

Workplace tech gap is generational thing

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The Baby Boomers may be approaching retirement age, but the recession and its corresponding hits to their retirement plans will keep many in the workforce well beyond their 65th birthdays.

Combine that with some slow-to-go WWII babies and the entrance of the Millennials (born after 1980) and small business owners potentially have four different generations sharing the same workplace.

As even the smallest business becomes increasingly dependent on technology, the differences in each generation's acceptance and use of computers and other electronic advancements can dramatically impact how they work together.

Some older Boomers and their predecessors tend to be technology avoiders. These are the folks that "never got caught up in that whole e-mail thing."

It's not that they think technology is a fad, but rather they see it as a series of fads that come and go too fast to possibly keep up with. While they may have great skills in the business, their resistance to change can derail others' productivity and advancement in the workplace.

Most Boomers are technology adapters. They aren't the first to take on a new gadget (and they might be the last), but they will deal with it once it become unavoidable.

Look for them to learn as much as is necessary to accomplish basic functions and not a whole lot more. They may slow you down a bit, but they'll get the job done eventually.

Generation X tends to be technology adopters. They embrace each new technology, and want to see what it can do.

They like to push the envelope. If they cause problems, it's frequently from their attempts to use the technology in ways beyond its intent.

For them, technology is cool. It conveys status, and can often be used for recognition.

The Millennials add an interesting twist to the mix. They are technology anticipators.

If they have an issue, they expect that there is a technology that can fix it.

They don't understand the "Gee whiz!" attitude of Gen X. This is the generation that has never been in an automobile they couldn't make a telephone call from.

They researched their 5th grade report on George Washington on the Internet, and they think nothing of carrying the **Library of Congress** in their shirt pockets.

The challenge in managing Millennials is keeping up with their expectations.

They think that anything less than the latest, fastest methodology or hardware is merely stupid. Their technologies are their tools, and they want the best tools if you expect them to do the best job.

Boomer managers want evidence that the Millennial has "earned" a new computer, or a second (or third, or fourth) flat screen.

The Millennial is unclear how she is supposed to "earn" anything without the proper equipment to work with.

Withholding technology from your 20-something employee is like asking her to quit. You are making a statement about how you value their work.

Too often we plan our technology upgrades with input from only the employees who "speak" tech.

Make certain that all generations are included in the conversation before you start mentally counting your profits from technology-enhanced productivity.

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