

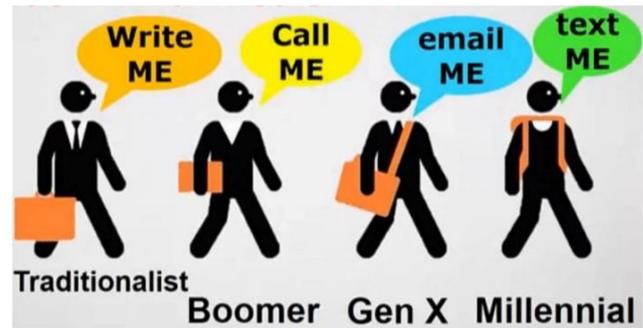
Traditionalists – Working With Other Generations

During the past 15 years, one of the major transformations within the modern workplace has been the scenario of having up to four distinct generations of employees working side-by-side. These generations are typically defined by the following approximate ranges* of birth years:

- **Traditionalists** (or Silent Generation) – born between 1925 and 1945.
- **Baby Boomers** – born between 1946 and 1964.
- **Generation X** – born between 1965 and 1981.
- **Millennials** (or Generation Y) – born between 1982 and 1999.

Based on the historical, cultural and technological trends that were prevalent during their formative years, persons from these generations often have different values, attitudes towards work, and preferred methods of communication . . .

In light of these differences, training programs aimed at “bridging the gaps” and working effectively with other generations have become increasingly popular in the realm of human resources management and workforce development.



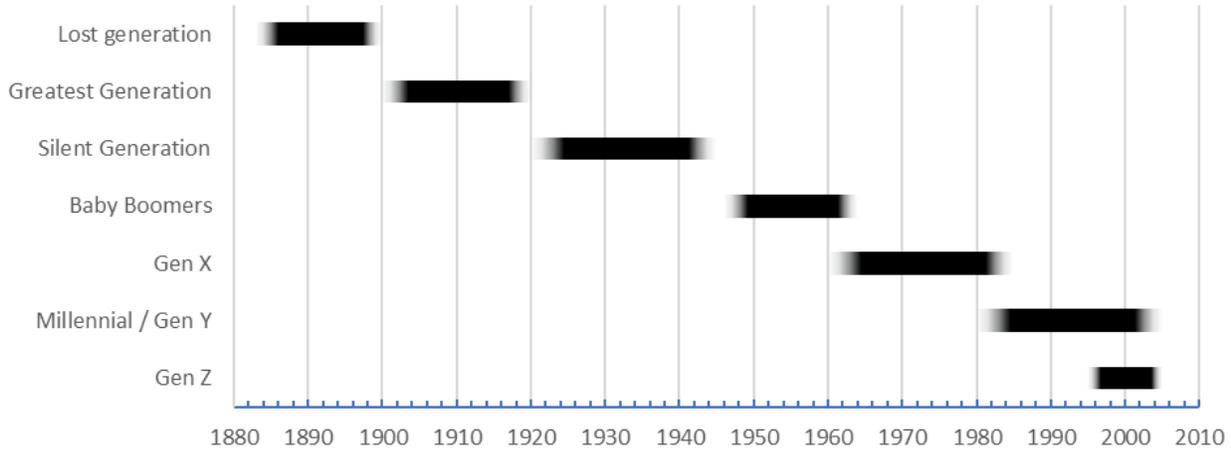
Who Are the Traditionalists?

Born between 1925 and 1945, the Traditionalists followed the Greatest Generation, and preceded the Baby Boomers (see chart on next page). Members of the Traditionalist generation are currently in their mid-to-late 70s or older, and most are now retired. However, some are still actively employed in the workforce, often in a part-time capacity and sometimes in senior leadership positions. In addition, there are still many Traditionalists within our families and communities, and among our customers.

Population data from 2017 indicated approximately 24 million Traditionalists living in the United States, representing about 7% of the U.S. population.

* These ranges should be considered approximate (rather than rigidly defined), as they can vary by several years depending on the source or publication.

Historical Context – Generations of the Western World



Traditionalist Trends: The Silent (Cautious) Generation

The Traditionalists and their relatives were impacted by a series of major historical challenges over a period of 15 years, including the Great Depression and high unemployment rates of the 1930s, and World War II during the first half of the 1940s. As a result, members of this generation typically reflect the themes of Tough Times, Sacrifice and Hard Work. Patriotism, teamwork, “doing more with less” and task-orientation very much define this generation.

A 1951 essay in *Time* magazine dubbed the people in this age group the Silent Generation because they were more cautious than their parents. They’ve also been called the Builders or the Lucky Few, as this was a relatively smaller generational population due to the financial hardships of the 1930s.

With early memories of difficult economic times for their families, Traditionalists value their jobs and are described as hard workers who have a high level of respect for authority. Many have worked for only one employer throughout most of their career, and have a strong sense of institutional loyalty. They typically prefer in-person interaction and formal written communications rather than electronic media to get tasks done.

Typical Generational Characteristics

- Frugal, polite and reserved.
- Strive for financial security.
- “Waste not, want not” attitude.
- Conformity and simplicity.
- Traditional family values.



- Patriotic.
- Understands the nobility of sacrifice for the common good.
- Patience and team work.
- Loyal to employers, and expect the same in return.
- Tends to believe promotions and raises should be largely based on job tenure or years of service – “working your way up the ladder.”
- Grew up during a time of formal written communication, such as letters and memos. Prefers face-to-face interaction, rather than using electronic media (email, text, social media, etc.).
- Strong work ethic based on productivity, timeliness and not drawing attention.
- May be reluctant to speak their minds or question instructions.
- May need help with adapting to newer or unfamiliar technologies.

Tips for Working with Traditionalists

- Acknowledge their experience, expertise and dedication.
- Seek and appreciate their insights.
- Use them as a resource when you have questions or problems.
- Acknowledge their respect for rules and hierarchy.
- Pay attention to the chain of command and its importance in getting things done in certain areas of your organization.
- Speak positively of the organization.
- Show interest in the work being done – projects, processes and results.
- Avoid making negative age-related comments.
- Be patient regarding their use of technology; provide training or tech support/assistance as needed.

While this information provides a good starting point for understanding Traditionalists, it’s important to realize that each person is a unique individual who is not defined entirely by their generational affiliation.



Additional Information

Each generation brings important perspectives and strengths to the work environment. The upcoming additional publications in this new *Workforce Development* category of the RON educational series will continue to highlight suggestions for improving inter-generational communication and maximizing the benefits of generational diversity in the workplace.



Some of the general recommendations are to:

- Have a conversation about generations.
- Avoid stereotyping, or making negative references to a person's age.
- Recognize the knowledge, skills and abilities of each individual.
- Leverage generational strengths by cross-populating teams.
- Encourage a positive work environment based on mutual respect.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for training and employee development.



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