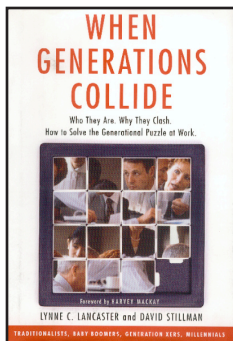


# Book Reviews for Managers

## When Generations Collide

*Who they are. Why they clash. How to Solve the Generational Puzzle at Work.*

by Lynne C. Lancaster & David Stillman



HarperBusiness, 2002,  
ISBN #0-06-662106-2

*These four cohorts  
"collide" at the core  
elements of managing.*

### REVIEWED BY IAN COOK

This is the first time in history that we have four distinct generations operating together in the workplace. Though they tend not to live together or play together or hang out together, they are forced to convene in offices and plants and be productive together. How well do these differing age groups understand one another? "Not well enough" suggest the authors of this book, partners in a consulting firm that specializes in bridging the gap between generations.

Let's first identify these generations, with birth years as a rough guideline.

- **Traditionalists** (sometimes called "Veterans") [born 1900–45]

Forged by war and depression, they honor hard work, respect for leaders and loyalty to institutions. In return, they expected to receive a job for life. Weaned on deprivation and duty, they have preferred to save their money and defer gratification and rewards, essentially, until retirement.

- **Baby Boomers** [1946–64]

Of course, it was called a "boom" because there were so many of them born. Boomers have had to compete with their generational colleagues for limited openings all the way up the hierarchy. They have learned political skills and how to read their bosses. And yet, they were called the "me" generation because their parents spoiled them and, from the beginning of the television age, advertisers have catered to them. Optimists at heart, they have introjected a message from their parents and from various cultural icons of the 60s: make the world a better place.

- **Generation X'ers** (or Nexters) [1965–80]

These are the famous latchkey kids, fend- ing for themselves after school, and the first to experience—in great numbers—

divorcing parents and the one-parent family. They have learned to be resource- ful and independent. Most have created a surrogate "family" through a network of close, reliable friends. Having seen over the years mergers and downsizing devas- tate people they care about, they tend not to trust companies or the individuals who manage them.

- **Millennials** (or Generation Y) [1981–99]

The front end of this cohort has just recently started entering the full-time workforce. Techno-savvy—they have al- ways known computers—and realistic, they arrive at the workplace fully ex- pecting to have input in all decisions affecting their work. Millennials grew up immersed in diversity at school, on TV and via the World Wide Web. So, they accept working with many cultures, races and lifestyles. In fact, they expect it!

Ironically, the authors themselves had to do some inter-generation accommodat- ing when they researched and wrote their book. Lynne Lancaster is a Baby Boomer and David Stillman an X'er and they sprinkle the chapters with humorous vignettes of their own struggle in col- laboration.

One example: Stillman had sent a memo to a list of recipients in a client company that was full of Traditionalists and Baby Boomers. He received back a curt voice mail from a Vice President that he had neglected to list the names in alphabeti- cal order. Blindsided by the fuss, David called his Boomer partner Lynne for guidance. She immediately echoed the VP's astonishment that he hadn't alpha- betized and then explained to her Gen X colleague how status conscious these earlier generations are.

How in heaven's name do you manage

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this diverse range of employees? *When Generations Collide* offers some valuable advice in terms of recruiting, motivating and retaining people from all four groupings. Below are just a few tips and insights the book provides about managing and motivating the generations.

*Traditionalists* are motivated by the opportunity to do a job well. As they are now approaching the end of their career, consider benefits such as phased in retirement programs. In the meantime, show respect for their experience and incorporate their advice, even if their tone to you, their manager, sounds a touch parental!

*Baby Boomers* value the trappings that exemplify a stellar career: title, office, and influence. They see themselves as “stars of the show.” They are competitive, cautious and political—they have had to be, given a lifetime of competing for the boss’s attention. At the same time, they share a deeper motivator: the opportunity to accomplish things that will benefit society at-large.

*Generation X’ers*, above all, seek freedom and flexible schedules. Compared to their older colleagues, they are less willing to sacrifice personal time for the company. Work to them is more a transactional arrangement than a cause or calling. But they do place learning and professional development high on their list of motivators. Make sure you are giving them assignments that will help them grow. After all, Xer’s very much want to build a track record and skill set that will keep them marketable—and independent. And be prepared for in-the-moment feedback, both requested from you and delivered to you! Candidness, even bluntness, is the norm and your rank in the organization doesn’t seem to temper this.

*Millenials*, the original multi-taskers, lead very busy lives. There is a lot, by choice, going on in their life outside of work. Right now their first priority is rewards that will pay for these many activities. Expect candidness from them, coupled with a greater level of respect than you typically receive from X’ers. Millenials assume they will be consulted and included on the job because they generally were when growing up in their family units.

The book includes extensive advice about the subtleties of mounting a recruiting campaign for each generational group. And it also spends a lot of time on Generation X, both how to manage them and how they can manage Boomers and Traditionalist employees. By the way, the book reports that all four generations (that’s right, including the Xer’s) single out Gen X’ers as the most challenging generation to manage.

Today’s managers need to understand and then flex to generational differences at work. Why? Because these four cohorts “collide” at the core elements of managing: recruiting and retaining the best people, setting performance standards and expectations, motivating and rewarding. You can no longer assume that all of your employees want what you want.

My only complaint about this book is it takes 335 pages to say what could have been said in 200. Their material is solid, based on surveys, focus groups and consultations they have conducted with a wide range of organizations. I particularly enjoyed their vignettes scattered throughout the book offering vivid and humorous examples of generational representatives in the act of misunderstanding one another.

If you want to get a handle on this issue, *When Generations Collide* is a good place to start. To go deeper, take a look as well at an earlier book, *Generations at Work*, by Ron Zemke, Claire Raines and Bob Filipczak (Amacom, 2000). I strongly suggest you and your supervisory staff get up to speed in this area. The generations will retain their particular mindsets for the rest of their working lives. The differences—and the challenge and benefits of managing these differences—will not go away over time.

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