

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES AND RECOGNITION



Today's workforce is different. By recognizing diverse perspectives, motivations and needs of your employees, you will master the art of recognition and impact engagement.



We often hear people discuss the challenges of planning their recognition strategy for well-rounded teams of different generations. But with challenge comes opportunity to better embrace the collective positive experiences of working alongside a team of people, no matter when they were born. It's all about understanding motivators and what makes people tick. So, when you develop your recognition strategy, it's a good idea to consider your audience, what is important to them, and how they like to be recognized. Because everyone is not the same. As Paul White in "The Changing Workplace: Generational Differences" writes, *"The one thing that is foundational for successfully conveying appreciation in the workplace is to communicate in the appreciation language that is desired by each individual. This is a small investment that creates a win-win-win situation (for the employee, for the supervisor, and for the company) and results in a more positive workplace!"*

An effective recognition strategy incorporates the "4 Pillars" of recognition targeting 8-12 recognition touchpoints annually per employee.

- FOUNDATIONAL SERVICE AWARDS** ➤ Best practices incorporate a hire to retire approach
- AUTOMATED RECOGNITIONS** ➤ Create an environment of celebration and appreciation to encourage retention & team building
- DISCRETIONARY RECOGNITIONS** ➤ Tools for leaders and all employees to applaud & acknowledge behavioral reinforcement
- PERFORMANCE-BASED RECOGNITIONS** ➤ Rewarding results aligned to your objectives

THE 4 GENERATIONS IN THE WORKFORCE

27%
Generation Z
(After 1996):

25%
Millennials
(1981-1996):

21%
Generation X
(1965-1980):

27%
Baby Boomers
(1946-1964):

GEN Z: RAISED ON THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA

According to Business Insider, Gen Z is estimated to soon become the largest US consumer population. This group cares about a stable work-life balance and they value “authenticity and transparency.” For Gen-Zers, recognition should be a regular part of their company experience – because they are attuned to receiving real-time feedback – i.e. think social media “likes.”

► **Rec on Recognition:** Performance-based recognition to create positive engagement is very fitting for Gen Z. Social recognition and celebrating small wins day to day is also appealing. So, keep it going, keep it flowing and your Gen Zer will keep it real.

MILLENNIALS: EASY TO BE MISUNDERSTOOD

Millennials are even more interested in regular, positive feedback from teammates and managers than Gen Z. “This age group is also the most likely to jump ship and find new employment should they feel that their efforts are underappreciated.”² The Incentive Research Foundation did a study using biometrics to gain insight on how different generations like to receive rewards and recognition. They found that millennials preferred peer-to-peer recognition and liked private recognition the least.³

► **Rec on Recognition:** A comprehensive recognition program that offers regular and consistent touchpoints (think automated, discretionary and performance-based recognition) would be a great fit for this audience.

GEN X: FRIEND-FOCUSED AND ENTREPRENEURIAL

Generation X tends to prefer autonomy and independence. “They’re distinct from other generations in that they generally prefer to be recognized in private, or in the company of a small group...their aversion to group fanfare is somewhat unsurprising. You should check in with all employees to make sure that they’re comfortable receiving recognition publicly, but be especially mindful to do so when working with Generation X.”⁴

► **Rec on Recognition:** Consider the benefits of foundational service and milestone recognition efforts, and discretionary recognition – especially manager-to-peer. You can’t go wrong.

BABY BOOMERS: JUST GET IT DONE

Baby boomers enjoy status and perks, and are more motivated by money than the other generations. Boomers don’t need constant feedback but do like being recognized for their expertise. And, according to SHRM, they prefer being recognized by their peers versus their manager.

► **Rec on Recognition:** Keep it simple. Appeal to Boomers with milestone and peer recognition programs.

The bottom line? All of us crave recognition. But make sure you execute on your strategies by engaging your diverse teammates the way that they will feel most appreciated, the way they will respond most appropriately and with a relevant approach to continue building that engagement.

¹ <https://www.appreciationatwork.com/blog/the-changing-workplace-generational-differences/>

² <https://www.workstars.com/recognition-and-engagement-blog/2019/10/21/what-millennials-want-from-work-7-research-backed-truths/>

³ <https://theirf.org/research/reward-presentation-and-attraction-a-biometric-experiment/2348/>

⁴ <https://www.bamboohr.com/blog/how-different-generations-want-to-be-recognized/>