



**WORKERS FROM** different generations huddle around a conference table in this stock image. An Assurex Global survey points to distinct differences in how generations view the insurance business.

**“REALLY, WHAT WE IMPART TO OUR BOOMERS AND OUR TRADITIONALISTS IS THAT YOU GUYS NEED TO HAVE YOUR EYES OPEN AND REALLY SEE WHAT THESE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE CAPABLE OF DOING.”**

—Arlene Lieberman, a principal with Barney & Barney

1961 and 1981, had a positive view of the industry, the survey found. That's not exactly good news for the insurance industry in general, said Warren Wright, a vice president with LifeCourse. Solutions to the problem of how to recruit Millennials and Generation Xers into the industry will vary depending on the firm, he said.

“There is no silver bullet here,” Wright said. One step in the right direction in recruiting Millennials is to better understand them.

Millennials were the beneficiaries of one of the greatest child-protection movements in history. This generation sat in safety-engineered car seats and wore equally well-engineered helmets when they bicycled and rode their skateboards as kids.

The result of this was to create a generation with a well-developed sense of self-esteem and an aversion to risk-taking.

Millennials look for a lot of structure in the workplace. They like clearly outlined goals, work well in teams and look for acknowledgement to a greater degree than previous generations.

Workers of Generation X were left to fend for themselves as economic changes drove more mothers into the workplace. Known also by the phrase the “latchkey kids,” this generation is much more independent.

Economist and historian Neil Howe, founder of LifeCourse, said Generation X is the most individualistic and entrepreneurial of the three—think Michael J. Fox's Alex P. Keaton character in the 1980's television series “Family Ties,” who became a young Republican rather than a liberal like his boomer parents.

Howe's work was a big influence on Horton, who pushed the Assurex Global team to do more work on the issue of generational differences.

“Generation Xers tend to be very much loners, they tend to do their best work if they are left alone whereas Millennials tend to do their best work in a team,” Horton said. “So if you make the mistake of putting a bunch of Generation Xers in a team and give them a mission you are not likely to get as much success.”

The combination of an aging boomer generation followed by two generations that are motivated differently makes it a challenge for agency owners looking at succession planning, Horton said.

Tim Templeton, president and chief operating officers of Senn Dunn Insurance, based in Greensboro, N.C., saw the same survey results. But his agency also gets high marks for how it is handling those differences.

## Summary

- Millennials and Generation Xers have a jaundiced view of insurance.
- Using different communications channels is a good strategy to unify the generations.
- Give Millennials some credit, they might have something to teach you.

# Across the Generations

**Agency owners have their work cut out for them in bridging gaps between generations, according to a new survey.** *By Dan Reynolds*

As agency owners and managers position themselves for success in the coming years, they would benefit by spending more time studying generational differences in the workplace, according to a new survey.

In particular, owners and partners might want to look at how those differences affect a team's ability to perform internally and with clients. Baby boomers, Generation X and Millennials may all work under the same roof, but they bring very different approaches to the workplace, according to the survey.

An even more striking survey finding was that employees and partners within the Assurex Global system reported that those differences posed challenges at a rate much higher than the rates in other industries nationally.

A sample of full-time employees across all industries reveals that 54 percent of them felt that generational differences posed challenges “sometimes” or “often.” Among the employees at Assurex Global agencies, that percentage stood at 72 percent.

The results of the survey, conducted by LifeCourse Associates on behalf of Assurex Global, did not come as a surprise to agency owners and executives interviewed by Risk & Insurance<sup>®</sup> for this story.

Success in recruiting new blood into the independent agency system will depend on

understanding these generational differences and the ability to act on these differences effectively, those sources said.

“As a group we are really struggling with the perpetuation of our businesses,” said Glenn Horton, president and CEO of the Horton Group, an Assurex Global brokerage based in Orland Park, Ill.

The differences that agency owners see come down to how different generations approach their work and lifestyles.

On one end of the spectrum are the baby boomers, that post-World War II generation that was born roughly between 1946 and 1964. Baby boomers are associated with the rapid social change of the 1960's and 1970's.

They had a much more positive view of the insurance industry as a place to work than the other generations, with 43 percent of the boomers surveyed viewing the industry positively.

On the other end of the spectrum are the Millennials. Pegged as those workers born after 1982, Millennials in the Assurex Global network, at a 24 percent rate, have a much less positive view of the industry than do boomers.

When it comes to the insurance industry, the opinions of Generation X, a generation squeezed between the boomers and the Millennials, aren't much rosier than those of the Millennials, the Assurex Global survey revealed. Just 31 percent of Generation X workers, those workers born between

Templeton said his company is innately fraternal. He described his own positive experiences with a mentor (they still keep in touch) as being a positive influence on how he and his company approach intra-agency dynamics.

"We are a fairly social group," Templeton said.

"Our group will reach out to each other and they will have a drink after work and get together and vent and talk and share," Templeton said.

Rather than being driven by the work done by Howe and other social scientists, Templeton said his

company, which was founded in 1927, has always paid attention to the needs of the incoming generations. "None of us started this business," Templeton said.

"The business has always been made available to us at a young age and we have made it available to our partners at a young age," he said.

Another Assurex Global agency executive who is conscious of the differences between the generations is focusing, among many other things, on the importance of how the different generations are communicated to, not only internally,

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—Tim Templeton, president and COO, Senn Dunn Insurance



but in a client-facing sense.

"When we are preparing for and conducting meetings, we are really multimessaging," said Marshall Wunderlich, COO of the Pittsburgh-based HDH Group.

"We are going to be considering the audience," Wunderlich said. "If the audience is of cross generations, during that meeting we are going to be delivering the message differently for each group in the room."

"We spend a good bit of time reminding [Millennials] that the other generations are not used to as much written messaging like text messaging and brief emails," Wunderlich said.

Older producers, he said, want phone calls and more face-to-face communication.

On the other side of the coin,

employees much more frequently, moving to performance reviews every six months as opposed to annually.

Assurex Global agency owners are learning to mix Millennials in with baby boomers and Generation X producers in teams to help them learn to solve problems together and work more effectively together.

Above all, these generational differences should be looked at opportunistically, said Howe and Meg Allwein, a vice president and chief quality officer for Assurex Global who is based in Columbus, Ohio.

Howe and Allwein advise agency owners and executives to push aside the prejudices that different generations might form about one another just because different generations use technology or view



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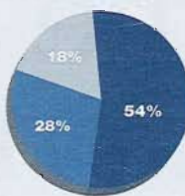
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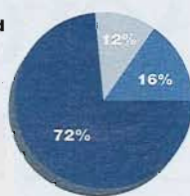
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### Perceived Generational Differences in the Workplace

National Benchmark



Assurex Global



The National Benchmark consists of a nationally representative sample of full-time employees across a variety of job roles and industries. LifeCourse Associates conducted the survey in August 2011.

baby boomers and the Generation X agents need to make room for how the Millennials communicate and the corresponding speed at which they are accustomed to learning, said Ron Wanglin, Chairman of Bolton & Co., an Assurex Global agency based in Pasadena, Calif.

Wanglin said the Millennials, because of their desire to achieve success quickly, also have higher expectations on returns and those expectations need to be managed, he said.

"Whether you are a new producer or an old producer this is a tough business," Wanglin said.

Wanglin said that means his team works to over-communicate with Millennials. He and his team make the effort to keep reaching out to them, giving them feedback on their performance, managing their expectations and reminding them that there are limits on that return due to a fiercely competitive business and the tough economy.

HDH's Wunderlich said he, too, is communicating with agents and other

the world differently.

Those differences are "true but you have to look at them in a framework," Allwein said.

"Why are they that way? Maybe they are not as bad as we think they might be if we understand them better and then maximize their strengths and what they are looking for," she said.

Her view was echoed by Arlene Lieberman, a San Diego-based principal with Assurex Global member Barney & Barney.

"Really, what we impart to our boomers and our traditionalists is that you guys need to have your eyes open and really see what these young people are capable of doing," she said.

"Their take is not wrong, it's not bad," she said. "It's different and they are going to give us new insight into some issues that we need to look at a little closer."

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