

### The Baby Boomers

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reward them when they do.

**5. Mentor them.** Keep the following in mind when acting as a mentor or coach for your Boomer employees:

- **Be tactful.**
- **Find opportunities for agreement and harmony.**
- **Ask questions to get to the bottom of issues.**
- **Let them tell you how they're doing.** When an opportunity for input presents itself, discreetly coach for improved performance.
- **Think of yourself as a friendly equal.** Ask permission at every turn when discussing performance and improvements.
- **Show respect, but do not burden your dialogue by referring to them as "sir," "ma'am," "Mr." or "Ms." ■**

### Generation Xers

Generation "X" might well have been called Generation "I" for "invisible" or Generation "L" for "lost." Living in the long shadow of the Boomers, this is the generation that has only really registered recently. Like the middle child in a family, the group has passively resisted anything its older sibling embraced. It is often defined by what it is not.

GenX's collective psyche has been shaped by a survivor mentality and can be summed up by the question "Just tell me, is this going to be on the test?" Critics see that sentiment as a sign that the generation does not care for the big picture; indeed, they may care for nothing but themselves. This is an inaccurate critique. The question really asks "What does this have to do with my survival?" GenX has developed an almost myopic concern with survival, both economic and psychological, stemming from their early sense that no one was going to hold their hands in life — they'd have to take care of themselves.

#### Work Ethic and Motivation

This sentiment translates differently to authority figures (teachers, parents, bosses), who note and perpetuate the label "slacker" for much of the "X" generation, denoting a questionable work ethic. While Veterans viewed work as a means of survival and Boomers turned to work as a means of self-fulfillment, Xers have learned that work is no guarantee of survival. Corporations can terminate you without warning, apology, or logic, and their entry-level positions are often mindless, dull, and exhausting. The prevailing attitude that all work is "just a job" is unlikely to change.

But Xers can be motivated to do good work, if presented with the right package, including the following:

**Flexibility.** The more flexible your work environment, the better the work you will receive from your Xers. Flexible hours, an informal dress code, and just the right amount of supervision are great places to start.

**Technology.** The generation reared on television, video games, and computers knows that having the best technology available to you at your desk is as good as having a corner office with a window and a door. Xers must know that their companies are willing to invest in their work; if you only provide them with an old, outdated computer that someone else discarded, your ability to retain these tech-savvy workers will be compromised.

**Multitasking.** Give Xers lots of simultaneous tasks and projects, let them prioritize them in their own way, then stand back and let them do their work. Xers like to feel that they have control over their own work, even if that control is illusory.

**Feedback.** Xers need constructive feedback to do their jobs more effectively, just like any other employee. Some have even suggested that Xers need it more, noting that the generation grew up with at least one absentee (Boomer) parent. That lack of attention in their formative years has them craving positive, sincerely offered feedback in their professional lives.

**Evenly disseminated recognition.** Xers may not be all that anxious to receive perks, but they resent it when others get visible, expensive recognition; it smacks of the worst kind of corporate, "good old boy" office politics, and it's likely to send your Xer staff running for the exits. ■

### How Xers Differ from the Previous Generation

**Boomers:** Fought against authority.  
**Xers:** Go around authority or turn it in their direction.

**Boomers:** Media darlings.  
**Xers:** Avoid the media and the limelight and, above all, don't let the media label them.

**Boomers:** Workaholics.  
**Xers:** Prefer to "have a life."

**Boomers:** Political.  
**Xers:** Politics never solved anything.

**Boomers:** Political at work.  
**Xers:** Corporate politics wastes time we could spend doing something we enjoy.