



News from Merced College

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MERCED COLLEGE OFFERS “DIVERSITY SERIES”

Quick! Which generation follows the philosophy “Live to Work?” Which generation follows the philosophy of “Work to Live?” If you guessed the first as the “Baby Boomer” generation and the second as the “Millennial” generation then you’re absolutely correct. Which generation values loyalty to the company and which generation values loyalty to individual? If you guessed the “Mature” generation and the “Xer” generation, you are again correct.

Now, put these four generations side by side in the workplace along with their differing philosophies, and employers will face challenges that have never before existed. These challenges are affecting the work environment from time management to overall productivity, and employers are scrambling for ways to deal with this problem.

For the past year, Merced College professor Jonae Pistoressi has heard the same complaint from employers over and over again; “what’s going on? How in the world can we make these people work together?” She has extensively researched this American phenomenon and is now addressing the issue for many employers and their staff by offering a quick-paced, information-packed, two-day workshop called “Generational Diversity: Working With Cross-Generational Teams.” This class is the first in a new series of professional development training classes called The Diversity Series at Merced College. The Cross-Generational class is a pilot program and will be followed by classes on personality diversity and cultural diversity.

Pistoressi bases her Generational Diversity class on the book “Motivating the ‘What’s In It For Me?’ Workforce,” by Cam Marston. For the first time in

American history, the current workforce is experiencing four generations of people working together. These generations can be broken up in four groups: “Matures,” those born prior to 1945; “Boomers,” those born between 1946 and 1964; “Generation X (GenXers or Xers),” those born between 1965 and 1980; and the “Millennials,” those born after 1980. While there may be some overlap of years, each generation brings to the workplace its own set of values, strengths and weaknesses, and understanding one another is the key to a successful work environment.

For example, the Matures consider themselves the “we first” generation compared to the “me first” generation of the Baby Boomers. They tend put others before themselves. The Great Depression and World War II left a strong impression on them, thus the Matures value loyalty, honor, duty and sacrifice, don’t expect instant gratification, and have a healthy respect for hierarchy. For the most part, they identify with groups or organizations such as the military and national institutions. They are the smallest group in the workforce, but are the most affluent. In general, they are loyal to their employer and expect the same in return.

Although the Boomers are a product of the post-war population boom, their formative years were shaped by the Civil Rights Movement, the Kennedy and King assassinations, the Vietnam War and Woodstock, and therefore do not identify as heavily with national institutions and the military as their parents do. As part of the “me first” generation, Boomers greatly value individualism and developing a more “whole” person. Their dedication to working long, hard hours at the workplace earned them the dubious honor of the term “Workaholic.” They “live to work” and, for the most part, identify themselves with what they do for a living. Whereas the Matures are the most affluent, the Boomers are the most influential. Because they make up approximately 45% of the workforce, they are the movers and shakers in our government and corporations. Their motto is “hard work plus education equals success” and they want products and services that prove such success to their peers.

In comparison, the Xers, those born between 1965 and 1980, are almost the exact opposite of the Boomers. They don't want to be defined by their job and tend to reject the Boomer work ethic attitude. However, that doesn't mean that they are unmotivated-- they are extremely self-sufficient. Having been raised during such global events as Watergate, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Challenger explosion and Gulf War, they have seen governments topple, corporations downsized and financial institutions fail, leaving this generation very skeptical. They know that they can't rely on the company to take care of them so they must look out for themselves. Instead of being loyal to institutions, they can be the most loyal of employees to the individual.

This brings us to the "Millennials," those born after 1980, that now make up approximately 10% of the workforce. Millennials are the next population boom to enter the workforce and will edge out the Xers by their sheer numbers. They are completely different from any other generation. For the most part, they grew up with doting parents who want to be "friends" with their children. Their parents hover over them in an effort to protect them from the dangers of a world filled with cruelty, violence and terrorism, which as a result created the term "helicopter parents." The Millennials are well cared for, idealistic, group oriented, confident, and sheltered. They've never known a world without the internet and technology just comes naturally to them. They are text-savvy and can get enormous amounts of information at a click of a button. Because of this, they tend to be a generation that expects instant gratification, unlike their grandparents, the Matures. In the workplace, this means they want open, constant communication and positive reinforcement from their boss. They look for mentors who will help them achieve their goals. They reject the Boomers "live to work" ethic and embrace the "work to live" ethic, searching for jobs that provide great, personal fulfillment.

So what does this mean for the employer? First, it's important that the employer recognize the differences and utilize the strengths of all the generations involved and that each generation understands and respects the others' strengths and philosophies. Making time for open and honest dialogue between the staff will encourage them to explore each other's differences.

Understanding where the other person is coming from leads to a healthy respect for each other with an appreciation that each generation has an important contribution to make to the company. Once they are comfortable with each other and respect sets in, these four very different generations will become a more cohesive, creative, and productive team – a team that will thrive along with the company.

Professor Pistoressi will be conducting several workshops this year. Each workshop is only \$10/person and worth half a college unit. For more information, please call 384-6051.