

Work Ethics of Different Generations

Consider Bob Taylor, a faculty member, and Suzette Lewis, a postdoctoral fellow. Bob supervises Suzette’s work. He feels that Suzette is not dedicated to the job and is disrespectful to him. On her part, Suzette feels that she demonstrates her dedication to the job because she gets her work done efficiently and on time. She views Bob as a colleague, even though he is her supervisor, and often uses her own judgment on issues rather than deferring to his. Why is there dissonance in this relationship? One reason may be that they value different things because of the era in which they were born. Bob was born in the 1950s and Suzette in the 1970s. This disparity alone can create differences in how they view work and what they value.

There are currently four generations of workers in the workplace. Each generation sees work differently and values different things. The following matrix compares the work ethic theme for each generation and the values they bring to work.

Generation	Description of Work Ethic	Values They Bring to Work
Born before the end of World War I (1945)	Dedicated to the job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are dedicated, hard workers ▪ Believe in following rules and abiding by the law ▪ Show respect for authority ▪ Are patient and do not need instant gratification
Born after World War II but before 1960	Ambitious and driven to succeed on job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have an optimistic outlook ▪ Hard workers who want personal gratification from work that they do ▪ Believe in self-improvement and growth
Born between 1960 and 1980	Want a balance between job and personal life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aware of diversity and think globally ▪ Want to balance work with other parts of life ▪ Tend to be informal ▪ Rely on themselves ▪ Are practical in their approach to work ▪ Want to have fun at work ▪ Like to work with latest technology
Born after 1980	Dedicated to the job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have an optimistic outlook ▪ Are self-assured and achievement – focused ▪ Believe in strong morals and serving the community ▪ Aware of diversity

For further reading:

- *Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace*, by Ron Zemke
- *When Generations Collide: Who They Are, Why They Clash, How to Solve the Generational Puzzle at Work*, by Lynne Lancaster