



“FROM WEDDING RINGS TO NOSE RINGS”

PART 3 – GEN X

This article will shine the spotlight on the group representing births that occurred between 1968 and 1978.

Most of us know them by the name Generation X or the Gen Xers. For several years articles written about this group (notably by Boomers) used terms such as slackers, mallrats, etc. to define a group of young adults who did not fit the workaholic view, as defined by Boomers, of what a generation should be. What the Boomers always seem to forget is that they are the parents of Gen X. They created them. Gen X was the first generation of latchkey children to come of age in the US. Bombarded with endless sexual messages through adult themed television and radio, they view sex much differently than the previous two generations. Being home by themselves for two to three hours every day produced an incredibly self-reliant group who do not see a team as an effective way to get things done. Gen X is the first group in the US to think globally. They grew up with CNN and new reports 24/7. Terrorism is not new to them. They grew up watching live shots of conflicts in other countries. In 1993 after the World Trade Center bombing the Gen X response was “They will be back.”

Fifty percent, of this generation, were children of divorce. They value change,

thrive on it and fear stagnation. Technology is viewed as their ally and a constant to their work. They have a generalized mistrust of all things corporate. Having grown up in the 1980’s and watching their parents and friends’ parents laid off during the steel mill closing, re-engineering efforts and company restructuring has not endeared them to the concept of loyalty. As employees they are hard working but feel no allegiance to the institution. They do, however, have an allegiance to the work. Boomers will often say that this group does not work hard. They do, but not in the same workaholic manner. If asked to work extra, most Boomers sigh and they say yes for the good of the institution (and the overtime). Gen X will work extra but expect an extra shift off in exchange for the over time. Time off and having a balanced life is critical to this group. Team efforts are foreign to Gen X due to the fact they are such self-starters. They need to be told that they cannot bring their cell phones into the work environment as they truly see technology as an extension of themselves.

Another interesting fact is that the term Gen X is itself a misnomer. There is no X, it was the Roman numeral for 10. The media didn’t understand this so the term Gen X evolved. When studying generations, you can tell who understands this by whether or not they look



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for a Generation Y. Recognition of this generation is definitely verbal or e-mail. They enjoy hearing they are doing well. They seek out mentors to assist them in learning the job and do well having a preceptor. Keep in mind that this group grew up with remote controls and drive through windows. As a result, they like things to go quickly and do not want to be bored. They do not do well in traditional orientation programs. Fun is listed in the top five things they expect from work.

In customer service, they value speed, first and foremost. They will not wait in a waiting room for hours, but they will spend part of the time in the waiting room on their cell finding someone else who can get them in sooner. Their questions are often based on what they read or heard, and alternative therapies are considered a given. This generation grew up with the three D's: disappointments, disasters and diminished expectations. Following the public exploitations of Monica Lewinsky and Anita Hill, their view of government and elected officials was permanently flawed. They have seen two shuttles disappear into the sky and have watched the scandals of the church with resignation. Viewed often as cynic, Gen X would correct that term by saying they are realist.

(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.)

As promised, the following are suggestions for our Gen Xer's. Show respect for the Baby Boomers. You don't have to agree or even like what they say. Do acknowledge to yourself that you do have less experience and that you can learn from them. Gen X take your time. Boomers tend to value the people side of business. Get to know Boomers as human beings who care what you think of them. Be friendly Gen X. Relationships are important to most Boomers and they prefer a warmer style. In conversation, choose face to face. Voice mail and e-mail may be too impersonal. Baby Boomers like to have your full attention. Don't do something else when you're talking to them. Also Xer's, "play the game". Politics happens! Everyone has a button – learn to push the right ones. This doesn't mean you're compromising yourself, just that your being effective. Learn the legacy. Boomers know the history of the organization and they value it. Many seemingly odd decisions are based on knowing the history. Finally, learn from colleagues. A person may be smart but they can always learn more.

The final group we will try and shed some light on is Millennials. This is the youngest generation representing those people born in 1979 and after.