

# Think Tank: Bridging the generation gaps – Generation X

## Speakers:

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Erica: You are listening to the ThinkTank Podcast. Right now, we're doing a special series on generations and this is part two, where we talk about Generation X.

My name is, Erica Hanlon. I'm a licensed professional counselor and life coach. And I'm joined by, Angee, Communications Director and, Lynn Borteck, licensed clinical social worker. So, it kind of depends on which website or which source you're looking at. But generally speaking, people who fall into Generation X, were born between the years of 1965 to 1980. But we wanted to learn more about what it looks like and what it feels like to be in Generation X. I for one, I'm right on the end and I don't know that I'm the most representative of my generation. Angee, I think you and I were both born in the same year. So, we went and invited a couple of people to talk to us about their experiences as Generation Xers.

Speaker 1: The Gen Xers are a unique group when it comes to work ethic. How we work and standards we set for ourselves. We ask questions, we're resourceful and take ownership of tasks and responsibilities. Gen Xers unfortunately, do not advocate as much for pay. We are grateful to have jobs and tend to more easily adjust to changes at work. We go with the flow, understand change is a given, we're flexible and do what we're told. It's an old-school mentality of following the rules, and if you complain, it's a huge deal. It takes a lot to get to that point.

Speaker 2: I define Generation X as being a generation with expectations very similar to the expectations of their parents. I think of Generation X as largely in line with their parent's understanding about how... Kind of how the world is supposed to work. How their lives are supposed to work. I think the primary change among Generation X is the rise of two-income

families and women being much more prominent in the workforce, but, nevertheless I see them as sort of buying into generally the same sets of values and expectations, and kind of trade-offs that their parents expected.

Lynn: I think that's really interesting what they both said, because I've actually read that the Gen Xers, are the middle children of boomers and Millennials, and that they have a lot of personality, and work characteristics of both. And so, I think the people we interviewed kind of said that, that they can, kind of really align with their parents and they seem to be kind of a combination.

Angee: Yeah. I think that's a good point. Because, being a Gen Xer myself, even though I am a little bit more on the borderline, I always found that I have a really, really strong work ethic, but at the same time, I have a large sense of independence. And I don't know if that's about my generation, but I do feel like... You see others from this generation that tend to have a stronger work ethic, but I do think that work-life balance also is important to me. And it started to come into more play in the workforce during Generation X.

Erica: Yeah, I think that there's this sort of... Most of us, well, I for one and a lot of my friends, grew up in homes where we had, both parents were working. A lot of us grew up in homes where our parents were getting divorced. And so, I think that there also was a big skepticism about institutions, even just like marriage and religion, and politics and all of these kinds of things. But we also... I agree with you, Angee, that there was very much this sort of sense of having to be kind of resilient and then to be resourceful, and depend on yourself, be self-sufficient. That whole like latchkey kid thing, I think became a thing during our generation, where kids were going home from school and because both parents worked, nobody was home. And so, you just had a key and you let yourself in, and you ate a snack and watched TV until your parents got home.

Lynn: That's such a big change from baby boomer times, of course. When mom was always home, probably in the midst of making dinner from scratch or something like that. But I loved Angee that you mentioned work-life balance. Because, really it's the Gen Xers who even invented the idea of work-life balance. The baby boomers were workaholics. And they were really... As we were saying striving to get ahead all the time. And it was the Gen Xers who started to back away from that and want to have work-life balance.

Erica: I really like this category of being the middle child. 'Cause I think that really resonates for me. When I was growing up and my parents took me to restaurants. My parents have horror stories about taking me to restaurants and they didn't have kid's menus, and they didn't have things for like kids to do. So they just stopped eating out, and then when my brother came along in 1984. Restaurants started to provide things like kid's menus, and crayons, and things for kids to. So it's almost like the world became a little bit more family-friendly and child-friendly. For people who came after us but that really wasn't a thing, for those of us who are in Generation X.

We're just in the middle. And from what I've read, it seems like we're pretty evenly divided as far as politics and beliefs and values. Its... In a lot of ways, we align very closely with boomers, and in other ways we aligned very closely with Millennials. It's very much sort of kind of 50/50, half and half. I think this sort of middle child idea makes a lot of sense.

Angee: I think the point that Lynn was talking about on the latchkey kid mentality, for me in my experience, I think that also ties into the education aspect. My mom didn't go to college when she was younger. And as the generations progressed, and our family progressed and she had the ability to go to college - she got a scholarship - so, she went back to college and my dad was working full-time. And so we really had that mentality we had to come home and make our own food and stuff like that. So, that also shows the progression of the different... The family model, right? My mom was going to go back to school to get her education. And that put us in a situation where we had to kind of... not necessarily raise ourselves, but we had to be more independent.

Erica: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Lynn: The other way that it changed the family dynamic, is that everybody's sitting down to dinner together at 5:30 p.m. or whatever was your family's time. Didn't happen so much anymore because different schedules, mom and dad might both be working and meals were often on the run. And that really changed things too. And I'm sure that Gen X kids felt it.

Angee: That's a great point. Yeah, I remember eating pizza for two weeks. Every night for dinner, my dad would bring pizza home because, my mom was doing projects for her college courses. And we'd have friends over... "You want to eat dinner with us?" And they're like, "Yeah." And they ask, "What are you having?" And I'm like, "Pizza?" And they'd be like, "Yeah!" And I'd be like "Eh." It's definitely something.

Speaker 1: I work with different generations. Many younger, pros to working with the younger generation, are having the energy to innovate, learn new things. And new ways of doing things many are technology gurus using the latest programs and just fast in general. They tend to do a great job of advocating for more pay and seeking that next level, position and opportunities. They are not afraid of going for a new job or switching companies. Cons to working with the younger generation. Sometimes they can move or take action too quickly, they may not want to take the time to pause, reflect, identify gaps or considerations. Some assume that everybody knows about and is using the latest technology. The younger generation can come across as entitled seeking what is a company or their manager going to do for them. And if they're not happy, they will let you know.

Speaker 2: I think that at least for most of us our experience with the older generations in our businesses has been largely positive in that they seem to have what one would hope for from older people. The wisdom of experience and, as expected a somewhat more straight-laced way of carrying themselves and there's more perhaps rigid separation between work and home or work and life. And to some degree of what, what seems a more diligent perhaps and dedicated work ethic. My experience and again, my industry is that I think attracts a certain type. But my experience on the Millennial side has been nothing but positive. So I hear people talking about dealing with difficulties in terms of work ethic with Millennials and their expectations of how fast they'll rise, without putting in the work or that they... Just that their values aren't there, but my experience has been largely the opposite.

I think if anything, my complaint would be simply that the reliance on electronic communication is greater than I would like. But I'm a bad test case for that because everyone's reliance on electronic communication is more than I would like. So, I just when I try to target the various people whose behaviors don't necessarily match what I would expect from someone in the workplace, there doesn't seem to be much of a through line between age and behavior. And I certainly amongst the Millennials, don't see anything that looks negative in terms of hiring. And I hear it all the time, but it just sounds to me like the crankiness of an older generation that never seems to think that the younger one worked as hard, did as much, knows as much learns it the way they did or anything. My experience has been that the Millennials step up when they're led properly.

Angee: I found it very interesting that they had some different responses here, right? So, the woman seemed to think that there were some clear pros

and cons between, Millennials and also boomers but I think she talked more towards Millennials and the younger generation, and I think the gentleman seem to think that it's more of a style of leadership and management, versus to actually see those differences distinctly. I have seen both, I do think that more people, these days, even in my generation are starting to become glued to their phones. Really dependent on their phones, but at the same time I do think that the younger generation being born with social media tends to, to have that natural gravitation towards that more so than our generation or the boomer generation.

Erica: I mean, one thing that kind of spoke to me was this sort of rise of technology, right? And the importance that technology plays. And I think that this is probably a universal theme across all generations and all of these podcasts is just really the developing and growing role of technology and social media in our lives. I for one, didn't get an email address, that wasn't even a thing until I went off to college in the mid '90s. And even then it was like, "Oh, what's the internet? This is the internet." And then there wasn't even really anything to search for on there, because there were so few websites. I remember being like, "Amazing, this whole internet thing." And then it was like, "Well, there's nothing to even look for. I don't even know how to use this. This is super weird."

Angee: Yeah, I totally remember that experience. I remember doing net meeting for the first time, that was the old program that you would use to do video conferencing. And it was just the coolest thing to me back then. But, I didn't even have a cell phone until I was in my early '20s, mid '20s.

Erica: Yeah. I remember MapQuest. MapQuest came out and it was like, "Oh my gosh, you don't need to use a paper map. This is so amazing." Yeah.

Lynn: Well, yeah. I mean, even I was finding my way someplace yesterday that I didn't know where I was going. And I was thinking, how did we do this before? You know, before we had Google maps or my nav system, I don't even remember... My husband has a glove compartment full of paper maps, but they don't make any sense when you're really trying to find a specific address. It's crazy, when you think about it.

Erica: And everything was paper. Like newspapers, my mother-in-law still sends us newspaper clippings, of articles that she thinks will be interesting to us.

Angee: Yeah. There's been some major, major changes in the media.

Erica: So, I think that's one thing that's kind of interesting about Gen X, is just that we really are in that middle place. Where, when we were kids if you talked on the phone, you talked on the phone and it was like a huge deal. Even just to get like a cordless phone that your home phone, much less a cell phone. And then music on the go. If you had a Walkman that was amazing. And then the Walkman turned into a Discman, so you had CDs. I tried to explain to the other day radio stations to my children. And I started to say, it's like the TV channels. And I realized my children don't even know what TV channels are, because all we do is like streaming services and different apps. They don't even know what a TV channel is. It's crazy.

Lynn: Okay. Well, do you want to know really ancient is when we had the first TV in our neighborhood and it was such an amazing thing that my friends used to come over and just sit and watch the TV. But back in those days, if you wanted to change the channel and P.S, I think there were five channels. You didn't have a remote, you got up and you went over to the TV and turn the dial to another station.

Erica: I think one thing that's really funny about being a Gen Xer is to see this quote/unquote war between the boomers and the Millennials, right. Where they're like "Arrrrrgggghhh!" And the Gen Xers, it's sort of like, we're just sort of sitting back and like, "Oh." And I think it's because we sort of have a foot in each generation a little bit, especially with the changes in technology and everything.

Angee: That's a good point. And it makes me kind of think about what the guy said. About, he just thought it was the older generation being grumpy about the younger generation. So, maybe when the next generation...The next youngest generation comes around, we're going to be the grumpy, the grumpy folks, talking about the younger generation. Maybe it is a cycle. I don't know.

Lynn: No. I've actually been using that idea to comfort myself during this crazy time with the pandemic and where everything feels almost apocalyptic. Where it's just, things feel so bad in so many ways. And then I think, wait a minute I think every older generation feels that way. That it's never going to be the same, things are going to be hard and difficult for our grandchildren. And then somehow that cycle just keeps going on and people, things come back and things get good and then things get difficult again and things get good. And I really believe it is a cycle.

Angee: Yeah. I mean, change is constant, but people are resilient. I thought it was interesting, the sense of entitlement that was mentioned. And it wasn't so much as give me a promotion. Give me a better job. But it was

more like, What can you give me? And they're not just looking about money. They're looking at that with benefits. I think a lot of the younger generation really looks at these different types of benefits, is there an education benefit? Is there, some kind of wellness benefit and in that way, I think a lot of younger generations, Millennials and Gen Zs choose companies based on the benefit packages that they have to offer them. And in a sense, they feel that they're entitled to a good benefit package.

Lynn: I think that's a really good observation and it kind of brings me back to what Erica's dad was saying in the baby boomer age that the benefits were like, the GI Bill and various grants and loans and stuff like that, some of which have gone away. And so I think maybe the younger generation needs to be a little more aggressive about where they're going to get these things from where they're going to get their healthcare from where they're going to get their paid time off and stuff like that. And so maybe, that comes across as entitlement or maybe they're just really being real.

Erica: So, that concludes our portion on Generation X. Join us for the next segment where we talk about the Millennials.

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