

GENERATIONS AT WORK

by Ron Zemke, Claire Raines and Bob Filipczak

— THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

Introducing the Players

The four generations who occupy the American workplace in these early days of the 21st century span a remarkable slice of American and world history. Over a period of nearly 80 birth years — from 1922 to 2000 — the formative forces, values, and views; workplace aspirations and dreads; hopes and fears; and delights and disappointments of each of these four generations have colored (and continue to color) the workplace with a distinct hue that is all their own. These four groups are as follows:

- **Veterans (1922-1943).** The last of the gray flannel suits, this group (all but the youngest of whom were born before World War II) are the classic “keepers of the grail” of yesteryear and all the values that period espoused — civic pride, loyalty, and respect for authority among them. While most of this group have passed into retirement, their ranks in the CEO slots in most major companies dictate that they’ll be a force in business well into the 21st century.
- **Boomers (1943-1960).** This is the cohort group that invented the 60-hour work week, the group that is passionately concerned about participation and spirit in the workplace, the one whose ability to become engrossed in their occupations made the business of business the most dramatic story of the last quarter of the 20th century. Their attitudes toward the office, the family, and themselves, have unquestionably shaped the workplace as we know it, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.
- **The Xers (1961-1980).** Adept, clever, resourceful, discouraged, disheartened — is there a cohort group with a soul more dark or with such an edgy skepticism about them? Their need for feedback and flexibility, coupled with their distaste for micromanagement, makes them a perplexing lot for employers to deal with. They work to live, not (like their Boomer predecessors) live to work; their correlated striving for balance in life and work have made Xers the most conflicted and conundrum-prone generation currently in the marketplace.
- **The Nexters (1980-2000).** This confident, achievement-oriented group is barely in the work force yet, but is already making an impact with its optimism,

goal focus, and technical know-how. It will be interesting to see where this group takes the work force as the new century stretches out before it. ■

The Veterans

The mind-set of Veterans has so dominated our culture that every other set of beliefs is compared to theirs. When managers complain about young employees’ work ethic, they are, in fact, comparing that ethic to that of Veterans. Their influence runs even deeper, deep into the value system of our nation. The moral and ethical foundations of our country (or the perception thereof) are based on their perspective — a perspective so pervasive that a large percentage of all generations continues to embrace (or rebel against) it today.

Veterans tend to act and react in certain ways in the following workplace situations:

Leadership. In leadership roles, Veterans tend to be more directive, which was standard operating procedure in the workplace of the 1950s (see article next page). They can be expected to take charge, delegate, and make the bulk of decisions themselves; in fact, it is surprising how many Boomers and Gen Xers appreciate such a take-charge manner.

Teams. Although Veterans make fine team members, the changing structures of teams might give them pause. Veterans grew up working as a team (in World War II and its aftermath); they saw the power exerted by labor unions and the impact collective action can make in the workplace.

Veterans have worked in many teams, under strong leaders who told them exactly what to do, as well as

(continued on page 3)

The authors: Ron Zemke, senior editor of *Training* magazine and president of Performance Research Associates, is the author or coauthor of 23 books. Claire Raines is a nationally recognized expert on generational issues and author of *Beyond Generation X*. Bob Filipczak is a writer and honorary member of Generation X.

Copyright © 2000 by Performance Research Associates. Summarized by permission of the publisher, AMACOM, 1601 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. 280 pages. \$25. ISBN 0-8144-0480-4.

To subscribe: Send your name and address to the address listed below or call us at 1-800-521-1227 (Outside the U.S. and Canada, 1-610-558-9495)
To buy multiple copies of this summary: Soundview offers discounts for quantity purchases of its summaries. Call or write for details.

Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries (ISSN 0747-2196), 10 LaCru Avenue, Concordville, PA 19331 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corporation. Publisher, George Y. Clement. Publications Director, Maureen L. Solon. Editor-in-Chief, Christopher G. Murray. Published monthly. Subscription, \$89.50 per year in the United States and Canada; and, by airmail, \$95 in Mexico, \$139 to all other countries. Periodicals postage paid at Concordville, PA and additional offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Soundview, 10 LaCru Avenue, Concordville, PA 19331. Copyright © 2000 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries.