Mind the Gap:
3 questions to help bridge the generational divide in today’s workforce

businesssolver
Looking at the American workforce today, you’ll see teams that look a lot more like this:

And a lot less like this:
That’s a Great Thing!

The surge in workplace diversity brings varying perspectives, ideas, and experiences – all of which can spark creativity, innovation, and growth for your organization. However, the differences in working styles between Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials also can expose cracks in engagement and productivity. Let those cracks grow into full-blown generational divides, and employees of all ages – not to mention business results – no doubt will suffer.
As the people hub of their organizations, what are HR professionals to do?

We’ll answer that question by asking 3 more.

Answering these 3 questions will help lead you toward benefit approaches that can bridge generational divides, achieve your organization’s goals, and meets employees’ unique needs.
“How does your organization define flexibility?”

Traditionally, Boomers and Gen Xers have distinct divisions between work and their personal lives.

“Work is what I do when I’m not out living my life.”

“Fun is what happens when I leave the office.”

By contrast, Millennials integrate their job as part of their life, which means they ebb and flow between the two throughout the day.

“I’m about living my fullest, best life all the time in all ways - at work, with friends and with family.”

“Work isn’t something I do; it’s part of who I am.”
“How does your organization define flexibility?”

Boomers and Gen Xers, inspired by their Millennial colleagues and seeking greater balance between personal and professional responsibilities, are starting to follow suit.

35% of employees want more flexible schedules, and 46% say that flexibility is the most important aspect when looking for a new job."
Pro Tip:

Prevent generational clashes. Ensure consistent productivity, and meet cross-generational needs through a flex-hours policy. Work with senior leaders to establish clear guidelines that apply to all employees – that way, there’s no misunderstanding or implications of favoritism. Include these 3 features:

1. Rules for how all employees, regardless of hours, will show accountability of a full work day.
2. Clear business and performance measurement metrics to keep teams on track for deliverables, no matter different team members’ work hours.
3. Guidelines around when and how employees will maintain accessibility during traditional hours, even if they aren’t in the office.
Remember!

Flexibility isn’t limited to when employees work, but also where. Many organizations have implemented remote work arrangements to support improved employee recruitment, retention, engagement, and satisfaction.

91% of remote employees say they “get more work done when working remotely,” compared to 9% who say they don’t.2

On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 representing happiest), remote workers averaged 8.10 compared to all workers’ score of 7.42.2
Embrace remote work and support offsite employees with these 5 strategies:

1. Exchange an old type of face time for a new one. Historically, the only way for employees to prove their productivity and value was for them to “see and be seen.” Instead, use technology to your advantage and conduct meetings and one-on-one check-ins with video conferencing.

2. Create an online hub and/or loop for general communication. The worst thing for remote employees to hear is, “Oh, you weren’t here so you didn’t know about...” Keep the big announcements in a single, consistent spot online; email can take care of the rest.

3. Set up a virtual watercooler. Everyone likes to take a mental break from the work day to chat about Game of Thrones or giggle at viral videos. Remote employees are no different, so let them get in on the fun.

4. Manage energy, not time. Time is finite; energy is not. Energy can be continuously replenished by taking those quick mental breaks (see No. 3) or exercise. This is especially important for remote employees, where the lines between work and home are forever blurred.

5. Manage output, not hours. Clear employee goals and expectations – followed up by even clearer measurement of what’s been accomplished – is critical to success with remote employees.
“What is your organization’s approach to benefits when considering unique generational needs?”
Trust us:

Employees are eager to tell you what they want. All you have to do is ask! Use surveys, lunch & learns, smaller team meetings, or other approaches to draw out insights from employees. Then, look for common wants and needs across generations that can guide your strategy.

Spoiler alert: You’ll find common ground in three key areas – health, money, and family.
Health

**Boomers** tend to be more traditional – for them, healthcare is transactional, like getting their car serviced. They see their doctors regularly, when they’re sick or just for scheduled maintenance.

**Millennials**, not so much; they’re less likely to have a primary care doctor, and like work, simply integrate fitness, wellness, and self-care into daily life.

**Gen Xers** fall somewhere in between – they tend to be appointment setters (NBC’s “Must See TV” in the 1990s was tailor made for them!) so they set aside specific time in the day to get care, exercise, and meditate.
Whether concerned with paying for college debt, continuing education, their children’s education, or saving for retirement – perhaps all of the above – a consistent need across all generations is creating more financial freedom and security.

Americans collectively owe more than **$1.3 trillion** in outstanding student loans, a figure that’s growing nearly $3,000 per second.³

Only **22% of Boomers** believe they are doing a good job of preparing financially for retirement, and 45% have saved nothing at all toward retirement.⁴

Gen X lost nearly half their savings in the 2008 economic collapse, an average **$33,000** per person.⁵
Family

Beyond paying past student debt and planning for future retirement, employees are seeking their employer’s support in meeting life milestones in the present. Gen X employees find themselves at a key crossroads for such markers, and likely will be engaged by paid parental leave and company-sponsored child care options, as well as resources for caregivers of aging parents or relatives.
Pro Tip: Use this matrix as a starting point for taking a cross-generational approach to your benefits strategy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENERATION</th>
<th>HEALTH</th>
<th>MONEY</th>
<th>FAMILY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boomers</strong></td>
<td>Wide access to choice in primary care; wellness program rewards for tending to age-based preventive care</td>
<td>Financial education programs to help create a realistic retirement budget that balances 401(k), Social Security, and personal assets; communication campaigns to boost 401(k) catch-up contributions</td>
<td>Legal benefits to assist with estate planning; voluntary supplemental life insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gen Xers</strong></td>
<td>FSAs to help offset costs of care for children and/or dependent parents</td>
<td>Financial wellness counseling to balance future retirement needs with current financial burdens (i.e., student loan repayments, child care fees, mortgage payments)</td>
<td>FSAs to offset dependent care costs; voluntary auto/home coverage; onsite child care or care resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Millennials</strong></td>
<td>Outcomes-based wellness programs that reward healthy behaviors</td>
<td>Low barriers to entry for 401(k) enrollment and generous employer match; student loan repayment assistance</td>
<td>Pet insurance, parental leave, broad child care resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pro Tip: Use this matrix as a starting point for taking a cross-generational approach to your benefits strategy.
“How does your organization foster a culture of empathy to help break down generational bias?”
Dealing with Biases

We’re all engrained with certain biases that influence how we think and act. These biases take shape during childhood – usually formed through significant cultural events and influence from our parents. What Boomer doesn’t remember the nightly newscast horrors of the Vietnam War? Millennials attitudes toward accomplishment no doubt were shaped by their “helicopter parents.” Gen Xers began thinking about work and information access in an entirely new way through the personal computer.

Work preferences and working styles all stem from the perceptions and biases we learned through these events. The key to overcoming these biases is fostering a workplace culture of empathy.

60% of CEOs believe their organization is empathetic. Only 24% of employees agree.6

One-third of employees would change jobs for equal pay to join an organization that is more empathetic.6

61% of employees believe the empathy their HR department shows is genuine, and HR is uniquely positioned to champion empathy.6
Pro Tip:

There are tactical ways you can weave empathy into your benefits program as well! These are the top benefits that employees agree go “above and beyond” to demonstrate a culture of empathy:6

- Gym reimbursement/membership
- Flexible work hours
- Flexible work location (working from home or remotely)
- Wellness programs
- Paid paternity leave
- Employer contributions to retirement plans
- Commuter benefits
- Paid time for community service
- Paid 12-week maternity leave

Mind the Gap: 3 questions to help bridge the generational divide in today’s workforce
Flexibility. Personalized benefits. Empathy.

Too often, these are reduced to buzzwords that oversimplify their importance in your organization’s strategy. However, they still have powerful weight with employees of all ages. When used intentionally, thoughtfully, and effectively, they have the power to build bridges to success, no matter how wide the generational divide.

Resources
Learn more about how we see things differently at businessolver.com.

In a rapidly changing and often uncertain market, you need a benefits technology partner you can trust. Founded by HR professionals who know what’s really important to you, Businessolver delivers market-changing technology supported by an intrinsic and unwavering responsiveness to your needs today and down the road. You can trust us to take care of you and your employees with a configurable and secure SaaS platform and a culture of service, all aimed at total and measurable success and your complete delight. We’ll help you maximize the investment in your benefits program, minimize your exposure to risk, engage your employees with our easy-to-use solution and full suite of communication vehicles, and empower them to use their benefits wisely and control their costs and yours.