

Some Call Them "Echo Boomers"

By Joanne G. Sujansky, Ph.D., CSP

For some time now we've been writing about a growing trend that's shaking up the workplace. The children of the "Baby Boomer" generation are entering the workforce in record numbers. Currently, in the U.S. alone, about 40 million Millennials are in the workplace and by 2014, their numbers will swell to about 58 million.

They are called by many different names. Most commonly they are referred to as "Millennials" or "Generation Y." They have also been called "Trophy Kids" -- in tribute to the numerous awards they received in childhood - and "Echo Boomers."

Ironically, the name "Echo Boomer" may be the most appropriate term. It was originally coined simply because their generation "echoed" the "boom" generation in numbers. But millennials have much more in common with their parents than population size. In many ways Millennials reflect some of the best qualities of their Baby Boomer parents.

Shaped by Technology

Both the Baby Boomer and Millennial generations have been shaped by technology. Just as Boomers were entering the workforce in the late 1960s and early 1970s the use of computers was becoming widespread throughout organizations. By the time Millennials arrived in the workplace a few years ago, computer-driven technologies had completely redefined the way employees work. But technology has shaped both generations in so many ways:

- The "TV" Generations - Boomers were the first generation to grow up with TV and Millennials are the first generation to grow up with a plethora of cable channels. But both Boomers and Millennials can relate to instant news coverage, witnessing history in the making and continuous free entertainment.
- Productivity "Tools" - In the 40 years since boomers took their places at work, personal productivity has skyrocketed thanks to technological tools. Boomers are versed in using computers, PDAs, voicemail and cell phones to accomplish their goals while their offspring are increasingly conversant with text messaging and social networking to collaborate on goals.
- The Music Goes Round - Personal music players, whether "Walkmans" or iPods are popular with both Millennials and Boomers. And while there are the inevitable differences in musical taste between parents and children, the Millennials may be the first that actually likes their parents' music. And after all, Boomers are history's first "rock and roll" parents.

The Value of Values

Boomers have been accused of being notorious workaholics while their offspring have often been accused of lacking a work ethic. However, those differences may be more matters of style than contrasts in values. When it comes to the workplace, Boomers and Millennials share many values:

- The Keys to Success - Boomers were among the best-educated generations in history and when they entered the workforce they were confident of success. Millennials have been equally well educated and they have also been bolstered by plenty of feedback and positive reinforcement. And when it comes to their prospects for success, Millennials take that for granted.

- **Join the Team** - Boomers understand that teamwork is the lubricant that makes success possible. In turn, collaboration has been stressed so strongly to millennials that the chance to join a workplace team is nearly a condition of employment for them. In either case, Boomers and Millennials should have no difficulty working together collaboratively.
- **The Power of Diversity** - The Boomer generation had a ringside seat to the civil rights movement and the rise of feminism. Their children have been raised to think of diversity as nothing less than a natural expectation. But both generations seem to understand that there is strength in multiple viewpoints and great power in diversity.

Unlocking the Puzzle

With thousands of Millennials entering the boomer-dominated workplace everyday there are bound to be conflicts. While it is often easy to react to the differences between generations, it may be more important to focus on the similarities. That's one key to managing different generations in the workplace. For more ideas you may want to look at my article "Leading a Multi-Generational Workforce."

For a more comprehensive look at the promise and potential of the Millennial generation you may be interested in the forthcoming book, *Keeping the Millennials: Why Companies Are Losing Billions in Turnover to This Generation and What to do About it*, by Joanne G. Sujansky, Ph.D., CSP and Jan Ferri-Reed, Ph.D. This new book probes in depth the similarities and differences between different generations, explores multi-generational impact on the workplace, and offers strategies for grooming your millennial employees to succeed.

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