

# Workplace Generational Issues

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Margaret Regan is The FutureWork Institute President and CEO. She is an expert in helping large companies respond to the diverse workforce and marketplace and understand future trends, especially generational differences.

In a global study done by The FutureWork Institute, middle managers were asked about the most difficult diversity issue for them to manage. The generation gap was ranked number one.

Regan pointed out that two generations are pointing fingers at one another. The way they think about work is different. She gives two examples:

"A twenty-seven year old employee shows his resume to his supervisor/boss saying he is thinking about posting it on an internet job site. He asks his boss nicely for his opinion on his resume. His boss, of course, gets upset, but the younger employee looking for work while he is working is a common thing for many GenY/Millennial employees. The difference is whether they let you know or not."

The next example is about a middle aged boss who prints out all his e-mails and then reads them." The younger generation would say the older employee helps to cut down too many trees."

Actually, as long as everybody gets their work done we should respect others' working styles.

In my company I have a researcher who doesn't want to stay late at work. He would rather finish playing, and come back in the middle of the night to continue his work. The next morning, and on time, the report I need appears on my desk. Maybe, we don't agree with his working style, but he is one of my best researchers.

### Generation X/Y Stands Out

It's a different time. Additionally, email and new technology has helped widen the generational gap, particularly, between the post WWII generation and the X and Y generations.



Margaret Regan, CEO The FutureWork Institute, pictured with Shalini Mahtani, Founder and CEO of Community business.

But, Regan add, "This is a very competitive marketplace. Management must find new ways to respond to this younger generation, especially because we are trying to recruit the best talent."

Regan points out that Generation X and Y are different. "They're young, the best educated, they're willing to spend time on technology and learn how to build social networks. Everything has to be the latest. Therefore, in looking at their careers, they don't want to follow the earlier generation. They don't want to do things the same way. Their way of thinking is better suited for a fast changing world.

They want to find their own direction in life. They hope the organization can meet their expectations. They demand a lot. They are more focused on lifestyle. According to our research, even though the cultures of Europe, America, and Asia are different, we find a good number of similarities within the youngest generation at work."

Regan also commented that Hong Kong is no different. "Right now, many American companies already have policies and procedures to address these kinds of conflicts. Corporations in Asia are starting to look at this issue. Very few are seriously acting on it."

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