



ORTHO2

# Multi-generational Workforce

by **Andrea Cook**

**H**ow many generations do you have in your office? From the doctor (or doctors), the team, to your patients many offices have three generations working and learning together. While each generation has its merits and strengths, their weaknesses and stereotypes can cause disrespect and contention. How many times have you heard, “they are just too young (old) to understand” or, “that generation just doesn’t get it”? Younger workers may not understand or appreciate the work styles of the boomers; Gen Xers might resist under the intense direction of the older generations. There are now four defined generations we generally see in the office:

- Baby Boomers – Born 1946 to 1964, 48–67 years old
- Generation X – Born 1965 to 1980, 32–47 years old
- Generation Y – Born 1980 to 1994, 18–32 years old
- Generation Z – Born 1994 to Present, 18 years old and younger

We live in a society that has a lot of age bias, whether it is employees, patients, or parents we need to develop means of communication to decrease the conflict. Understanding the differences is the first step in bridging the generations. Training in generational workforce diversity is no longer an option. It’s now imperative. And it’s essential that management and trainers understand each generation’s unique core values so they can manage and lead those generations.

Each generation has a different view of (and approach to) communication. While you may not subscribe to the text-messaging habits of Gen Y or Zers, it’s important to appreciate every generation’s modes of communication to better manage an age-diverse team. Patient communication should also be considered here. Are you addressing all communication styles of your practice? Most offices have a higher percentage of Gen Y and Zers as patients – texting them a reminder to wear their elastics or as a care call after a bonding may be a better way to

communicate.

- Generation Z – The first generation to have spent their entire life on the web. Most use their phone as their primary means of communication.
- Generation Y – Prefers to communicate via the latest technology such as texting or blogging. They are highly interactive and group-oriented, much like their social preference.
- Generation X – Is familiar with recent technology. They feel comfortable using tools such as video conferencing, e-mail, and text messaging.
- Baby Boomers – Differ greatly from their younger counterparts. These more experienced workers still prefer face-to-face meetings and telephone conversations.

A surprisingly high percentage of workplace conflicts arise from differences in generational values. Mentoring young employees is a great way to transfer knowledge, and there are mutual benefits. There’s a lot to be said for reverse mentoring. Younger workers can learn about the organization and social networking from older team members, but experienced team members can also gain so much in terms of new technology and proficiency. Use your younger employees for sharing and training on the latest software and hardware; they will feel valued for their skills, and your older employees will benefit by staying current.

Training team members must also be revisited for the new generation of employees. The clinical manual that you have had on the shelf (if you can find it) since the office opened most likely has not been read or updated

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for some time. Procedures, protocols, and guidelines for the office are changing rapidly and should continue to be updated frequently. The way work related information is communicated to employees should be evaluated. Baby Boomers were typically given a manual that they actually read and absorb. An employee from a younger generation would more likely keep the manual on a shelf, untouched. Their learning style is much different and the transfer of information must address this change to be effective.

I encourage all doctors and team members to open themselves to the benefits of working together as a multi-generational team. There is so much to learn from understanding and accepting the different generations and what each one brings to the team. When employees come to the point of understanding and effectively communicating, regardless of age or other factors, there is great potential to increase worker productivity,

collaboration, and morale. Don't underestimate the power of the multi-generational workforce; use it to your advantage.

I look forward to seeing you all at the 2013 Ortho2 Users Group Meeting where I will be presenting a lecture on how to hire, train, and retain great team members from all generations. See you there! ☺

## About the Author

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Andrea Cook is a clinical consultant and trainer for premier orthodontic offices across the country with more than 20 years experience chairside. She is presenting two classes at the 2013 UGM in Las Vegas.