# Teaching Multiple Generations

Just as there are different learning styles (visual, auditory, etc.), there are also differing generational learning styles. Awareness of generational preferences is one more piece of the puzzle in designing and delivering effective training sessions.

So how do we facilitate learning with different generations? The answer requires understanding how the different generations value training and how they like to learn before we provide more detailed suggestions. In this short summary, we can only provide broad generalizations of how the generations learn. We know that not every member of a generation will match all the generalizations, and there is much more that could be said about how they learn. However, we suggest that understanding these foundational differences will stir your creativity in teaching multiple generations.

Generations Value Training Differently

All generations value training, but they value it for different reasons. This comparison summarizes how and why the different generations value training:
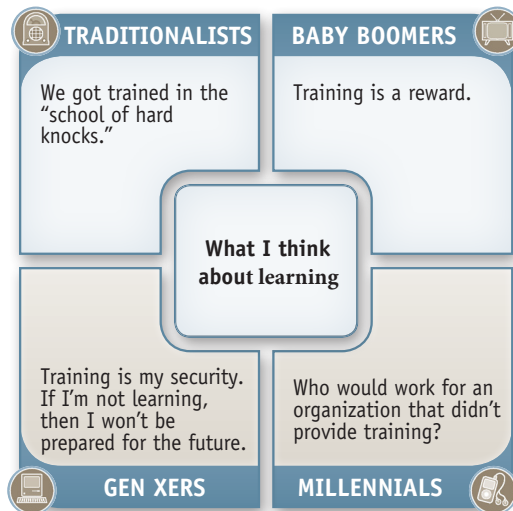
Why They Think That Way

- For Traditionalists, information was available through libraries, newspapers, colleges, and companies. Ongoing training was a reward for high potential.

- Boomers were used to lectures and memorization, so they could pull the useful parts out of ineffective training. Keeping current is the only job security for tomorrow.

- Gen Xers believe that organizations who don't provide opportunities to learn are robbing them of their future.

- Millennials know that other parts of the world have higher educational standards and knowledge is doubling rapidly, so organizations that cut learning in tough times are too dangerous to work for.
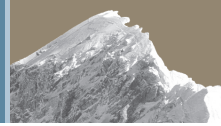
Summary of How Generations Learn

Traditionalists
Keep in mind that Traditionalists learned not to question authority. Titles are important, and respect is given based on positional authority. That's important in the classroom. If a facilitator is viewed as being the "expert," Traditionalists are less apt not to question credibility.

Boomers
Boomers learned to put up with lecture formats, build and abide by ground rules to encourage fairness with each other, role play and interact (fall backward and we'll catch you) and enjoy "tribal wisdom" stories.

Gen Xers
Gen Xers want relevancy in the training. And don't expect them to believe you just because you have a title. Xers don't hesitate to question authority and methods. They will give you feedback (in some cases whether you want it or not) and expect to apply the training immediately.

Millennials
Millennials want to interact throughout training sessions. They are used to having a voice and expect to contribute. Not only do they expect to learn but they expect to have input into the process and have fun while learning. They network out of the classroom and expect to network in the classroom as well.

Once we take these differences into account, we can go into more detail on their learning preferences. Remember, these are broad generalizations and not every person in each generation fits all the generalizations. And since the Traditionalists make up less than three percent of most organizations, we will focus on the three larger generations, especially the Millennials since they are the newest and often the least familiar. The bulleted descriptors you see on the next two pages for each group will provide you with important points to consider as you prepare to teach multiple generations.
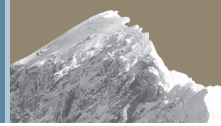
Descriptions & Suggestions for Implementation

Baby Boomers
- Like discussions in groups.
- Will wait through material they don't find practical hoping for "two or three nuggets."
- Can sit in one spot for a long time, especially if they get to talk once and a while.
- Appreciate "ground rules" and "parking lots."
- Like laws, principles, and getting things right so it all turns out okay.
- Don't think some things should be talked about.

Gen Xers
- Have been entertained while they learned.
- Scan five websites in fifteen minutes looking for relevant information. So give them useful stuff, quickly.
- Question authorities.
- Lose attention if it's boring.
    - They expect to work on their laptop or handheld, or pull out other work if a section is not relevant
    - You have ten minute windows to be relevant and practical.
    - Blow three ten minute windows in a morning and you are deleted.
- Roll their eyes at "ground rules" and "parking lots." Wonder why you are putting off the hard questions until later.
- Will learn on line or live if you don't waste their time.
- Talk about all topics unless they discriminate against people or over generalize. (Gen Xers least like lists comparing different generations.)

Descriptions & Suggestions for Implementation

Millennials

- Were entertained at all times. (Think *Sesame Street.*)

- Expect interaction.

- Trust authorities who "get it." ("Get it" means appreciate their values and preferred tools.)

- But question, tease, and banter with the authority.
  (They've seen every major social and political figure demythologized and deconstructed. They know you don't know everything. They know you can't know everything. They don't expect you to know everything. And in five minutes they can find six experts on line who disagree with you. So quit being a "poser" and relax.)

- Believe the world is fixable so are looking for what works. They want proof it works.

- Don't want to wait to make a contribution. Let them make one in your classes.

- Disregard "ground rules" and "parking lots" if they get in the way. So be flexible.

- Expect to have fun or get through it quickly. (So pick up the pace in the boring bits.)

- Moved around and learned through activities since they were in preschool. You had better have something for them other than a manual and Power Point.

- Will talk about anything.

- Don't mind learning on line if it's interactive and quick.

- Communicate through the visual far more than the previous generations (think YouTube). So get far more visual, or better yet, have them help you find the illustrations and graphics, and footage. Or have them shoot the video in your training that you post on line or use in later sessions.