



BY DAVID COHEN  
For Workplace News

# Generation Howdy Doody or Rubic's Cube?

OK class, time for a cross-generational test. Do you remember?

When Atari's "Pong" was a stare-of-the-art video game?

Watching Neil Armstrong walk on the moon?

The Brooklyn Dodgers moving to L.A.?

Alf?

Popping an 8-track into the deck on a summer night?

"What Willis was "talking about?"

Bearing your best score in Pac Man?

How amazing color TV was?

Your favorite pair of Wonder Woman or Superman Underoos?

Discovering Bob Dylan?

Depending on your answers (see end of article), you will be classified as either a Baby Boomer or Generation X/Y, which is also referred to, in combination, as the Nexus Generation. If you are part of today's diverse workforce, you know that the gap between those two groups can be very real.

Baby Boomers and The Nexus Generation view job security, career and "the company" in very different ways. But does that gap reflect fundamental differences in

values or just a difference in upbringing? Are we talking nature or nurture?

The debate matters if you are worried about developing a meaningful retention strategy. And if that isn't worrying you, here's why it should.

Boomers — currently filling most management roles — have 10 to 15 career years left before they ride off into the social security sunset. Then what? The Nexus Generation may be eager to fill those shoes but they don't have nearly enough feet.

Simply put, the number of jobs available will soon exceed the number of qualified and unqualified individuals.

How does that fit your company's future growth plans? How has this been accounted for in your leadership development and succession management activities? Thought so. All right, let's look at that meaningful retention strategy a little more closely.

The key to retaining key employees across generations is to understand the environment they were brought up in and the values that they hold — nature *and* nurture.

Baby Boomers are the children of Howdy Doody — it came on TV just before supper. After it was over, Baby Boomers ate with their parents, and sometimes even grandparents. If the conversation turned to jobs, the parents and grandparents — survivors of the Great Depression and the Second

World War — saw employment in simple terms: any job was a "good job."

Remember the Rubic's Cube? The Nexus Generation grew up in a world a bit like one. They overheard talk about careers and companies hinged on uncertainty: downsizing, the end of lifetime employment, global competition, mergers and bankruptcies. Companies, marriages and jobs could be taken apart, re-arranged, and put back together again just like a little block with shifting pieces.

We associate the Nexus Generation's lack of loyalty, high demands and restless nature with negative values — but they make sense given the formative experiences. Gen-Nexers are all too willing to move on to greener pastures. Not only are they more comfortable with change and more open to new opportunities, but their seniority makes them easy to let go.

In my years as an educator, I always thought the Nexus Generation should be applauded for their frankness and courage to say it like it is. It is no surprise that they have the courage to leave a job that makes them miserable or for demanding flexibility in benefits and working conditions.

But are they so very different from the Boomers when it comes to core values?

When asked what they are looking for in a company, most Gen-Nexers say "a Rio place to work." If you

ask for details, those answers always comes down to culture fit — a company worth contributing to, a boss they like, a job they can grow in. Simply put, one that aligns to their personal values.

Try asking Baby Boomers and you'll run into the same concerns. The gap is actually quite small — if any. After all, we are our parents, eventually!

Both groups feel at home in a company that shares their values and treats them the way they want to be treated. Retention of key talent — Boomer or Gen Nex — is a simple matter. Find out whether those key people hold the same values as the company's leadership. If they don't, then no amount of money can keep them for long; if they do, then they are predisposed to stay.

Now, ask them what it would take to make them happy in their jobs. Don't impose your views on them. Allow them to speak freely and openly.

The answers can be used to establish an "employee value proposition." You don't need to provide more in that proposition than what you can afford but you do need to open a dialogue. Finding common ground in core values and expressing those values through culture is a powerful way to create a satisfied and loyal work force. And job satisfaction always leads to higher productivity and loyalty regardless of generational "differences."

The answers:

Boomer: 2, 3, 5, 8

The Nexus Generation: 1,4,6,7,9

Both: 10

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