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## CARE's *WorkLife* Solutions Monthly Wire Mixing and Managing Four Generations of Employees

October 2011

This month's Wire is taken from one of the many articles found on our website. The article, "**Mixing and Managing Four Generations of Employees: Part I-Differences**" relates to our October Webinar topic, "ABC's of Working with the YXZ's," which is attached. To access this article, log-on to [www.caresworklivesolutions.com](http://www.caresworklivesolutions.com), click on the World Icon and enter your unique company password. (If you do not have a company password, contact CARE's *WorkLife* Solutions to request a temporary password.) Next, click on the Site Search tab on the right, click on Advanced Search and enter "Generation," in the Search the Website by Title field. You will find this article as well as other relevant articles.

### Mixing and Managing Four Generations of Employees: Part I—Differences

Think of the last time you heard comments like these:

- "Get a life!"
- "He wants feedback; what the heck is that?!"
- "They have no work ethic."
- "It's 5:00 pm, I'm out of here!"
- "You're right, but I'm the boss!"
- "Just do your job!"
- "I remember when..."
- "The kid wants a promotion after 6 months on the job!"
- "No!"

How did you react? Were you offended? Were you okay with the comment? Did you understand, or not understand, why someone would say these words? The words and your reaction, as well as the reactions of others, reflect generational differences in the workplace.

If you don't think generation makes a difference, think of this example: When asked to recall how and where Kennedy died, the *veterans* and *baby boomers* (*boomers*) would say gunshots in Dallas, TX; *Generation X* (*Gen X* or *Xers*) might remember a plane crash near Martha's Vineyard, MA; and *Generation Y* (*Gen Y* or *Yers*) might say, Kennedy who?"

There is a serious new problem in the workplace, and it has nothing to do with downsizing, global competition, pointy-haired bosses, stress, or greed. Instead, it is the problem of distinct generations—the veterans, the baby boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y—working together and often colliding as their paths cross. Individuals with different values, different ideas, different ways of getting things done, and different ways of communicating in the workplace have always existed. So, why is this becoming a problem now?

## The Power of Four

This is the first time in American history that there have been four different generations working side by side in the workplace. If you are old enough, you might remember a time when older workers were the bosses and younger workers did what was asked of them with no questions asked. There were definite rules as to how the boss was treated and how younger workers treated older workers. This is no longer: Roles today are all over the place and the rules are being rewritten daily.

At work, generational differences can affect everything, including recruiting, building teams, dealing with change, motivating, managing, and maintaining and increasing productivity. Think of how generational differences, relative to how people communicate, might affect misunderstandings, high employee turnover, difficulty in attracting employees, and gaining employee commitment.

Research indicates that people communicate based on their generational backgrounds. Each generation has distinct attitudes, behaviors, expectations, habits, and motivational buttons. Learning how to communicate with the different generations can eliminate many major confrontations and misunderstandings in the workplace and the world of business.

Here is an analogy to help understand the issue: What often happens when a family gets together for a holiday or a vacation? Four generations—a boomer, his or her children (Xers), grandchildren (Yers), the boomer's brothers and sisters (also boomers), and the boomer's parents (veterans)—all trying to get along together. How long does it take before someone mentions "the good old days" and another says "I remember when..."? Is that when things become testy? How many times is so much friction created that family members leave the gathering saying "Never again"? Do you usually attribute this to "your family" or do you find yourself saying, "That's just what we're like whenever we get together"? Could this be due to generational differences and not just be "the way the family is"?

Whether at a family gathering or in the workplace, how do you manage intergenerational groups with conflicting work ethics, dissimilar values, and idiosyncratic styles? How do you get them to stop snarling at each other? How do you motivate them to get along or work together?

Every generation has created its own commotion as it has entered into the adult working world. Every generation says the same things about other generations—"They don't get it" or "They have it so much easier than we did."

### Generation Timeline

Born between 1922-1945	Born between 1946-1964	Born between 1965-1980	Born between 1981-2000
Veterans, the silent generation, traditionalists	Baby boomers	Generation X, Gen X, Xers	Generation Y, Gen Y, Yers, Millennials, or the millennium generation, Echo boomers

Hammill, G. (2005, Winter/Spring). Mixing and managing four generations of employees. *FDU (Fairleigh Dickinson University) Magazine Online*. Retrieved November 8, 2010, from <http://www.fdu.edu>

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