The Mindset of Baby Boomers & How to Effectively Engage Them

- by Sami L. Barry

For the first time in history, there are four generations making up the US workforce. Recruiting, motivating and managing these individuals with diverse perspectives, work ethics and career ideals can be a challenge for many organizations. Therefore, understanding each generation's attitudes, behaviors, strengths and motivational buttons can assist you to effectively integrate these attitudes in your workforce and to build teams that are productive and cohesive.

Baby Boomers represent a significant portion (37%) of this diverse US workforce. Born between 1943 and 1964, these individuals are the most likely of all of the generations to hold management positions, which makes it even more critical for organizations to understand these professionals. The first step in knowing how to engage these employees is to learn what historical events in US history affected their growth and helped to shape the kind of person they are today, personally and professionally. From those answers, you can then comprehend how to continually engage them as productive, valuable members of your organizational team.

Simply understanding how the baby boomers within your organization think and feel about work and their careers, and implementing ways to motivate them, can have a tremendous impact on their performance. With the knowledge and expertise baby boomers possess, organizations that leverage the strength and skill sets of this generation will experience sustained success long after these professionals retire.

**Personal Characteristics:**
- Confident
- Optimistic
- Independent
- Challenge rules
- Family-oriented
- Status conscious
- Work / Life balance tends to tip toward work
- Value personal growth and social involvement
- Challenge authority and rebel against convention
- Generally anti-establishment and anti-government

**Historical events that shaped their early lives:**
- Civil Rights Movement
- Cold War
- Space travel
- Vietnam War
- Social unrest
- Nixon / Watergate
- Television
**Professional characteristics:**

- Goal-oriented
- Career-Focused
- Team Orientation
- Respect hierarchy
- Respond well to coaching
- Accommodating of technology
- Prefer a consensual leadership style
- Internalized strong work ethic (workaholics)
- Like to be acknowledged by raises and promotions
- Define themselves by professional accomplishment
- Prefer face-to-face communication and in-person meetings
- Competitive because they equate work and position with self-worth
- Possess strong loyalty to their employers as they feel a sense of belonging and dedication

**WHAT ARE THE KEYS TO ENGAGING BABY BOOMERS?**

First and foremost, give them attention and recognition because they are motivated by being valued and needed.

Specifically, you should consider the following:

**Baby boomers are often motivated by their position and authority.** They prefer titles and authority commensurate with their responsibility.

**Baby boomers seek meaning and balance and mentoring other generations is appealing to them.** Furthermore, their expertise could be the most powerful on-the-job training for your other employees. Mentoring others is a way they can share their experiences and transfer their knowledge, thus building the skill sets of other employees.

**Baby Boomers like to work on team projects with their colleagues.** Allow them to participate in associations and conferences that help them to maintain their professional connection with their peers.

**Baby Boomers like challenging assignments.** They want to work on projects that can gain them recognition and that make a difference to your organization.

**Baby Boomers want to be involved in all decisions at all stages.** They appreciate transparency and democracy in decision-making.

**Baby Boomers respect employers with established policies who play fair.** The parents of boomers were from a generation that had a strong employer/employee commitment. This upbringing has made it desirable for baby boomers to work for companies that are loyal to their employees and value hard work and years of dedication.

**Baby boomers want opportunities for post-retirement employment.** A new phenomenon is occurring in which baby boomers coming upon traditional retirement age either cannot afford to stop working or feel that their lives may be less fulfilling without work. Therefore, they are interested in active retirement or flexible, part-time arrangements. Employers should take advantage of this mindset and tap into their experience and skill sets on a flexible basis.

**Baby Boomers seek opportunities with short-term financial rewards and long-term financial security.** Offer them retirement, 401(k), pension, and stock plans.

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