

Audit departments can leverage the varied talents of different age segments in today's workplace, while avoiding the potential for interpersonal clash.

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The Multi



TODAY'S WORKPLACES HAVE BECOME GENERATIONAL MELTING POTS. Trends such as delayed retirements, second careers, and increased longevity mean that the age spectrum of workers is wider now than ever before.

The generational ground-shifting occurring in workplaces around the world has not bypassed internal audit departments. In the course of a typical day or week, internal auditors are likely to interact with a diverse array of professionals

generational Workforce



from as many as four generations. And whether auditors find themselves at the oldest or youngest end of the age spectrum — or somewhere in the middle — they're likely to encounter some generational potholes in their interactions with colleagues.

Demographic experts generally point to four generations that are active in the global workforce: traditionalists, baby boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y — the newest addition on the corporate ladder. The differences among these groups go well beyond birth periods. Experts maintain that each generational cohort has been shaped by unique historical, social, and cultural events; as a result, each has distinct preferences, work styles, and professional goals. In addition, there are indications that workers from each generation respond to different sets of motivators and rewards and seek to derive varying experiences and benefits from their jobs.

Although this generational brew makes for a lively and diverse mix of perspectives and personalities, it can also create friction in the workplace as members of different groups seek to carry out a common

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mission while embracing often conflicting values, work styles, priorities, and viewpoints. Working with people who seem to approach their professional obligations differently can initially seem problematic, and even unsettling or irritating. But when audit practitioners resolve to make these workplace relationships more than merely superficial, transactional ones, there are profound opportunities for learning and growth on both a personal and professional level. For its part, management also should recognize that changing workplace demographics can affect productivity and morale in either

a positive or negative way. By encouraging intergenerational understanding and cooperation, organizations as a whole and internal audit groups, in particular, can improve their ability to thrive while taking advantage of the distinct talents and strengths of every team member.

A GENERATIONAL PRIMER

Generational profiles provide broad outlines that can be useful in trying to understand what motivates members of various groups. While it helps to be aware of generational attributes, auditors should keep in mind that even when supported

Understanding Gen Y

As the oldest baby boomers ease out of the workforce in the years ahead, members of Generation Y — also known as the Millennial Generation — will become an increasingly large and vital segment of the corporate world. They constitute the labor pool from which companies will draw most of their employees in the coming years. As a result, much attention has been given to attracting and retaining workers of this generation, who frequently have been characterized — whether fairly or unfairly — as “high maintenance.”

Although some say Gen Yers frequently have been maligned in the media and by older colleagues, they also have their share of often-prominent supporters. For instance, writing in their *BusinessWeek* column of Sept. 27, 2007 (“Generation Y’s Bad Rap”), much-admired former executive Jack Welch and his wife and co-columnist, Suzy Welch, defended Gen Y, saying: “Overwhelmingly, we’ve found Gen Yers to be hardworking, entrepreneurial, startlingly authentic, refreshingly candid, and wonderfully upbeat.”

To learn more about why Gen Y elicits such strong and often varied views, Robert Half International, in conjunction with Yahoo! HotJobs, surveyed more than 1,000 of the most senior members of Gen Y — those between 21 and 28 years of age — to study their professional priorities. Several tips derived from the survey, *What Millennial Workers Want: How to Attract and Retain Gen Y Employees*, may be helpful to employers and managers.

Offer Attentive Management Contrary to what some may think, Millennials are not an aloof generation. They’re social and eager to engage with those around them, especially their managers. Raised on instant communication, video games, and frequent parental input, Gen Yers are accustomed to direct, ongoing supervision and guidance from authority figures. They seek a similar relationship with their bosses, looking to them for almost constant feedback.

For audit departments, this means that the CAE or an auditor’s direct supervisor should not reserve feedback for an annual or twice yearly performance evaluation. Instead, they should offer Gen Y employees a steady stream of communication about performance.

Show Them the Money Although Millennials have a variety of job-related expectations, salary ranked as the top consideration in deciding whether to accept an offer. Because Millennials are accustomed to instant results, managers may have greater success making them an attractive offer up front, rather than offering a lower salary with the possibility of a raise or bonus down the line. In fact, this may be a necessary step for any audit department intent on attracting the most talented professionals in a difficult hiring environment.

Emphasize Career Development Millennials want to make a contribution to their employers; in return, they want help

by extensive surveys and research, these traits are, at best, generalizations. Professionals should avoid jumping to conclusions solely on the basis of someone's generational identity. Numerous factors in addition to birth era also shape how others think and behave, such as race, gender, ethnicity, geographical considerations, and socioeconomic background.

With this caveat in mind, demographers generally attribute specific traits to the generational groups currently active in the workforce:

- **Traditionalists.** Born before 1946, members of this generation typically value loyalty, discipline, respect for authority, and a traditional approach toward work. They believe in paying their dues and are accustomed to a seniority-based system and a command-and-control approach to management.
- **Baby Boomers.** Born between 1946 and 1964, these individuals belong to a generation that comprises about 40 percent of the U.S. workforce. Boomers have long been a dominant presence — not only in the labor force, but in society overall. Generally

ambitious, career-oriented, and accustomed to intense competition for jobs, boomers range in age from 44 to 62, with many at the peak of their careers. Boomers are likely to be found in senior-level leadership positions, such as chief audit executive (CAE). They desire to remain connected to the workforce and make intellectual contributions as they near retirement age.

- **Generation X.** Composed of individuals born roughly between 1965 and 1979, members of this generation generally place a premium on work-life balance, growth opportunities, and good relationships with supervisors and colleagues. Gen Xers are between the ages of 29 and 43. They generally seek autonomy, versatility, and self-direction in their careers. They tend to distrust corporations and other institutions, having watched their parents experience downsizing and job insecurity and having endured similar career experiences themselves. These professionals may be more likely than others to leave the workforce or change careers — often pursuing entrepreneurial ventures —

if they feel their current jobs lack meaning or purpose or fail to offer them the flexibility they need to reconcile competing personal and professional priorities.

- **Generation Y.** Numbering nearly 80 million in the United States, Generation Y — also known as the Millennial Generation — is broadly defined as those born between 1979 and 1999. The youngest members are still in elementary school, while the oldest are in their late 20s. The much-studied, much-discussed Millennials typically value autonomy and reinforcement in their jobs, as well as workplaces that are fun, informal, and promote collegial relationships. Because this generation grew up using personal computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices, its members tend to be highly proficient with technology. At best, Gen Y members have been depicted as eager and tech-savvy, requiring that work be both enjoyable and challenging. At worst, they have been characterized as an over-stimulated, high-maintenance generation hooked on instant gratification. This

achieving their career goals. Internal audit departments can enhance their appeal to these workers by showcasing perks such as in-house training and mentoring programs, rotational opportunities, reimbursement for tuition and professional fees, and paid time off for professional development activities, including pursuing certifications.

Offer Challenging, Diverse Assignments Gen Yers crave challenge and change. After all, they have been exposed to numerous enrichment activities and hobbies from the time they were babies. They also grew up with a high level of stimulation — TV, video games, the Internet, and myriad extracurricular activities — and will disengage quickly if they're not challenged.

Gen Y professionals may be more likely to thrive if they're given opportunities to stretch their skills and develop multiple competencies. For example, they're likely to prefer a series of short-term roles on several different audit projects, as opposed to being immersed in one engagement for an extended period. They also might be attracted to employers that offer rotational programs or allow auditors to work with clients in various industries and business units.

Focus on the Work Environment Survey respondents ranked working with a boss they can respect and learn

from as the most important aspect of the work environment. Rounding out the top three responses were “working with people I enjoy” and “having work/life balance.” And while Gen Yers have a reputation for being tethered to technology, they place a surprisingly high value on personal interactions with co-workers.

The takeaway for managers: Make sure the workplace is structured to encourage plenty of the “face time” that Gen Y professionals enjoy. This could mean arranging work groups in open, connected seating areas that facilitate easy communication or creating more opportunities for employees to socialize during and after work. Pleasant break rooms or cafeterias, monthly staff lunches, and opportunities to gather away from the office can go a long way toward keeping this group engaged and productive.

Promote Balance Employers will encourage longer tenures and greater loyalty if they offer perks and programs that support Gen Y's desire for balance. Nearly three-quarters of those surveyed said they are concerned about their ability to balance a career with personal obligations. To improve retention of younger workers, companies may need to rethink traditional career paths and timetables for advancement and offer options such as job sharing, telecommuting, compressed workweeks, or flexible schedules as appropriate.

group also has been accused of having a sense of entitlement and unreasonable expectations about work. Like Gen Xers, Gen Y professionals are more likely to put family and personal pursuits before career and desire flexible schedules that will help them achieve the balance they seek.

As these demographic sketches suggest, some significant “cultural” differences exist among generations, and it’s easy to see how conflict might arise between a traditionalist supervisor accustomed to a conventional 50-plus-hour workweek and a Gen Y internal auditor wanting to work fewer hours in the office in favor of more time spent telecommuting. The Gen Y professional might prefer to fill out the workweek by logging late-night hours from home or multitasking on the weekends by building an Excel table while watching a golf tournament on television.

While companies have become more cognizant of the need to better understand and address potential generational clashes — often at the policy level by implementing telecommuting or flexible schedules, for instance — audit professionals can also take steps to minimize generational differences.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Internal auditors can foster better and more generationally diverse relationships in the workplace by avoiding the natural tendency to cluster with co-workers based solely on age. Although it may seem like work to develop a comfortable relationship with individuals who are dissimilar from themselves, employees who do so will likely find the experience personally enriching and career-enhancing.

Rather than simply offering co-workers of different generational groups a cordial greeting when passing them in the hallway, approach them one-on-one and seek to discover what can be learned from each person. If Gen Y workers hear, for instance, that a traditionalist team member has a reputation for compiling impressively concise audit reports or delivering audit findings with confidence, they should ask for the individual’s advice in these areas. They might even request to shadow a more experienced colleague on an engagement or ask him or her to walk them through a report. Not only do younger internal auditors stand to accelerate the learning curve by tapping into the expertise of seasoned

team members, but this strategy can be an effective way for Millennials, in particular, to defuse any generational tensions that may exist between them and older workers and replace these tensions with constructive relationships.

Internal auditors might also look for opportunities to participate on project teams that bring colleagues from different generational groups together. For

instance, by joining a group that is tasked with recommending a new software package for the department, professionals can learn more about one another’s individual strengths while getting to know each other better on a personal level.

RESPECT FOR OTHERS

Professionals of every generation want to know that colleagues respect their

Rules of the Road for Gen Y

Just as Generation Y has certain expectations of companies and managers, the corporate world also has some for this newest generation of workers. The following guidelines may be useful to young professionals trying to find their footing in today’s workforce.

Listen First Even if a younger worker thinks he or she has the perfect solution to an office conundrum, it’s best to hear colleagues out and gather all the facts before speaking up. While auditors shouldn’t shy away from making contributions, no one wants to come across as the office know-it-all who has the answer to every problem even before a co-worker has finished explaining it.

Accept the “Pay Your Dues” Mentality The age-old philosophy of paying one’s dues may eventually go the way of the dinosaur, but in most audit environments it still exists. No matter how impressive their educational background or internship experiences, auditors will be expected to gain certain experiences before receiving the most desirable assignments. This widely accepted practice doesn’t mean managers should sentence new recruits to nothing but repetitive, mind-numbing work either, but fledgling auditors should accept the need to prove themselves and work their way up to projects of increasing complexity and importance.

Dress the Part Auditors should show appropriate deference when it comes to wardrobe choices and appearance. Although most managers understand the appeal of casual dress and may even have children who sport tattoos, this doesn’t mean the boss will tolerate extreme choices in clothing and personal adornment.

Reserve Judgment On occasion, Gen Yers may find that older colleagues are not as knowledgeable in some areas as they are. For instance, they may not know how to test a particular IT control or create a macro in Excel. Their shortcomings in one area, however, do not mean they have nothing to teach. Gen Y employees should modestly offer their expertise and remain open to opportunities to glean knowledge from experienced colleagues in other areas.

Show Rather Than Tell It’s fine to tout one’s knowledge and skills during the interview, but doing so on the job will likely stir resentment from more experienced colleagues. Auditors should allow their work to speak for itself. In time, managers and co-workers will take note of an employee’s thoroughly completed audit reports or proficiency with risk management software.

Help Them Manage You Although managers realize that employee preferences for supervision and feedback vary considerably, they can easily get caught up in their daily responsibilities and overlook individual needs. If auditors find their supervisor is not as attentive or responsive as they’d like, they should approach him or her to ask for additional guidance or performance critiques. Bosses generally strive to adjust their management style to employees, but they may need occasional prompting to deliver targeted and timely feedback.

knowledge and experience. It's common, though, for generational groups to feel pitted against one another. Often there are perceptions — whether valid or not — that one group devalues another's abilities, and this promotes generational ill will.

In the most harmonious workplaces, respectful attitudes flow up and down

MENTORING MATTERS

Mentoring is another tool that can be highly beneficial in breaking down generational barriers. Through mentoring, younger professionals gain the counsel of an experienced colleague who can share technical know-how and offer guidance on the subtleties of office protocol, preferred work methods, and interpersonal

mentor Gen Y professionals; or by informally — and diplomatically — dispensing advice and counsel to them, these relationships may develop naturally.

AIR DIFFERENCES

When generation-based differences in work style or attitude seem to be a persistent source of difficulty with colleagues, both parties should try talking it out rather than resigning themselves to conflict. Sometimes the solution is simple and relatively painless. For example, a boomer CAE may decide to implement more flexible work options in response to requests from Gen X and Gen Y auditors. In return, these staff members are likely to increase their productivity and do a better job of keeping team members informed of their progress on a project or engagement. Changing policies or benefits to make them more responsive to workers' needs should not be viewed as making concessions to any one employee group, but as a means to a mutually beneficial end. These actions can help companies and audit departments improve their ability to attract top candidates, increase retention, and boost productivity and morale among existing staff.

Experienced professionals are likely to find that younger workers can help them gain a new perspective on their work and may have valuable skills to share with their mentors.

the generational spectrum. Professionals interact with an open mind and view any differences they encounter, not as obstacles, but as opportunities to broaden their perspectives.

While experienced members of the team should certainly be recognized for their hard-earned expertise, they also need to acknowledge that even the greenest staff-level auditors bring valuable skills and perspectives to the table. For instance, Gen Y professionals may have more up-to-date technology knowledge than colleagues who are 30 years older, or the younger worker may have greater enthusiasm for taking ownership of some aspect of an audit project, no matter how small the responsibility.

Seasoned auditors may need to take the initiative to break the generational ice with younger colleagues. A simple open-ended question about how a current engagement is going can pave the way for knowledge sharing and mutual assistance. Most importantly, perhaps, veteran practitioners can improve their ability to relate to Gen Y, in particular, by recalling their own mind-set in the early days of their career. Didn't they also believe that they had the necessary preparation and knowledge to make a difference right away? And didn't they also expect — or at least hope for — a certain amount of professional challenge and respect right from the start? Gen Y may not be that "different" after all.

skills. In addition, mentors typically become workplace allies, confidantes, and career champions to mentees — and who can't benefit from having someone act on his or her behalf in this way? For their part, older workers often become re-energized when they take an enthusiastic, knowledge-hungry employee under their wing. Moreover, experienced professionals are likely to find that younger workers can help them gain a new perspective on their work and may have valuable skills to share with their mentors.

Mentoring relationships can be especially appealing to Gen Y employees, who place a premium on opportunities for career growth and on having positive interactions with colleagues. Millennials may be especially comfortable having older boomers as mentors. After all, Gen Y adults — sometimes referred to as "echo boomers" — are the children of leading-edge boomers and are accustomed to close and constant parental involvement in their lives. In the workplace, mentors can mirror this relationship by providing the continual feedback and reinforcement that many Millennials crave.

Young professionals should seek a mentor within their department or company, unless they are paired with someone automatically. Not only can these relationships be good for a fledgling auditor's career, but they signify that a mentee is open to learning from more experienced colleagues. Boomers may want to offer to

A COMMON FOCUS

Developing a greater awareness of the characteristics of a multigenerational workforce allows audit practitioners to take better advantage of the varied perspectives and talents of colleagues from each group. But even when audit departments are true generational melting pots — bringing together each of the various age segments — their common goals and shared mission as auditors should always remain the central focus in their interactions. By building on this connection and ensuring that team members understand their individual roles and responsibilities in carrying out the group's overall mission, auditors should come to realize that their professional commonalities are greater than their individual differences. And finding common ground is always the first step toward better understanding and more productive relationships.

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