/documents/lunch-bytes/generationaldifferenceschart.pdf> (last visited May 30, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Terry Wiedmer, *Generations do Differ: Best Practices in Leading Traditionalists, Boomers, and Generations X, Y, and Z*, 82 *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin* 51, 57 (2015).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 52.

<sup>7</sup> Mecca M. Salahuddin, *Generational Differences Impact On Leadership Style and Organizational Success*, *J. of Diversity Mgmt.*, Apr. 1, 2010, at 1, 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Age Range by Generation*, *supra* note 3.

<sup>9</sup> Wiedmer, *supra* note 5, at 53.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> Salahuddin, *supra* note 7, at 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

Millennials are the generation born between 1981 to 1996 and labeled “Generation Me.”<sup>14</sup> Cultural influences for Millennials included events such as the September 11th attacks, Hurricane Katrina, the rise of Google, the Oklahoma City bombing, Princess Diana’s death, and the beginning of the Iraq War.<sup>15</sup> Millennials were the first generation to experience advanced technology such as computers and the internet.<sup>16</sup> As a result, they are accustomed to constant, accessible information. Because of the ease and quickness of accessing information, Millennials seek a faster pace in all aspects of their lives.<sup>17</sup> Millennials witnessed the lack of work-life balance from their Boomer and Gen X parents, so they prioritize that balance in their own lives.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Millennials are categorized as assertive, social, bold, and confident.<sup>19</sup> Millennials are also known to be creative, opportunistic, and entrepreneurial.<sup>20</sup>

The youngest generation, known as Generation Z (“Gen Z”) was born between 1997 and 2012.<sup>21</sup> Gen Z experienced the origin of social networking, smartphones, #MeToo movement, police brutality, the Great Recession, and the election of Barack Obama as first African American president of the United States.<sup>22</sup> Gen Z is more open-minded than past generations and vocal about social causes.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, they are fierce advocates for climate change awareness, diversity, and equal rights. This generation is also the most formally educated with

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<sup>14</sup> *Age Range by Generation*, *supra* note 3.

<sup>15</sup> Wiedmer, *supra* note 5, at 54.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> Jean M. Twenge & Stacy M. Campbell, *Generation Me and the Changing World of Work* 7 (Nicola Garcea et. al. eds., 2009) [hereinafter *Generation Me and the Changing World of Work*].

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Generational Differences Chart*, *supra* note 4.

<sup>20</sup> Janet S. Coulter & Debra C. Faulkner, *The Multigenerational Workforce*, 19 *Case Management Matters*, 46, 48 (2014),

[https://journals.lww.com/professionalcasemanagementjournal/Citation/2014/01000/The\\_Multigenerational\\_Workfor ce.9.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/professionalcasemanagementjournal/Citation/2014/01000/The_Multigenerational_Workfor ce.9.aspx).

<sup>21</sup> *Age Range by Generation*, *supra* note 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Generational Differences Chart*, *supra* note 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

IQ scores higher than previous generations.<sup>24</sup> Gen Z has never known a world without fast-paced and constantly advancing technology. As a result, they are tech-savvy and expect answers and results immediately.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, Gen Z focuses on shorter time frames due to a life of constant change and evolution.<sup>26</sup> Gen Z is also labeled “Generation Snowflake” because they are physically safe yet mentally fragile.<sup>27</sup> Gen Z grew up more sheltered and protected than other generations, resulting in a physically safe generation,<sup>28</sup> but the same cannot be said for their emotional safety. The overwhelming influence of social media in the lives of Gen Z has led to higher levels of self-esteem issues, anxiety, and depression.<sup>29</sup> Because of their insulated upbringing and delicate mental state, Gen Z may choose to play it safe rather than take unnecessary risks.<sup>30</sup>

Despite their differences, Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z have at least one thing in common – they all are partaking in the Great Resignation.

## **B. The Great Resignation**

The Great Resignation refers to the voluntary mass exodus of workers from their present jobs. The underlying signs of the Great Resignation appeared years ago, but the COVID-19 pandemic served as a powerful catalyst that resulted in record-breaking resignation numbers.<sup>31</sup> Before the pandemic, the American resignation rate never exceeded 2.4 percent of the total

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<sup>24</sup> Mark McCrindle, *Understanding Generation Z: Recruiting, Training and Leading the Next Generation* 25 (2019), [https://www.academia.edu/40080574/Understanding\\_Generation\\_Z\\_Recruiting\\_Training\\_and\\_Leading\\_the\\_Next\\_Generation.](https://www.academia.edu/40080574/Understanding_Generation_Z_Recruiting_Training_and_Leading_the_Next_Generation.); Wiedmer, *supra* note 5, at 56.

<sup>25</sup> Wiedmer, *supra* note 5, at 57.

<sup>26</sup> *Millennials vs Gen Z: Key Differences in Workplace Dynamics*, Allegis Group (Nov. 22, 2019), <https://www.allegisgroup.com/en-gb/insights/blog/2019/november/millennials-vs-gen-z-key-differences-in-workplace-dynamics>.

<sup>27</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *iGen* 312 (2018) [hereinafter *iGen*].

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at 312.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at 112.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.* at 146.

<sup>31</sup> David Miller & Haley Yamada, *The Great Resignation: Its Origins and What It Means for Future Business*, ABC News, May 3, 2022, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/great-resignation-origins-means-future-business/story?id=84222583>.

workforce per month.<sup>32</sup> In September 2021, however, the rate reached 3 percent – the largest spike on record – and 4.4 million Americans resigned from their jobs.<sup>33</sup> The law profession saw the impact of the Great Resignation. In 2021, law firms saw a 17 percent increase in partner and counsel resignations and a 43 percent increase in associate resignations from previous years.<sup>34</sup>

COVID-19 apparently served as a powerful catalyst for resignation because the associated unprecedented changes caused workers to re-evaluate their careers and how those careers coincided with their overall lives.<sup>35</sup> Resignations surged when organizations returned to in-person work. Some workers chose to resign out of fear of getting sick while others realized that the benefits of remote work exceeded the traditional in-person workplace atmosphere.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, some workers resigned due to other external factors: overwhelming stress stemming from COVID conditions, an uncertain economic future, and the pandemic as a significant source of stress.<sup>37</sup> Finally, in trying to determine the personal reasons why workers left jobs, a Pew Research Center study found that low pay, a lack of opportunities for advancement, and feeling disrespected at work were the primary reasons for seeking other jobs.<sup>38</sup>

Pandemic relief efforts created a financial safety net in the form of stimulus checks, a rent moratorium, and student-loan interest rate freezes, freeing young and low-income workers to resign from their unsatisfactory jobs to test their luck elsewhere.<sup>39</sup> However, today’s workers do

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<sup>32</sup> Mussie T. Tessema, et. al., *The “Great Resignation”: Causes, Consequences, and Creative HR Management Strategies*, J. of Human Resource and Sustainability Stud. 161, 162 (2022).

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 162.

<sup>34</sup> John Roemer, *Much Ado About Nothing? When It Comes to Lawyers, is the ‘Great Resignation’ Really Just the ‘Great Reshuffle?’* ABA J. (Apr. 1, 2022), <https://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/much-ado-about-nothing-when-it-comes-to-lawyers-is-the-great-resignation-really-just-the-great-reshuffle>.

<sup>35</sup> Tessema, *supra* note 32, at 162.

<sup>36</sup> *Id.* at 164.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> Simone Phipps, *What Exactly is the ‘Great Resignation?’*, Middle Georgia State Univ. (Apr. 21, 2022), <https://www.mga.edu/news/2022/04/what-is-the-great-resignation.php>.

<sup>39</sup> *Why Everyone’s Quitting: The Great Resignation, A Searcher’s Job Market, and Online Education*, Abilene Christian University [hereinafter *Why Everyone’s Quitting*], <https://acu.edu/2022/05/03/why-everyones-quitting-the-great-resignation-a-searchers-job-market-and-online-education/> (last visited May 30, 2022).

not need luck to find different jobs; the Great Resignation produced a trend that American society has never encountered before – more jobs available than workers.<sup>40</sup> In-demand workers can be more selective with their employment and demand higher wages which suggests that the Great Resignation is something of a misnomer. While some workers have resigned from the workforce entirely, the majority actually are resigning from one job to take another as the hire rate continues to exceed resignation rates. This re-entry statistic suggests that people want to work, but they also want to be valued and fulfilled at their jobs.<sup>41</sup>

The Great Resignation is in full force across all industries and all generations of workers but is especially prominent among the younger generations – Millennials and Gen Z. For example, almost half of Boomers (45 percent) surveyed reported they are extremely likely to stay with their current employer for the next two years compared to only one in five Gen Zs (20 percent).<sup>42</sup> Millennials make twice as many job and organizational moves per year as Gen X and almost three times as many as the Boomers, spending 50.2 fewer months on the job than Boomers.<sup>43</sup> Gen X also participates in the Great Resignation, spending on average 24.2 fewer months on the job than Boomers.<sup>44</sup> Nor does the Great Resignation appear to be slowing; 36 percent of Millennials and 53 percent of Gen Zs say they will leave their current employer within two years.<sup>45</sup> The Great Resignation clearly has generational implications, and to stem the chaos caused by the Great Resignation, workplaces must recognize the changing trends in generations

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<sup>40</sup> Tessema, *supra* note 32, at 162.

<sup>41</sup> *Why Everyone's Quitting*, *supra* note 39; Phipps, *supra* note 38.

<sup>42</sup> McCrindle, *supra* note 24, at 18.

<sup>43</sup> Eddy S.W. Ng. & Jasmine McGinnis Johnson, *Millennials: Who Are They, How Are They Different, and Why Should We Care?* 128 (2015), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282368010>.; Tom Jacobs, *Workplace Attitudes Surprisingly Similar for Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials*, Pacific Standard (June 14, 2017), <https://psmag.com/economics/workplace-attitudes-surprisingly-similar-boomers-gen-xers-millennials-73279>.

<sup>44</sup> Jacobs, *supra* note 43.

<sup>45</sup> Allen Smith, *Generational Mindsets Affect the Workforce*, SHRM (Sept. 10, 2021), <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/global-hr/pages/generational-mindsets-affect-workforce.aspx>.

and adapt managerial methods that cater to a multigenerational workforce.

## **II. Trends Across the Generations**

While much has changed over the generations, attributes such as individualism and materialism, need for extrinsic rewards and deceleration of adolescent development started with Boomers and have grown stronger over the years. Younger generations are characterized by a growing distrust in government, notions of an external locus of control, rising anxiety and depression, and a greater concentration on work-life balance.<sup>46</sup>

### **A. Individualism and materialism are increasing throughout the generations.**

Each generation endorses individualism, but that trait peaks with Millennials.<sup>47</sup> Millennials score higher on both positive individualistic traits such as self-esteem and assertiveness as well as more negative individualistic traits such as narcissism.<sup>48</sup> For Millennials, social media increased individualism as it replaced in-person community involvement and a provided an online community where members could flaunt their achievements but conceal their faults.<sup>49</sup> For members of Gen Z, though, social media decreased individualism and led to lower self-views, greater feelings of inadequacy, and lower expectations of success.<sup>50</sup>

Boomers work ethic and focus on career led to material wealth, and younger generations grew up with greater affluence. They missed, however, the method but which this affluence was attained. While they place great value on money, wealth, and possessions than older generations,<sup>51</sup> they have less desire to work which constitutes the typical path for achieving

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<sup>47</sup> Jean M. Twenge, et. al., *Generational Differences in Work Values: Leisure and Extrinsic Values Increasing, Social and Intrinsic Values Decreasing*, 36 J. of Mgmt. 1117, 1118 (2010) [hereinafter *Generational Differences in Work Values*].

<sup>48</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *A Review of the Empirical Evidence on Generational Differences in Work Attitudes*, 25 J. of Bus. & Psych. 201, 206 (2010).

<sup>49</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 176.

<sup>50</sup> *Id.* at 101.

<sup>51</sup> Jean M. Twenge & Tim Kasser, *Generational Changes in Materialism and Work Centrality, 1976-2007:*

materialistic desires.<sup>52</sup>

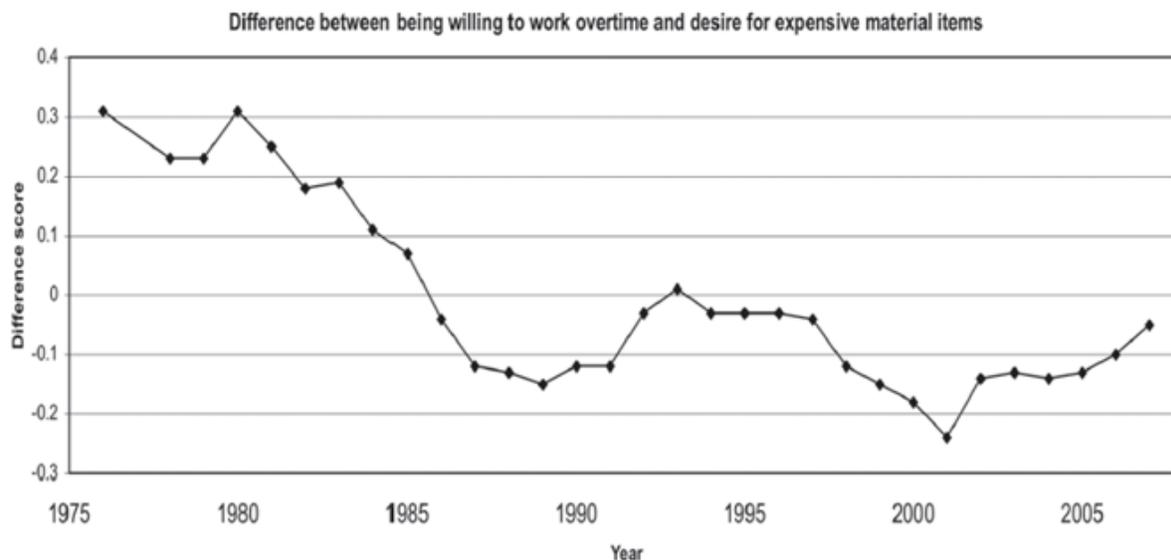


Figure 1. This chart measures the discrepancy between willingness to work overtime minus the desire for expensive material items among U.S. 12th graders from 1976 to 2007. A positive score means that valuing work is higher than valuing material items; a negative score means that valuing material items is higher than valuing work. Jean M. Twenge & Tim Kasser, *Generational Changes in Materialism and Work Centrality, 1976-2007: Associations with Temporal Changes in Societal Insecurity and Materialistic Role-modeling*. 39 *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 883, 892 (2013).

Social media likewise increased the desire for wealth in Millennials and Gen Z because it highlights the lavish and extravagant lifestyles while concealing the normalcy of everyday life.<sup>53</sup> While Facebook appropriately earned the moniker “Fakebook,” knowing that the lifestyles portrayed on social media may have no connection to reality has not kept Millennials or Gen Zs from aspiring to the glossy lifestyle they see.<sup>54</sup> They seemingly fail to appreciate, however, that an affluent lifestyle (either idealized on social media or experienced while living with their

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*Associations with Temporal Changes in Societal Insecurity and Materialistic Role-modeling*. 39 *Personality and Social Psychol. Bulletin* 883, 892 (2013) [hereinafter *Generational Changes in Materialism and Work Centrality*].

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*

<sup>53</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 169.

<sup>54</sup> Rebecca Savastio, *Facebook Is Fakebook as People Are Not Authentic Says Study*, *The Guardian* (Aug. 14, 2004), <https://guardianlv.com/2014/08/facebook-is-fakebook-as-people-are-not-authentic-says-study/>.

parents) came from effort and work rather than luck or coincidence.<sup>55</sup> They seem to have an almost entitled view that they deserve – without effort – a comparable lifestyle.<sup>56</sup>

### **B. The need for extrinsic rewards.**

Just as the post-Boomer generations seek economic rewards independent of the effort needed to acquire them, they likewise yearn for extrinsic rewards. Extrinsic rewards are tangible rewards external to the individual, such as status, respect, and a high salary.<sup>57</sup> They place less emphasis on intrinsic rewards which focus on the process – the intangible benefits that reflect inherent interest in the work, the learning potential, and the opportunity to be creative.<sup>58</sup> Put another way, intrinsic rewards value the journey; extrinsic rewards look only to the destination. Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z all value extrinsic rewards more than Boomers, but that interest level peaks with Gen X.<sup>59</sup> The importance of intrinsic values declined slightly over the generations of workers, suggesting that younger generations of workers do not necessarily seek meaningful work.<sup>60</sup> In other words, “money is in, meaning is out.”<sup>61</sup>

One explanation for this trend is the economic insecurity that Millennials and Gen Z college graduates face. Boomers experienced a thriving economy and lower costs in higher education, which meant they graduated from college less burdened by student debt.<sup>62</sup> As a result, Boomers could choose meaningful jobs with lower pay while still paying their bills. Subsequent generations have not been as fortunate in this regard. Gen X holds most of the debt at 38.4

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<sup>55</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 184.

<sup>56</sup> *Id.* at 185.

<sup>57</sup> *Generational Differences in Work Values*, *supra* note 47, at 1121.

<sup>58</sup> *Id.*

<sup>59</sup> *Id.* at 1132.

<sup>60</sup> *Id.* at 1134.

<sup>61</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 33, at 167.

<sup>62</sup> Melanie Hanson, *Student Loan Debt by Generation*, Education Data Initiative (Oct. 12, 2021), <https://educationdata.org/student-loan-debt-by-generation>.

percent but has fewer borrowers than Millennial borrowers.<sup>63</sup> Millennials make up more than one-third of the nation's total student loan debt with 14.8 million carrying some student loan debt.<sup>64</sup> While much of Gen Z has yet to reach college age, it is nonetheless set to become the generation with the most student loan debt.<sup>65</sup> As of 2021, 57 percent of Gen Z enter college at age 18 to 21 compared to 52 percent of Millennials at that age and 43 percent of Gen X.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, Millennials and Gen Z frequently sacrifice meaningful jobs to pay off staggering mountains of student loan debt which in turn leads to a greater desire for extrinsic rewards. In other words, if you are working solely for a paycheck, you may want some tangible reinforcement since your work provides little satisfaction.

### **C. Delayed maturity and the snowflake generations.**

For numerous reasons, teens are growing up more slowly, delaying activities such as driving, working, and even partying until they are older.<sup>67</sup> Gen Z espouses a fear of “adulting” and seeks to stay nestled under the comfort blanket of childhood.<sup>68</sup> The number of teens working during the school year and summer has dropped dramatically. In the late 1970s, only 22 percent of high school seniors did not work for pay at all during the school year. By the early 2010s, however, twice as many – 44 percent – did not.<sup>69</sup> In 1980, 70 percent of high school seniors had a summer job; only 43 percent did in the 2010s.<sup>70</sup> Those high school seniors who did not work in 2010 explained their reasoning simply as not wanting to work.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *Id.*

<sup>64</sup> *Id.*

<sup>65</sup> *Id.*

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*

<sup>67</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 302.

<sup>68</sup> *Id.* at 45.

<sup>69</sup> *Id.* at 31.

<sup>70</sup> *Id.*

<sup>71</sup> *Id.*

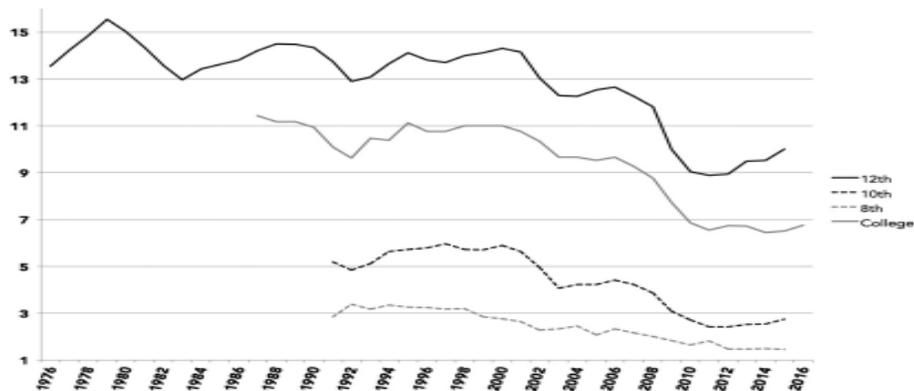


Figure 2. Hours per week spent working at a paid job (8th and 10th grades and college) and paid or unpaid job (12th graders) measured among teens from 1976 to 2016. Jean M. Twenge, *iGen 30* app. B (2018).

The contemporary teenager’s lack of desire to work and experience with work negatively impacts their work ethic and understanding of employment later.<sup>72</sup> Young people are entering the workforce without adult independence or even knowing how to “adult”.<sup>73</sup> They have an unrealistic view of what a job entails, how much it pays, how much effort it takes, and importantly, the orientation of expectations.<sup>74</sup> In other words, they expect the focus to be on them and their needs as opposed to meeting the needs and expectations of the business.

Moreover, because Gen Z is less likely to work, manage their own money, and drive in high school, they are less likely to develop the resiliency that comes from these actions of independence.<sup>75</sup> This can translate to employees who are not open to feedback or criticism, who do not understand the need for hard work, and who are poorly informed about how business runs or their role in a business. Moreover, because they often view jobs merely as a paycheck, they are not particularly loyal and are willing to quit without an understanding of how their abrupt departure impacts the business...or them.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Id.* at 33.  
<sup>73</sup> *Id.* at 302.  
<sup>74</sup> *Id.*  
<sup>75</sup> *Id.* at 35.  
<sup>76</sup> Jacobs, *supra* note 43.

#### **D. Growing distrust and disinterest in government.**

A 2018 study demonstrated that Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials shared a similar distrust in government.<sup>77</sup> Anti-government attitudes started with the Boomers' opposition to the Vietnam War and continued with Gen X as they watched the Watergate Scandal unfold.<sup>78</sup> While these generations distrusted the government, they maintained a strong interest in current affairs and political events. This strong interest contrasts with Millennials and Gen Z who not only distrust government but are neither interested or informed on current affairs and political events.<sup>79</sup> A study by the Annenberg Public Policy Center, found that only two in five American adults (39 percent) correctly named the three branches of government: executive, legislative and judicial.<sup>80</sup> Sadly, that was the highest rate in five years, statistically the same as the prior high of 38 percent in 2013 and 2011 and a substantial increase over last year, when 32 percent could do the same.<sup>81</sup>

Gen Z has a particularly cynical view of government and politics. Although most of Gen Z is not of voting age, they believe that participating in politics is fruitless because their vote has no significant impact.<sup>82</sup> Instead, they prefer to exercise their political views through movements organized by social media.<sup>83</sup> This distrust of government also influences workers' career paths, driving Millennials away from the public sector and into non-profit employment which they

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<sup>77</sup> *Views of Scope in Government, Trust in Government, Economic Inequality*, Pew Research Ctr. (Mar. 1, 2018), <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/03/01/2-views-of-scope-of-government-trust-in-government-economic-inequality/> (explaining that 15 percent of Millennials, 17 percent of Gen X, and 14 percent of Boomers distrusted the government).

<sup>78</sup> *Trust in Government*, Pew Research Ctr. (Nov. 23, 2015), <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2015/11/23/1-trust-in-government-1958-2015/>.

<sup>79</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 280.

<sup>80</sup> *Americans' Civics Knowledge Increases But Still Has a Long Way to Go*, Annenberg Pub. Policy Ctr. of the Univ. of Penn. (Sept. 12, 2019), <https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/americans-civics-knowledge-increases-2019-survey/>.

<sup>81</sup> *Id.*

<sup>82</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 280.

<sup>83</sup> *Id.* at 287.

perceived to be a more effective way of implementing social change.<sup>84</sup>

### **E. Generational shift from internal to external locus of control.**

Locus of control generally refers to an individual's belief in his ability to shape his own destiny (internal locus) as opposed to being at the whim or external forces (external locus). In other words, in a stormy sea, is the individual at the tiller and guiding the boat to shore or buffeted by the waves and blown by the wind. Generations with an external locus of control, such as Millennials and Gen Z, have a low expectancy of their ability to control events.<sup>85</sup> These generations may accept their condition in life, believing that barriers outside their control such as race, sex, family background, or just plain luck, stop them from getting ahead.<sup>86</sup> Meanwhile, Boomers and Gen X lean more toward an internal locus of control, believing their own behaviors can influence outcomes.<sup>87</sup> This trend conflicts with the increase in individualism as it would seem logical that those with high self-confidence would believe they have control over their lives.<sup>88</sup> Some researchers hypothesize that an individualist's belief that they cannot control outcomes may be a mechanism for preserving their self-esteem when things go wrong.<sup>89</sup>

This trend carries over to their attitudes toward work. Most Millennials tend to agree with statements such as "getting a good job depends mainly on being in the right place at the right time," and "who gets to be boss often depends upon who was lucky enough to be in the right place first."<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, externals take a more passive role and are more likely to want their

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<sup>84</sup> Ng. & McGinnis Johnson, *supra* note 43, at 8.

<sup>85</sup> *Generation Me and the Changing World of Work*, *supra* note 16, note 17, at 7.

<sup>86</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 192.

<sup>87</sup> Janet S. Jones et. al., *The Effect of Generational Differences on Locus of Control in the Workplace*, 1 Acad. of Bus. Rsch. J. 7, 12 (2019).

<sup>88</sup> Amy Drew, *Talkin' About Your Generation*, Assoc. for Psych. Sci. (Dec. 31, 2014), <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/talkin-about-your-generation>.

<sup>89</sup> *Generation Me and the Changing World of Work*, *supra* note 17, at 8.

<sup>90</sup> *Id.*

organizations to give them a gentle push rather than take the initiative.<sup>91</sup> This shift toward believing that one cannot control their successes or failures in life contributes to the mounting levels of anxiety and depression in younger generations.<sup>92</sup>

**F. The overwhelming influence of social media is leading to a rise in anxiety, depression, and insecurity.**

Today, the lifetime rate of major depression is ten times higher than depression rates of workers in 1915, despite these workers living through the Great Depression and two world wars.<sup>93</sup> Researchers say the culprit for this dramatic increase is social media.<sup>94</sup> Studies prove social media is connected to more screen time, less in-person interaction, and less sleep, producing feelings of inferiority, insecurity, and loneliness in Gen Z.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, Millennials and Gen Z suffered more stress than their Boomer and Gen X counterparts due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>96</sup> A survey showed that 41 percent of Millennials and 46 percent of those from Gen Z feel stressed all or most of the time as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>97</sup> More so than any other generation, Gen Z prioritizes their mental health. Gen Z workers are more candid and upfront about their mental health challenges with their employers and expect their mental health to be prioritized in the workplace just as much as their physical health.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> *Id.*

<sup>92</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 191.

<sup>93</sup> *Generation Me and the Changing World of Work*, *supra* note 17, at 9.

<sup>94</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 108.

<sup>95</sup> *Id.* at 101.

<sup>96</sup> Smith, *supra* note 45.

<sup>97</sup> *Id.*

<sup>98</sup> Emma Goldberg, *The 37-Year-Olds Are Afraid of the 23-Year-Olds Who Work for Them*, N.Y. Times (Oct. 28, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/business/gen-z-workplace-culture.html>.

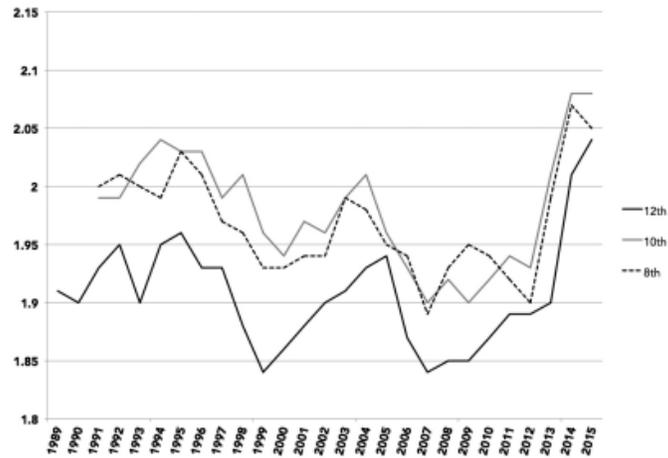


Figure 3. Depressive symptoms among 8th, 10th, and 12th graders from 1989 to 2015. Jean M. Twenge, *iGen* 102 app. F (2018).

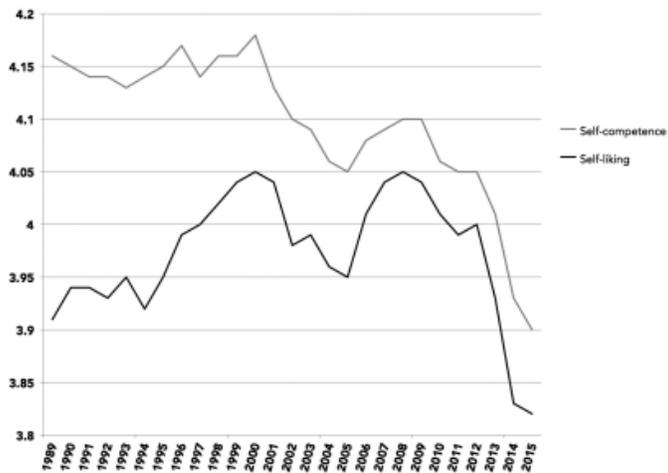


Figure 4. 12th graders' self-competence and self-liking (subscales of self-esteem) from 1989 to 2015. Jean M. Twenge, *iGen* 94 app. E (2018).

**G. The desire for a balance between work and personal life has steadily intensified over the generations.**

Boomers live to work while the other generations work to live. Only 27 percent of Millennials believe that work is a central part of life as opposed to 46 percent of Boomers.<sup>99</sup> Gen X and especially Millennials, believe that work is less central to their lives, value leisure, and

<sup>99</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 183.

seek more freedom and work-life balance than their Boomer counterparts. For example, Millennials are more likely than Boomers to say they want jobs that provide more vacation time, slower pace, and flexibility in hours.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, when considering career decisions, more than 80 percent of Millennials say they seriously consider how a position will affect their work-life balance.<sup>101</sup> Gen Z has backed off slightly on work-life balance and is a bit more realistic about work and its demands, raising work centrality to the same level as Gen X but still well below Boomers.<sup>102</sup> Each generation's view on a work-life balance is highly reflective of their overall work attitudes.

### **III. Work Attitudes Among the Generations**

Each generation's cultural influences and signature characteristics as well as developing generational trends contribute to diverse work attitudes. These diverse work attitudes include the generations' work ethics, the centrality of work in their overall lives, commitment to work, ideal management styles, and preferred work environments. However, despite significant differences, all generations share a common desire to contribute to their workplace, receive praise, grow, and be treated as individuals.<sup>103</sup>

#### **A. Boomers**

Boomers live to work and are considered "workaholics" that invented the 50-hour workweek. Boomers lack a work-life balance and often bring work home with them. They continue to work outside the office and are more involved in professional activities outside of

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<sup>100</sup> Beatrice Elizabeth Nnamboozee & Sanjana Brijball Parumasur, *Understanding the Multigenerational Workforce: Are the Generations Significantly Different or Similar?*, 13 Corp. Ownership & Control 224, 225 (2016).

<sup>101</sup> Franziska Alesso-Bendisich, *Millennials Want a Healthy Work-Life Balance. Here's What Bosses Can Do*, Forbes (July 23, 2020), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ellevate/2020/07/23/millennials-want-a-healthy-work-life-balance-heres-what-bosses-can-do/?sh=b901f7614cbf>.

<sup>102</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 182.

<sup>103</sup> Nnamboozee & Parumasur, *supra* note 100, at 234.

regular work hours.<sup>104</sup> Additionally, Boomers equate their work ethic to their overall worth and fulfillment. Because a Boomer's work ethic symbolizes their worth, they are known to go the extra mile and do whatever it takes to excel in their careers.<sup>105</sup> In their opinion, long hours, physical presence in the office, and casting aside personal desires for the good of the organization demonstrate an admirable work ethic.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, their profession tends to define their identity.<sup>107</sup> For example, a Boomer lawyer may identify as a lawyer first and a mother second. Consequently, Boomers demonstrate a formidable loyalty and dedication to their work and frequently are committed to lifetime employment.<sup>108</sup> As for their relationship with authority, Boomers prefer an organized authority structure based on experience and seniority, yet are inclined to challenge such authority.<sup>109</sup>

## **B. Gen X**

Gen X has similar degrees of work commitment as their Boomer counterparts but portray their commitment in contrasting ways. For example, Gen X does not find effort, long hours, or participation in professional activities as necessary to be committed to one's work.<sup>110</sup> Instead, Gen X believes the degree to which a worker views how meaningful and socially important their work is are greater signs of work commitment.<sup>111</sup> Gen X also differs from Boomers in that their career does not define their identity, rather it merely plays a minor role.<sup>112</sup> This difference in how

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<sup>104</sup> Jean E. Wallace, *Work Commitment in the Legal Profession: A Study of Baby Boomers and Generation Xers*, 13 Int'l. J. of the Legal Pro. 137, 144, <https://contacts.ucalgary.ca/info/soci/files/info/unitis/publications/23332847/generation%2BX%2Blawyers.pdf>.

<sup>105</sup> Salahuddin, *supra* note 7, at 3.

<sup>106</sup> *Generation Me and the Changing World of Work*, *supra* note 17, at 7.

<sup>107</sup> Wiedmer, *supra* note 5, at 53.

<sup>108</sup> Ronald Iden, *Strategies for Managing a Multigenerational Workforce* 19 (2016), <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1767384184/abstract/FD180F1302204879PQ/1?accountid=7014>.

<sup>109</sup> Smith, *supra* note 45.

<sup>110</sup> Wallace, *supra* note 104, at 147.

<sup>111</sup> *Id.*

<sup>112</sup> *Id.* at 139.

the generations define themselves results in Gen X placing greater emphasis on lifestyle choices and making sure they have more time for family, friends, and leisure.<sup>113</sup>

Gen X values work ethic but not to the extent as Boomers. Instead, Gen X places greater value on skills and adheres to the motto “work smarter, not harder.”<sup>114</sup> Because Gen X is typically independent as a result of their upbringing, they desire autonomy and little supervision in the workplace.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, Gen X distrusts authority and dislikes rigid work rules; rather, Gen X desires a workplace that is fun, creative, and most of all – flexible.<sup>116</sup> To break it down more simply: they get the job done, but prefer to get it done on their own time and in their own way.

### **C. Millennials**

Millennials have the lowest work ethic of all generations yet also have the highest sense of job entitlement.<sup>117</sup> This entitlement is in part because Millennials are attaining higher education more so than previous generations and subsequently expect a high-paying, respectable job upon graduation.<sup>118</sup> As compared to Boomers and Gen X, Millennials are less likely to want to work overtime and are more likely to say they would stop working if they had enough money.<sup>119</sup> In other words, Millennials view work simply as a means to an end.<sup>120</sup> This illustrates the continuing decline in work centrality and the increase in work-life balance. Millennials value leisure and fun and look for employment opportunities that can provide this.<sup>121</sup> Similar to Gen X

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<sup>113</sup> *Id.*

<sup>114</sup> *Generational Differences Chart, supra note 4.*

<sup>115</sup> *A Review of the Empirical Evidence on Generational Differences in Work Attitudes, supra note 48, at 203.*

<sup>116</sup> *Iden, supra note 108, at 32; Smith, supra note 45.*

<sup>117</sup> Jean M. Twenge & Stacy M. Campbell, *Who are the Millennials? Empirical Evidence for Generational Differences in Work Values, Attitudes, and Personality* 126 (Ronald J. Burke et. al. eds., 2012).

<sup>118</sup> *Id.*

<sup>119</sup> *Generation Me and the Changing World of Work, supra note 17, at 12.*

<sup>120</sup> *Coulter & Faulkner, supra note 20, at 49.*

<sup>121</sup> *Generational Differences in Work Values, supra note 47, at 1118.*

(but to a greater degree), Millennials believe that as long as they get quality work done that it should not matter how, where, or when they worked.<sup>122</sup> Therefore, they value a flexible schedule and work environment.<sup>123</sup>

Additionally, Millennials believe in a democratic style of leadership in the workplace that allows all voices to be heard.<sup>124</sup> Millennials also require that their managers and other authoritative figures demonstrate competence in order to earn their respect.<sup>125</sup> In return for their respect, Millennials want managers to hand out recognition and praise and to listen and encourage their ideas genuinely.<sup>126</sup> Millennials are not afraid to be assertive with authoritative figures and to suggest change in the workplace.<sup>127</sup>

#### **D. Gen Z**

Gen Z demonstrates a stronger work ethic than Millennials – they are willing to go the extra mile; however, they are significantly less confident in the work they produce.<sup>128</sup> Gen Z has the education, training, and intelligence to succeed in the workforce, but their severe feelings of insecurity hinder them. Moreover, because Gen Z believes in an external locus of control, many believe that successful careers are unattainable.<sup>129</sup> Therefore, much of Gen Z does not feel motivated to work hard when they believe that their place in life cannot improve.<sup>130</sup> However, Gen Z is realistic and they know the significance of money in the world and that working is what makes them money. In short, even if they do not believe that they will succeed, they continue to

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<sup>122</sup> *Generation Me and the Changing World of Work*, *supra* note 17, at 3.

<sup>123</sup> Wallace, *supra* note 104, at 138.

<sup>124</sup> Nnamboozee & Parumasur, *supra* note 100, at 225.

<sup>125</sup> Smith, *supra* note 45.

<sup>126</sup> Tay Angeline, *Managing Generational Diversity at the Workplace: Expectations and Perceptions of Different Generations of Employees*, 5 *African J. of Bus. Mgmt.* 249, 251 (2011), <https://academicjournals.org/journal/AJBM/article-full-text-pdf/2CD4D3B15906>.

<sup>127</sup> Coulter & Faulkner, *supra* note 20, at 49.

<sup>128</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 184.

<sup>129</sup> *Id.* at 191.

<sup>130</sup> *Id.* at 192.

work hard.

Because Gen Z has innate anxiety toward risks, Gen Z seeks jobs that can provide stability.<sup>131</sup> However, Gen Z does not view a constant change of jobs as instability. Gen Z regards constant change as necessary and expected and will move from job to job if they find a position that can provide better financial stability.<sup>132</sup> For this reason, Gen Z leans more toward any job with a steady paycheck rather than starting their own business.<sup>133</sup>

Similar to Millennials and Gen X, Gen Z's preferred leadership style is more consensus rather than command, more collaborative, and more flexible than a structured hierarchy.<sup>134</sup> Gen Z looks to have multiple needs met at the workplace, such as social connection, personal development, and learning experiences.<sup>135</sup> Lastly, as a result of their insulated adolescence, Gen Z requires emotional and physical safety in the workplace and want to work for employers that understand their mental health challenges.<sup>136</sup>

### **E. All Generations**

Just as it is essential to recognize the differences between the generations, it is equally essential to recognize the similarities between the generations. First, workers from all generations want to contribute to their workplace.<sup>137</sup> Whether it be spearheading reform or just making a suggestion at a weekly meeting, workers want their voices heard and acknowledged. They want to make a personal impact and be more than just a cog in the wheel.<sup>138</sup> Studies show that the satisfaction employees have in their job is directly correlated to their ability to see how

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<sup>131</sup> *Id.* at 152.

<sup>132</sup> Smith, *supra* note 45.

<sup>133</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 187.

<sup>134</sup> McCrindle, *supra* note 24, at 24.

<sup>135</sup> *Id.* at 16.

<sup>136</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 153.

<sup>137</sup> *Id.* at 311.

<sup>138</sup> *Id.*

what they do fits into the big picture.<sup>139</sup> For some workers, feeling valued and finding meaning as an employee goes far beyond compensation.<sup>140</sup>

Furthermore, workers want to receive praise and recognition for such contributions. While generations may vary with how much praise they want and in what way they want to receive it, all workers want acknowledgment for their good work.<sup>141</sup> Recent studies show that 79 percent of people who quit their jobs cite a “lack of appreciation” as their reason for leaving.<sup>142</sup> Workers want recognition for their efforts, and if they are not receiving that vital recognition, then they will stop performing and find someone who can give them the appreciation they deserve.<sup>143</sup>

Third, all workers, irrespective of generation, want and need ample opportunities for advancement and constant growth.<sup>144</sup> This includes opportunities for professional and personal development such as more education, training, and leadership positions.<sup>145</sup> People are competitive and dynamic by nature and understand that to stay afloat in the workforce, they must constantly improve themselves. All people are also ambitious to some degree – they want to achieve more and greater accomplishments in numerous aspects of their lives.<sup>146</sup> To achieve their ambitious career aspirations, all generations seek employment that provides them opportunities to grow and to advance.<sup>147</sup>

These three similarities all stem from humanity’s rudimentary desire to be treated as

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<sup>139</sup> Clay Scroggins, *How to Lead When You’re Not in Charge* 116 (2017).

<sup>140</sup> *Id.*

<sup>141</sup> Keith Ferrazzi, *Leading Without Authority* 157 (2020).

<sup>142</sup> *Id.* at 167.

<sup>143</sup> *Id.*

<sup>144</sup> Nnamboozee & Parumasur, *supra* note 100, at 225.

<sup>145</sup> *Id.* at 226.

<sup>146</sup> Scroggins, *supra* note 139, at 64.

<sup>147</sup> Phipps, *supra* note 38.

unique individuals.<sup>148</sup> As previously explained, all generations are considered individualists to some degree and crave attention and customization. Workers want their individual values and needs fulfilled and want their workplace to make them a priority.<sup>149</sup> Workers want employers that will not perceive them just by an employee ID number, but rather will take the time to form relationships and get to know them as individuals.

#### **IV. Management Tips for a Multigenerational Workforce**

In order to disrupt the Great Resignation, leaders must take into account the generational differences, similarities, and current trends to manage and retain a multigenerational workforce. Some methods leaders can implement include sharing the decision-making power, treating others how they wish to be treated, and developing relationships. Leaders can also devise more advancement opportunities, have difficult but necessary conversations, increase options, and lead effective meetings. With these suggestions, leaders might inspire workers of all generations to lay down some roots and stay.

##### **A. Disperse the decision-making authority.**

Workers are more likely to buy in when they have had an opportunity to weigh in.<sup>150</sup> Leaders should eliminate the mystery of closed-door decision making and allow workers of every generation to weigh in on decisions. As previously mentioned, every generation wants to have a meaningful and direct impact in their workplace. Therefore, do not concentrate all the decision-making authority with senior employees; instead, give junior employees greater responsibilities and opportunities to speak. For example, let junior employees conduct exit

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<sup>148</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 311.

<sup>149</sup> Kendra Cherry, *Individualistic Cultures and Behaviors*, VeryWell Mind (Dec. 11, 2020), <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-are-individualistic-cultures-2795273>.

<sup>150</sup> Scroggins, *supra* note 139, at 123.

interviews, give presentations, and organize staff events.<sup>151</sup>

Another method is to implement collaborative problem-solving (CPS) – a discussion-based method that allows every voice to be heard in the decision-making process.<sup>152</sup> The process starts with presenting one big question or topic for discussion to a large group. Then the big group is broken into smaller groups who then discuss the question or topic with each person having the chance to speak. When time is up, all groups reconvene as a large group, with one representative from each smaller group sharing what the smaller group discussed. This method is effective because the smaller groups foster a sense of psychological safety that encourages risk-taking, candor, and creativity, while the presentation to the larger group breeds feelings of inclusivity and contribution.<sup>153</sup> As a result, voices from all generations are heard and acknowledged.

**B. Follow the “Platinum Rule” - treat others the way *they* wish to be treated.**

The “Golden Rule” of treating others how *you* wish to be treated is not effective or suitable in the modern multi-generational workforce. What motivates and works for an individual is not necessarily the same for others. In Keith Ferrazzi’s *Leading Without Authority*, he recommends following the “Platinum Rule” instead – treat others how *they* wish to be treated.<sup>154</sup> It is important to note that each individual within these generations has their own preferences that may differ from their generational norms. Therefore, adjusting the approach to fit the person and not just the generation is necessary in a multigenerational workforce.

For example, not every employee wants direction and feedback in the same manner. Leaders should modify feedback according to the person they are giving it to rather than

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<sup>151</sup> McCrindle, *supra* note 24, at 21.

<sup>152</sup> Ferrazzi, *supra* note 141, at 106.

<sup>153</sup> *Id.* at 118.

<sup>154</sup> *Id.* at 79.

delivering it how they would want feedback delivered. Generally, the Boomer generation has a preference for coaching-style feedback once a year, while Gen X and Millennials want feedback immediately and constantly.<sup>155</sup> Gen Z also appreciates frequent feedback; however, they oftentimes need more reassurance than feedback.<sup>156</sup> Again, while these are each generation's general preferences, the approach must be tailored even more to apply to the individual.

Finally, give praise frequently. Millennials and Gen Zs are more likely to want and expect praise in the workplace.<sup>157</sup> While older generations like to call Millennials and Gen Zs “the participation trophy kids,” there are benefits to praising employees for jobs well done.<sup>158</sup> As Ferrazzi notes, it's not that Boomers and Gen Xs do not want praise, it's just that they have come not to expect it.<sup>159</sup> But why withhold praise just because someone does not expect it? Don't we all want to be told that we did a job well?

However, this does not mean that praise should not be given for every little thing and it definitely should not be given insincerely.<sup>160</sup> Instead, look for opportunities to praise someone for doing something well and then give a sincere and appropriate comment. Did a junior member of the team give a great presentation about a project? Did someone plan and execute an event for the organization that went really well? A well-timed “thank you and good job” makes people feel valued, builds relationships, and contributes to the mission of the organization.

### **C. Proactively and authentically develop relationships.**

Even in an age of decreasing office time and increasing remote work, relationships are necessary for any job. When workers do not have relationships in their workplace or feel

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<sup>155</sup> Nnamboozee & Parumasur, *supra* note 100, at 226.

<sup>156</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 310.

<sup>157</sup> *Generation Me and the Changing World of Work*, *supra* note 17, at 5.

<sup>158</sup> Ferrazzi, *supra* note 141, at 161.

<sup>159</sup> *Generational Differences Chart*, *supra* note 4.

<sup>160</sup> Ferrazzi, *supra* note 141, at 172.

connected, they do not lean in to collaborate and are not motivated to contribute.<sup>161</sup> Thus, leaders must proactively develop authentic relationships with their employees and between employees. One way to create relationships between multigenerational employees is through reverse mentoring. Reverse mentoring is a method that pairs different generations of junior employees with senior employees who then learn from one another while simultaneously sharing their own knowledge and experience.<sup>162</sup> Not only does this method forge a relationship between those employees, but it also builds interest and motivation in the work environment, enhances networks, promotes inclusion, and allows all employees to provide input.<sup>163</sup>

Furthermore, a leader must serve and share to create substantial and authentic relationships with their workers. An authoritative title does not make one superior to another – a leader must still serve all people with generosity.<sup>164</sup> Serving with generosity requires leaders to give their time, energy, resources, and knowledge without expecting anything in return.<sup>165</sup> A leader must also share in order to connect and commit to others – this can include sharing interests, needs, or struggles. When leaders share their goals and challenges, workers are more likely to be inspired and share what matters to them.<sup>166</sup> This serving and sharing relationship establishes a valuable safe space. A safe space is so invaluable because people who feel psychologically safe tend to be more innovative, learn more from their mistakes, and are motivated to improve.<sup>167</sup> They are also more likely to offer ideas, ask for help, and provide feedback.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> *Id.* at 44.

<sup>162</sup> Nnamboozee & Parumasur, *supra* note 100, at 226.

<sup>163</sup> *Id.* at 234.

<sup>164</sup> Ferrazzi, *supra* note 141, at 70.

<sup>165</sup> *Id.* at 72.

<sup>166</sup> *Id.* at 74.

<sup>167</sup> *Id.* at 111.

<sup>168</sup> *Id.*

#### **D. Increase and accelerate career advancement opportunities.**

All employees, irrespective of generation, need constant growth and advancement.<sup>169</sup> Each generation may vary in their motivation for seeking career advancement opportunities, such as money, stability, or egotistical gratification, yet all workers want to feel that they are moving in an upward trajectory. Therefore, organizations should make education and training opportunities available to all employees and focus on various aspects of developing the individual as a whole. For example, organizations should offer leadership and management development, coaching from highly skilled personnel, and wellness courses.<sup>170</sup> Also, organizations should speed up the timeline of promotions and make them more numerous.<sup>171</sup> In an age of speed and instant gratification, workers are unwilling to wait around long to advance in their careers. Workers, especially Gen Z and Millennials, are prepared to job-hop until they find the advancement opportunities their previous jobs did not provide.<sup>172</sup> To prevent workers from job-hopping, organizations should provide more promotions and more responsibilities, even if they seem slight or inconsequential. For example, organizations can implement small promotions every six months rather than waiting two to five years. If workers know that they have immediate and likely potential to grow and move up at their workplace, they will be more likely to stick around.

#### **E. Provide feedback and have difficult conversations.**

Difficult conversations are necessary and inevitable at work. Instead of trying to avoid them, leaders should embrace them as a learning opportunity for themselves as leaders and for their employees. Leaders should use five fundamental techniques when having difficult

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<sup>169</sup> Nnamboozee & Parumasur, *supra* note 100, at 226.

<sup>170</sup> *Id.* at 234.

<sup>171</sup> *iGen*, *supra* note 27, at 311.

<sup>172</sup> McCrindle, *supra* note 24, at 24.

conversations with workers from any generation.

First, leaders need to ask for permission and set a time and place. Leaders must not assume that they have permission to offer feedback just because of their authoritative title or position.<sup>173</sup> Leaders should also explain why they are offering feedback and schedule a time to deliver it.<sup>174</sup> Recipients of feedback are more likely to accept and welcome feedback if they have some foresight and can mentally prepare for it. How one delivers feedback varies per individual recipient – some may prefer in-person, and some may want it over email. Whatever the preference, adjust the approach for the person.

Second, feedback should come from a place of caring, and the leader should assure the listener they are for the recipient.<sup>175</sup> It is also important to keep in mind that this feedback is for the recipient, not the person delivering it – this is not the time for the leader to rant about all the individual's shortcomings and release all their frustrations. The leader must remove their ego from the conversation and preclude their personal wants from overtaking the focus.<sup>176</sup> The feedback must focus on what the leader knows the individual worker wants for themselves, not what the leader wants for them.

Third, leaders should have difficult conversations when emotions are low. If a leader cannot talk about the issue without getting emotional, then they are not ready to talk about it.<sup>177</sup> High emotions may transport the conversation from a place of caring to a place of frustration or disappointment, resulting in more harm than good.

Fourth, leaders need to focus on the future and provide solutions to any problems they

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<sup>173</sup> Ferrazzi, *supra* note 141, at 133.

<sup>174</sup> *Id.*

<sup>175</sup> *Id.* at 144.

<sup>176</sup> *Id.* at 146.

<sup>177</sup> Scroggins, *supra* note 139, at 145.

raise. It is easy for feedback to make the individual feel like they are receiving a grade for their performance, so leaders should “stop giving others a grade, and start lending a hand.”<sup>178</sup> Merely issue-spotting mistakes made in the past does not benefit the person receiving the feedback nor improve their performance. Instead, leaders should provide concrete suggestions and ideas on what the person can do moving forward.

Lastly, leaders should welcome the worker’s feedback in return.<sup>179</sup> Leaders need to be open to hearing their areas of improvement so that they may continue to learn and evolve. Additionally, workers will be less inclined to accept and act on the feedback if they witness their leaders not doing the same. By allowing feedback to be a two-way street, leaders strengthen their relationships with their workers and create a safe space for candor and change.

#### **F. Increase options.**

Because the workforce consists of four diverse generations, leaders may find it daunting to find one size fits all solutions while simultaneously attempting to cater to each generation’s specific wants and needs. Alternatively, leaders should provide multiple options and allow workers to make their own choices. Leaders might consider providing various options for work schedules, methods of communication, and extrinsic rewards. Some options for work schedules may include the typical nine-to-five day, flextime, telecommuting, options to work from home, part-time employment, or job-sharing hours.<sup>180</sup> The generations also differ on preferred communication methods, so leaders may find it effective to implement several methods. Research shows that Boomers prefer face-to-face conversations while Millennials and Gen X prefer email and digital messaging.<sup>181</sup> Despite Gen Z’s tech-savviness and preference for digital

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<sup>178</sup> *Id.* at 144.

<sup>179</sup> Ferrazzi, *supra* note 141, at 136.

<sup>180</sup> Nnamboozie & Parumasur, *supra* note 100, at 225.

<sup>181</sup> *The Evolution of Communication Across Generations*, Notre Dame of Maryland Univ. (Feb. 6, 2019),

communication in their personal lives, they too prefer face-to-face communication like their Boomer counterparts.<sup>182</sup> Extrinsic rewards motivate all generations to some degree, but what those extrinsic rewards may look like varies per generation. For example, Boomers may desire good health and retirement savings plans; Gen X may need funded holidays, extended paid leave, and social security; Millennials may favor cell phones, laundry services, and vacation time; and Gen Z may want advanced technology, diversity, and constant training opportunities.<sup>183</sup> This is not to suggest that organizations must offer everything all the time. Rather, incorporating numerous options, offering different perks at different times, or letting employees select a package can allow multigenerational workers to make choices for themselves and have a say in their own jobs. When workers have more say in their own jobs, they are less likely to leave to find new ones.<sup>184</sup>

#### **G. Run effective meetings.**

Meetings are central to an organization's success and need to run effectively, regardless if they take place in-person or on video conference. First, two principles should be the pillars of every meeting – civility and respect. Leaders should not assume that everyone has the same understanding of civility and respect, so leaders should take the time and to discuss how their organization defines these principles.<sup>185</sup> Additionally, leaders can go a step further and give concrete examples or even create a clear and concise code of civility and respect.<sup>186</sup> Everyone must agree to follow these principles at the start of each meeting, then, when a heated discussion occurs, the leader can gently remind everyone that they agreed to adhere to these two principles.

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<https://online.ndm.edu/news/communication/evolution-of-communication/>.

<sup>182</sup> *Id.*

<sup>183</sup> Nnamboozee & Parumasur, *supra* note 100, at 225.

<sup>184</sup> Phipps, *supra* note 38.

<sup>185</sup> Christine Porath, *Make Civility the Norm on Your Team*, Harv. Bus. Rev., (Jan. 2, 2018), <https://hbr.org/2018/01/make-civility-the-norm-on-your-team>.

<sup>186</sup> *Id.*

With these two principles at the forefront of every meeting, emotion is cast aside and the focus is on the issues, not personalities.

Furthermore, leaders should empower the least senior members of the group to open up a discussion. By letting the members who are most senior or most experienced speak first, it can discourage open dialogue and influence the rest of the group to fall into a dark abyss known as groupthink mentality.<sup>187</sup> Conversely, by creating an environment where younger members know that they will be treated with civility and respect, they are encouraged to confidently speak their mind, thus, giving rise to new solutions and creative thinking.<sup>188</sup>

Additionally, everyone needs the opportunity to speak. As explained above, all workers want to contribute to their workplace – speaking in meetings is one way to encourage contribution. Leaders should take note from *Robert's Rules of Order*: no person can speak a second time until everyone else has had the opportunity to speak once about an issue.<sup>189</sup> No matter the title or rank, no single voice should dominate the conversation.

Lastly, leaders should wrap up the meeting with a future action plan.<sup>190</sup> Everyone needs to be on the same page and understand who is doing what and by when. If necessary, follow up with specific individuals with more detailed guidance. Generations fluctuate in their preference for detailed guidance – Millennials and Gen Z typically appreciate detailed instruction and directions, whereas Gen X and Boomers prefer to work independently and only ask for directions when needed.<sup>191</sup> With everyone on the same page, the organization can work more fluidly as a

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<sup>187</sup> Adam Bryant, *How to Run a More Effective Meeting*, N.Y. Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/business/how-to-run-an-effective-meeting>, (last visited May 31, 2022).

<sup>188</sup> Cameron Herold, *Why Leaders Should Speak Last in Meetings*, The Globe & Mail (Sept. 19, 2016), <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/careers/leadership-lab/why-leaders-should-speak-last-in-meetings/article31934105/>.

<sup>189</sup> Henry Martyn Roberts, *Robert's Rules of Order* § 4.2 (1998).

<sup>190</sup> Bryant, *supra* note 187.

<sup>191</sup> Herold, *supra* note 188; Iden, *supra* note 108, at 33.

unified body to achieve its goals.

## **V. Conclusion**

While leaders need to learn and embrace generational differences, attitudes, and trends, leaders must not forget the individual. Every generation consists of workers who wish to be recognized and managed as individuals who seek personal achievement and progression. The Great Resignation is not a result of generations as a whole fleeing jobs, rather it is a result of individuals within those generations seeking new, fulfilling (and maybe more lucrative) jobs elsewhere. To succeed in the modern workplace, leaders must prioritize the value of the individual first and foremost.