



“FROM WEDDING RINGS TO NOSE RINGS”

PART 2 – BABY BOOMERS

Boomers, we have kept you waiting long enough. Let’s talk about you now. We’re told that is your favorite subject, you. You know, however, while you were waiting, as we mentioned in our last article, you have learned social skills and how to read people. Boomers we know you love to talk and either you LOVE something or HATE something. Boomers are the children of the 60’s. They witnessed the idealism in this country turn to cynicism as the decades of the 60’s and 70’s reeled from the assassinations, Watergate and the struggles of the civil rights and women’s movements. Idealism dies as this generation matures as they saw firsthand the loss of stature of the government and faith-based hierarchies. As a result of these tumultuous times, boomers do not like change and love to talk about the way things used to be.

As employees this generation increased the average workweek in the US from 40 to 60 hours. They are the workaholics. Boomers feel an incredible affiliation to the institution that hired them. Boomers enjoy work and have made it an integral part of their life; the majority has worked since their teens and do not envision retiring at a traditional age. Today’s gyms and weight loss centers are filled with Boomers trying to stave off aging and the illnesses associated with aging. After all this generation grew up saying “Don’t

trust anyone over 30” and has now reversed it to “Age don’t matter”. However, these workaholics are now middle-aged and with retirement quickly approaching they feel the need to balance work and family life.

A typical Boomer response to things is “Let’s have a committee and talk about it. Can you stay late Wednesday to do this?” You may also notice male Boomers utilize sports metaphors: “Let’s make this a team effort.” “I’ll give you the ball to run with on this one.” “This will be a slam dunk.” Their emphasis is on how you feel about something, versus whether or not it is correct or right. On the down side, conflict remains the area boomers are the weakest in and as a result passive-aggressive behaviors may abound in the workplace. As far as recognition for a job well done they like that done publicly.

They value money and material possessions. They pride themselves on filling their homes and the shed out back and even renting a storage unit in the eternal race to accumulate the most stuff. I remember a T-shirt that said “He who dies with the most toys wins”. The question with the boomers is not “Do you have a Visa or MasterCard?” the question is “How many?” A joke about Pre-Boomers is that the reason they won’t die is that they are



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afraid their Boomer kids will spend the inheritance in six weeks.

As many Boomers devoted time to their careers and had their children later in life, their family size is smaller, usually one or two children. Their divorce rates increased to 50% and the word family was redefined to mean either a one or two parent home. During this generation's adult years the majority of women entered the workforce. The word that best characterized this generation is Freedom. They are the last generation to know what it was like to go to school without security guards and metal detectors or to run into an airport 10 minutes before a flight and still "make it".

A third generation that has emerged is the Cuspers. This term came from the fact that this group is literally on the cusp between the Boomers and Gen X. In both personal and work behavior/values they share some attributes of each generation. Born between 1960 and 1968 they are known as socially liberal and fiscally conservative.

Demographers note that this group is significant because many of them opted to have a third child. This slight blip on the birth rate screen is viewed as a generation that has "hope for the future". When discussing generation differences you will not see Cuspers listed as a separate entity, due to the fact that they are seen as having either Boomer or Gen X behaviors.

We would like to offer some suggestions to our Baby Boomers in dealing with Gen Xers.

These are only suggestions. Get to the point of a topic. Gen Xers don't spend a lot of time developing a rapport or warming up to a topic. Avoid clichés. Xers don't like corporate games, lingo or buzz words. Be absolutely genuine. Xers hate phonies. Walk the talk. Learn to use technological communication efficiently. Xers prefer e-mail over phone tag. When making assignments, sketch out end results, but let Xers figure out how to achieve it. Boomers have a tendency to micro-manage. Xers often have unique approaches to an assignment. As Boomers you need to communicate benefits. Xers see themselves as a marketable commodity and their only security is their resume. You may need to run political interference for Xers. They are turned off by organizational politics which can lead them into a deep hole. "Paying your dues" is something that Xers don't buy and it doesn't matter to them whether you do or not. Finally, lighten up when communicating with Xers. Don't take things quite so seriously.

Don't feel picked on Boomers we are going to offer suggestions to your Gen X co-workers in our next article. Communication and being able to work together is always a two way street. This series of articles is given to everyone to make you a little more aware of our differences. To give you the knowledge of where we have come from that has shaped who we are today. Until you have walked a mile in someone's shoes you don't fully understand where they have come from or where they see their life going.



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(Most of the information in this article was taken from the article “From Wedding Rings to Nose Rings...Generational differences in the Workplace and in the Practice Setting”, by Marilyn Moats Kennedy supplied by Leading to Change and the book Career Intelligence by Barbara Moses.)