

Leadership Across Generations

We are in a unique time in history. This is the first time that four, sometimes even five, different generations are working side-by-side in nearly every industry around the world. Each generation carries a set a values and communication styles different from one another. This is what makes each generation so valuable to the workforce, but these differences can also present challenges.

LAI values our Associates from each and every generation. We would not be where we are today without contributions and collaborations **from everyone**. We also know that leadership across generations continues to evolve just as our workforce does, and we are committed to meet the demand and make the most of our diversity.

	Veterans (1922-1945)	Baby Boomers (1946-1964)	Generation X (1965-1980)	Generation Y (1961-2000)
Ethics at Work	Respect authority, hard work, age, and value company first	Workaholics, strive for quality, and question authority	Self-reliant, want structure and direction, but skeptical	Looking for the next big thing, multitask, tenacious, and entrepreneurial
Work Means...	Duty	Exciting adventure	Difficult but an obligation	Means to an end
Leadership Style	Directive, command & control	Quality	All are equal, challenge others, question everything	Unknown yet
Communication	Typed memos	In-person	Direct and instantaneous	Digital, preferably short-form
Rewards & Feedback	No-news means good-news	Money, title, and formal awards	Freedom and complements	Meaningful work and technology
Motivation	Being respected	Feeling values and needed	Freedom and no rules	Working with like-minded people
Work/Life Balance	Completely separated	Life IS work	Balanced	Balanced
Technology Icons	Hoover Dam	Microwave ovens	PDAs and cell phones	Everything is digital and intangible

The Four Generations

Knowing the four generations, and the characteristics that make each unique, is essential in everyone working together. Do note that not everyone agrees on exact dates for each generation, so these dates are approximate and there are some years with crossover of two generations.

The oldest generation is the Veterans (sometimes called Maturists) or The Great Generation. This group was born before 1945. People in this generation value hard work, sacrifice, authority and rules. They tend to prefer a more individual interaction style, like communication from a written (formal) memo and respond well to directives, as in a command-and-control approach.

Next are the Baby Boomers, born 1945–1960. The “workaholic” generation values efficiency but also personal fulfillment and quality. They may question authority. To Baby Boomers, work is “an exciting adventure” where they can be a team player. In-person meetings are a preferred communication style and they like leadership to be more consensual and collegial. Generation X includes people born from 1961-1980. This group values self-reliance, structure and direction. They view work more as a contract and a challenge. They consider co-workers and leaders the same and likely ask “why” frequently. They prefer direct and immediate communication, like email and phone calls. This is the first generation to introduce the idea of a work life balance.

Generation Y (born 1981-1995) is much like Generation X in their desire for balance. They view work as a “means to an end” but want to work with creative and bright people. They prefer a collaborative environment with immediate and open communication. To this group, change equals opportunity.

And then there are Millennials, also known as Generation Z, born 1995 and after. They prefer more in-person interactions and a coaching leadership style, but they communicate mostly digitally between email and text messaging. Biggest values are freedom, empathy and acceptance. They are accustomed to change and expect it.

How Generations Work Side-by-Side

Each of the generations have key characteristics and require different approaches to help integrate into a very diverse team. [In new research on generational differences in the workplace](#), some key figures were brought to light. Of the CFOs interviewed, 30% said **communication skills** were the biggest difference in generations, followed by **adapting to change** (26%), **technical skills** (23%) and **collaboration** (14%).

It should come as no surprise that communication differences can be a huge hurdle in the workplace. And it’s important to note that communication styles vary across generations as well as personality types. Some people are more reserved while others, like the later generations, want to communicate collaboratively and in-person. The biggest way we can come together and communicate with each other is to recognize these style preferences and work *with* them. Your project teams will likely include a mix of communication styles, so be sure to respect them and encourage open collaboration via whatever communication works best.

[Blending project teams is an excellent way to utilize the strengths of each generation](#), while also learning from them and building each other’s technical skills up. This may also mean

encouraging newer and younger Associates to take the lead on a presentation or project so that they can feel like their background and perspectives are valued.

Onward and Upward

Contributions from all generations is part of LAI's Culture and necessary to advance our mission: supply mission critical components safely, with the right quality, on time, and at the right costs.

In leadership, one size certainly does not fit all, and customizing is key. As a Leader, it's my responsibility to dive deeply into what makes our workforce so strong and what motivates us to meet our mission. Speaking to an audience of five diverse generations requires a different collaborative style. Over the past decade, I have taken a keen interest in understanding the motivating factors of each generation and modifying my messaging to be more inclusive. I have also been trained in communicating between races, genders, religions, social and economic status and ages. Collaborative, open innovation is important to me and to LAI's Culture, and should be important to you, too.

Technology has advanced drastically, but there is something to be said for experience. Everyone can learn together if we play to our strengths and remember we win and lose **as a team**. I have heard numerous times that there is no "I" in "TEAM." But the last time I counted, there are 13 "I" in TEAM. The team is a sum of its parts operating at a higher level, supporting the adage of synergistic impact: $1+1=3$ vs 2. Synergy doesn't happen because one says to do it, it happens when the individuals "care" (that's right, I went with a feeling) and bring the proper attitude. There are two types of attitude – one that is coachable and the other that is not. What type do you bring to the table?

As we move forward together and build LAI up, we must work to understand each other, too. Each of the generations is critical to our mission; one generation is no better or worse than the others. It's up to me and to you to lead in an environment that is both collaborative and inclusive. That's the only way we keep LAI on our upward trajectory while attracting the best and brightest Associates to join us on our mission.