



20 Fascinating Facts About Generation X

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Relocation at the speed of life.

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20 FASCINATING FACTS ABOUT GENERATION X

INTRODUCTION

Last year, we wrote an eBook about Millennials, the traits and trends that make them unique and the impact they are having on the workplace and, consequently, HR. The book was well-received and we were pleased with the discussions that followed, most of which enforced the idea that, in a multi-generational workforce, it's important to make an effort to understand one another.

As we reviewed our transferee base, we realized that an overwhelming majority of the people we move are ages 35-50. You may know them as Generation X.

And, what do we know about Generation X? We've all heard the stereotypes. Generation X is full of hopeless, cynical slackers who resent the Baby Boomers for their materialism, and the Millennials for their narcissism. They are loners who can't work in teams and are difficult to manage because they don't respect authority.

Sound harsh? That's because it is harsh. Generation X has an image problem, even though none of the stereotypes prove true in real life. In fact, Generation X deserves our respect – and may just be the generation to lead us into more prosperous times.

Generation X is the smallest of the three generations in the workplace today. Born between the 1960s and the 1980s, Generation X is flanked, and dwarfed, by the Millennials and the Baby Boomers. In the next 10-12 years many of this group will stepping into the spotlight as they take on leadership roles.

Thus, it's critical that companies look beyond stereotypes to understand how generations interact in the workplace and which benefits, including relocation, will be critical components for recruitment and retention strategies.

To help, our team poured through articles and blog posts to pull the most salient information about Generation X. In the chapters that follow, we share 20 fascinating findings about Generation X, their potential in the workplace and their concerns and motivators.



Gen-X is relatively small.

According to Pew Research, there are approximately 65 million Gen-Xers. This is relatively small compared to the 77 million Baby Boomers who came before them and the 83 million Millennials who were born after them.



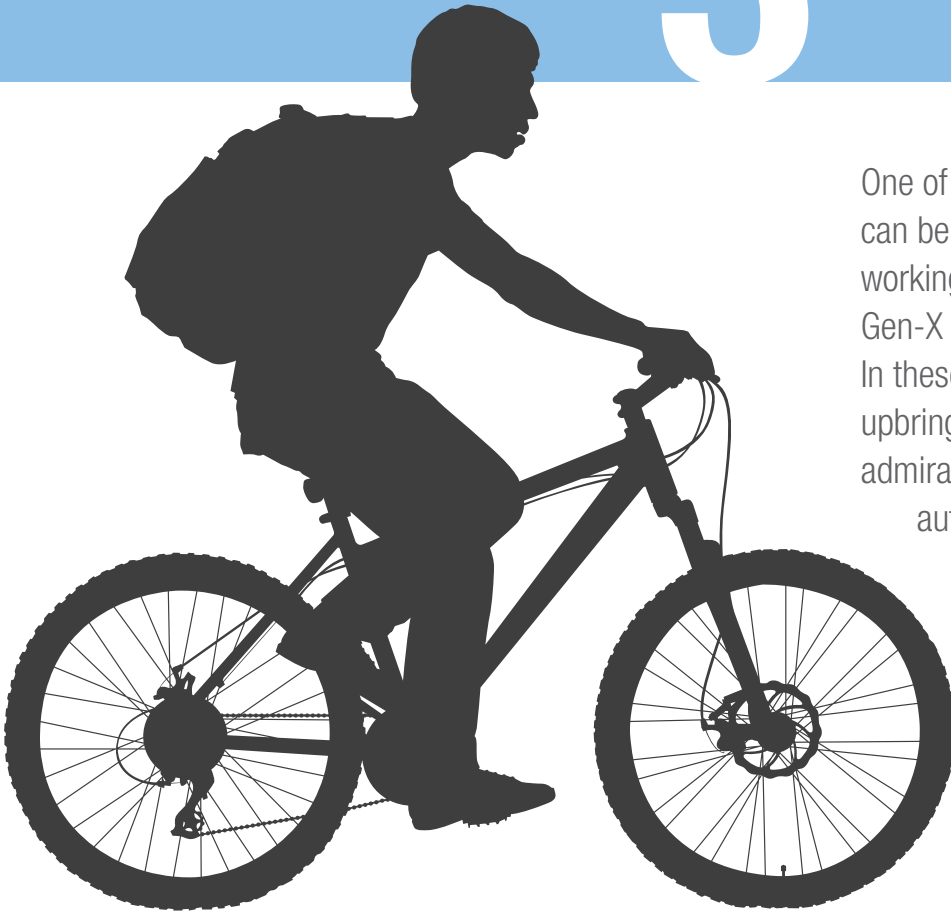
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Gen-X feels ignored.

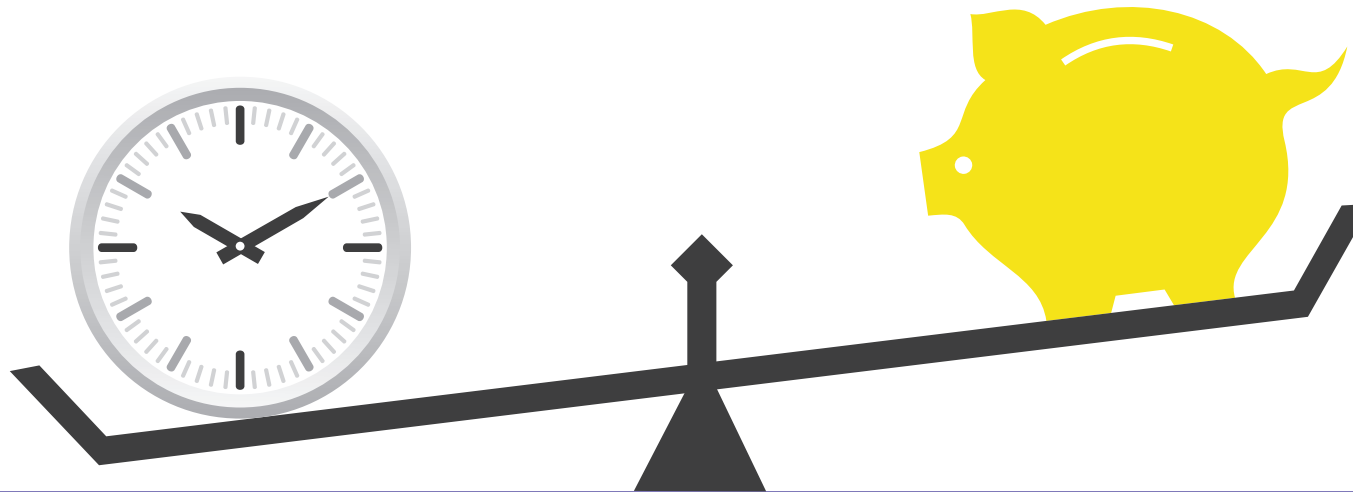
Because of the relatively small size of Gen-X, and all the media hype around the Baby Boomers and the Millennials, Gen-X feels like an ignored middle child. As you know, there are plenty of resources regarding how to manage Boomers and Millennials in the workplace, but few focus on Gen-X, even though this is the generation entering senior level ranks today.

3

Gen-X is a latch key generation.



One of the defining characteristics of Gen-X is their autonomy. This can be attributed to growing up in homes where both parents were working long and late hours, leaving the kids to fend for themselves. Gen-X children were not coddled and they quickly learned self-reliance. In these ways, Gen-X has benefitted from the latch key nature of their upbringing. But, every pro has a con. While their independence is admirable, Gen-Xers can also be perceived as loners who don't respect authority. When it comes to relocation, you can expect Gen-X transferees to try and handle everything on their own. While some may be experienced enough to do so, you will want to get out in front of this behavior so that they actually use the help being provided.



4

Gen-X views work as a job, not a life.

According to the Ernst & Young¹ study, Gen-X ranks workplace flexibility as the most important perk they can receive and they are prepared to walk away from a job if flexibility is not provided. This is consistent with the notion that Gen-X views work as a job, not a life. And, it makes sense. Baby Boomers are workaholics who put in long hours, often to the detriment of home life. Gen-X remembers the absence of their parents and may even feel wounded by it. They also lived through the divorce boom and were among the first to experience custody battles. As such, Gen-Xers don't want to repeat the pattern and, while they work hard, they do not want to do so to the detriment of their personal life. Be prepared to offer HR programs that offer flexibility. Further, your Gen-X transferee may not prioritize the job over their child's education or their spouses' career. If you want them to move for you, be sure to offer a wide breadth of support services for settling-in so that they can rest assured they are doing the right thing for their family.

5

Speaking of family, Gen-X is split on children.



Out of all your transferees, Gen-X are the most likely to have school-aged children who will need school finding services for their kids. But, younger Gen-Xers may be bucking the trend. According to a study done by the Center for Work Life Policy², Gen X women have/are actively choosing to not have children (43% of women and 32% of men). They prefer to focus on their romantic relationships and their career. Further, the economic downturn several years ago has caused would-be families to put off children. Studies have also shown that Gen X employees are working an average of 10 more hours per week than they were five years ago and, since family is important to Gen-X, this may be another reason why so many couples have decided against having them.

So what does this mean for relocation? It means that while many of your Gen-X transferees will have children, some may not. This reinforces the need to have a flexible policy. If a school finding service is not to be used, what other benefit can you offer the employee?



6

But they do have aging parents.

Gen X is defined as the population born between the 1960s and early 80s. This means that many of them have aging parents that may be close to considering assisted living communities or retirement homes. While this may not seem like something to consider in the workplace, or with regards to relocation, it is.

Will your relocation benefits offer elder care services? If a transferee has a parent or parents in a 'home' or assisted living community, is your company prepared to provide resources so that the employee can find a suitable place in the destination city? The condition of your employees parents very well may influence their decision to accept a relocation. In a situation that is stressful on its own, it's best to provide as much assistance as possible so that the employee can focus more on the job at hand






They are not impressed with authority for authority's sake.

ValueOptions, a behavioral health care and wellness company that analyzes generations suggests that, because Gen-X was independent from childhood, they lean more towards autonomy and less towards authority. They prefer to be self-reliant, which may come across as disrespectful towards workplace authority³.

In terms of relocation, Gen X may appreciate having various options based on their personal needs, rather than a one-size-fits-all policy with strict guideline. While the employer will still have authority over budget and benefits offered, the Gen-X transferee thrives on making big decisions regarding their move independently. Further, particularly stubborn Gen-Xers may stray from protocol and attempt to start the move on their own. It's important to communicate to them the benefits of having a third party company help them, instead of just mandating the process.

8

Gen-X will work around authority and use influence to get what they want.



It is true that Gen X is not impressed by high authority titles, but that doesn't mean they are disrespectful towards their superiors. However, it does mean that they may find ways to get their way in the workplace. Generations at Work, an online resource about the different generations, says Gen X is known to push the boundaries at work to see how far they can go⁴. They often "reject the rules" since they are not afraid of authority. Gen-X employees believe in efficiency and getting the job done correctly, but quickly. Since their work production is impressive, they may use that as a way to get things that they want, whether it be flexibility, a seat at the upper level management meeting or extra time off.

Consider offering incentives for a relocation. While a sign-on bonus may be a nice offer, money is not typically the driving force for engaging Gen X. It may be a better idea to offer a project lead, extra vacation time, or a flex work week. Further, you should be on the look out for exception requests from this generation. If they don't hear what they want from you, they may try to go through their boss – or vice versa. Be sure to keep record of any and all exceptions and to train business unit leaders what is, and is not, an acceptable exception request.



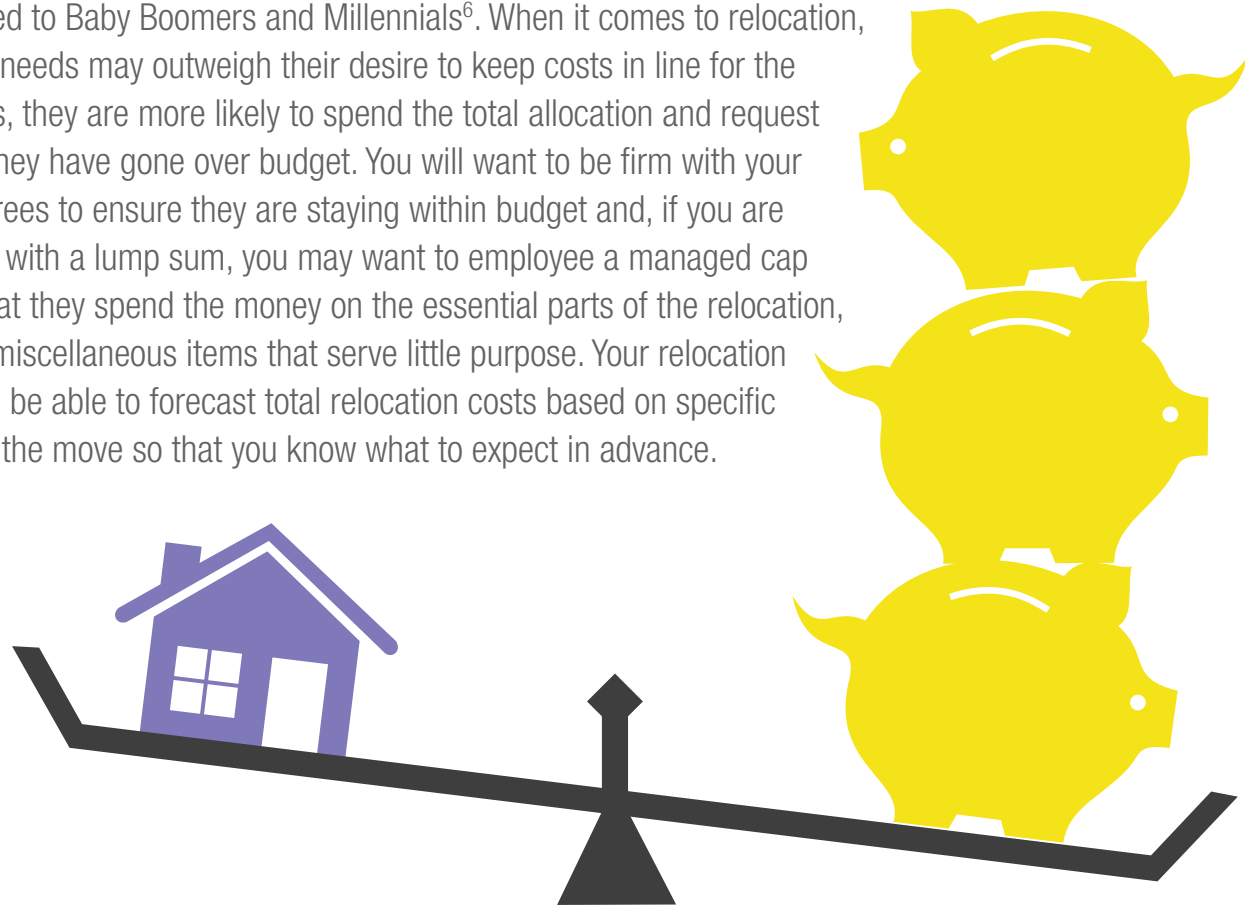
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Gen-X may fade when it comes to executive presence.

Gen-Xers are notoriously individualistic. At work, they may go unseen on a daily basis as they spend a lot of time on their own, getting their work done quietly and with little fanfare. They are not as authoritative as the Boomers, nor are they as energetic and vocal as the Millennials. In fact, Ernst & Young found that Gen-Xers are perceived to have the least amount of executive presence when compared to other generations⁵.

10 While spending too much money.

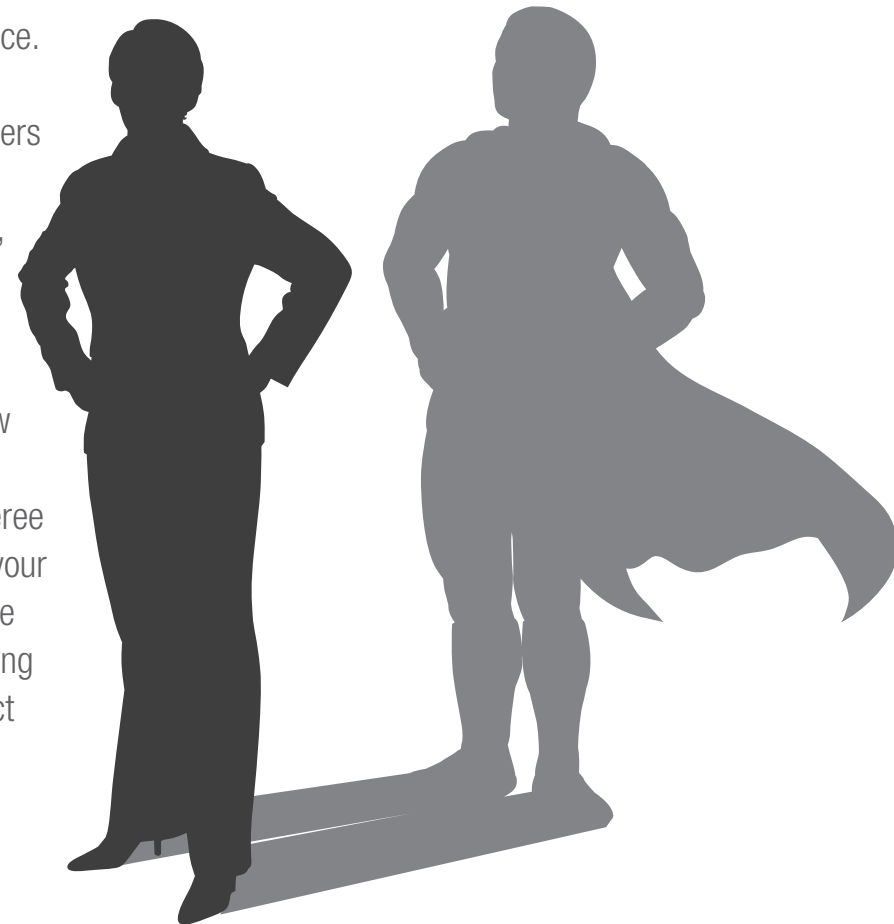
According to Ernst and Young, Gen-Xers are the least cost effective generation when compared to Baby Boomers and Millennials⁶. When it comes to relocation, their personal needs may outweigh their desire to keep costs in line for the business. Thus, they are more likely to spend the total allocation and request exceptions if they have gone over budget. You will want to be firm with your Gen-X transferees to ensure they are staying within budget and, if you are moving Gen-X with a lump sum, you may want to employee a managed cap program so that they spend the money on the essential parts of the relocation, instead of on miscellaneous items that serve little purpose. Your relocation partner should be able to forecast total relocation costs based on specific needs prior to the move so that you know what to expect in advance.



But they are your superstars.

Without a doubt, Gen-X has a lot to offer in your workplace. According to E&Y, most of the respondents in their study (70%) believed that Gen-X are the most effective managers in the workforce. They are also ranked the highest when it comes to revenue generator (58%), adaptability (49%), problem solving (57%) and collaboration (53%)⁷.

These are the folks you want to be leading your troops, whether you are bringing on a new hire, setting up a new plant or striking deals in a foreign country. As such, they probably make up the bulk of your mid to top tier transferee base, and for good reason. You will want to ensure that your relocation policies are competitive enough to entice these folks to relocate when you need them, instead of expecting younger, less experienced talent to have the same impact for a lower cost.



12

And they are ready to embrace senior management positions.

Not only are Gen-Xers at the right age to climb the management ladder, they are perceived to have the right attributes for it. Despite their reputation for independence and autonomy, the E&Y study found that they are team players (65%), nurturing and essential for development opportunities (56%) and relationship builders (53%)⁸. These traits are critical for managing both up and down in an organization. Do note, however, that their readiness to take on very senior positions is also a point of contention. Gen-X feels that the longevity of the Baby Boomers in the workforce is impacting their leadership opportunities.



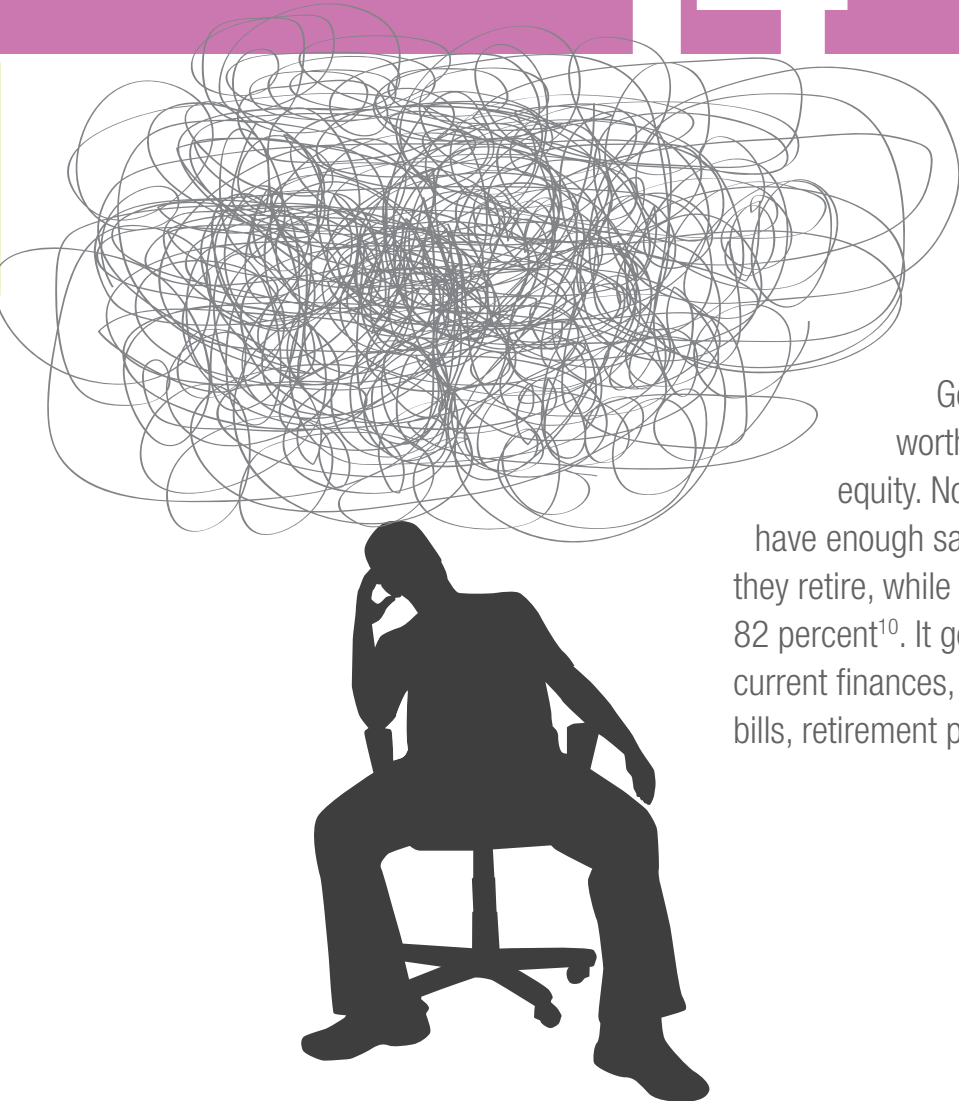
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But they may be disengaged.

Despite being effective employees, a good portion of Gen-X workers are disengaged in the workplace. According to Gallup's most recent State of the American Workplace report, 70% of Gen X employees are either disengaged (51%) or actively disengaged (19%). The study also shows that those workers who are not actively managed are more likely to be disengaged⁹. Thus, even though Gen-Xers like to be loners, they still need to be managed. More importantly, they need to understand the corporate mission and feel tied to it. The more they can relate to the purpose of an action, the more likely they are to be engaged. Thus, if you can show why the relocation is important, how it relates to the overall mission of the firm and what their particular role is in the initiative (or new job), they will be more likely to accept the relocation with enthusiasm. Further, and perhaps most importantly, if you can show what growth opportunities will result from the move they will be more likely to embrace the program.

14

And, they are worried.
About everything.

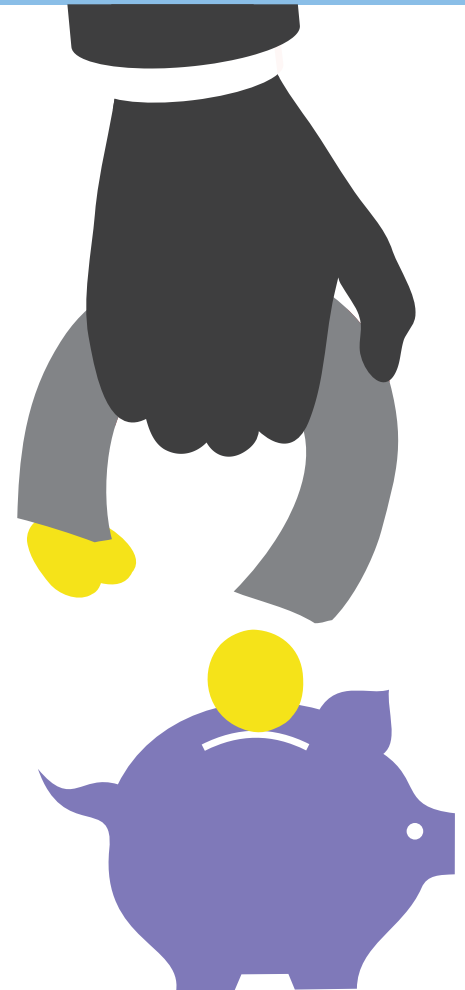


In the most recent downturn, Gen-X was hit harder than any other generation. All of the financial security that Gen-X was able to acquire in the 90s boom went bust. In fact, according to Pew Charitable Trusts, Gen-Xers lost 45% of their pre-recession net worth. They also lost a median 27% of their home equity. Now, forecasts indicate that Gen-Xers will only have enough savings to replace half of their income when they retire, while the leading edge of the boomers can replace 82 percent¹⁰. It goes without saying, they are worried about current finances, home values, college payments, medical bills, retirement planning and so much more.

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So, they are frugal.

Because they have lost so much of their net worth, Gen-X is more frugal when it comes to personal expenses than they have been in the past. For this reason, they will be looking to the relocation policy to cover the vast majority of their expenses. Further, they are less likely to move to a higher cost area. This is both good and bad. On the one hand, it will be hard to convince your Gen-X employees to relocate to a high cost area. You will likely need provide a significant cost of living adjustment. On the other hand, if you are moving employees to a lower cost area, you may have an easier sell to your Gen-X employees. By touting the cost savings they will reap from lower living expenses, you will appeal to their need for financial security.



16 And a little cynical.

And how can they not be? Gen-Xers were the guinea pigs for huge trend shifts in the country that impacted home life, as well as the business environment. They have lived through the recession in the 80s, the dot com bust in 2001 and, now, the Great Recession. They have seen their parents get laid off and lose their pensions after many years of service, with no recourse and no job prospects. They, too, have been laid off and left to their own devices. In short, they don't trust anyone, let alone corporate America. While they may make great employees, they will always have some doubt about whether or not they have job security. When it comes to relocation, they will wonder if the company will stand behind them after the move and if they will have job prospects in case it doesn't work out. While there are no guarantees in life, it's important that HR discusses career pathing beyond the relocation so that there are reasonable expectations and a guide that the transferee can follow to progress and be successful.



But, Gen X is resilient and strong.



Gen-X had it rough during the last downturn. Since the age range is 35-49, many of them directly felt the impact of the financial meltdown either through home values or lost jobs. But, they are resilient. Today, Gen-X has the highest median income out of the other generations. They are also ready to upsize their homes to accommodate growing families. If you are relocating Gen-X, you may find that some of your transferees will be looking for a larger home at destination than they had at origin. Your relocation partner should take the time to assess what they want at destination, instead of just assuming it will be the same.

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Some are even second-time homeowners.



According to the National Association of Realtors, many Gen-Xers are second-time homeowners. In fact, 30% of recent home sales were Gen-X who either needed to relocate for work or wanted a bigger home for a growing family. Gen-X also comprised 31 percent of recent home purchases. Homes purchased by Gen-X average 2,100 square feet with a cost of \$235,000¹¹. Gen-X is experienced, which is great from the perspective that they understand real estate transactions and may not need as much hand holding through the home sale and home buying parts of a relocation. That said, this generation will want to settle in a convenient location for family needs. Thus, if they are moving to an unfamiliar place, they will need expertise on the ground to help them settle near quality schools, medical facilities and, possibly, eldercare.

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But, they may be underwater.



Unfortunately, Gen-X was hit hard by the real estate crash. Even though the market is improving, Gen-X had fewer resources to dig out from under falling home prices. According to Zillow, a good portion (18.7%) of Gen-X homeowners are still underwater.¹² If you are relocating a lot of Gen-Xers, you should still be prepared to address negative equity and loss on sale.

If the loss is not that great, you might provide additional funds in a one-time payment to help your transferee move forward. If you cannot provide loss on sale relief, you should urge the transferee to discuss a short sale with their lender. There have been successful cases where lenders have accepted a short sale, instead of going into foreclosure. This is especially true in a relocation situation because there are no other options.

If a short sale doesn't work, your transferees may decide to rent their home until the market picks up. We do not encourage this, as it still financially ties the transferee to the origin location. However, sometimes transferees simply cannot accept the loss and must wait it out.

20 At the end of the day, they are worth your best effort.

Last, but certainly not least, the E&Y study found that Gen X was viewed as the generation best equipped to manage in current economic conditions, as well as in 2020.

One can speculate that, for the very reasons why Gen-X has certain quirks, they have what it takes to lead corporate America into the next decade. They have been through it all: war, blended families, single parent homes, polarizing politics, the technology boom and, of course, three recessions. They have emerged strong, independent and experienced. Gen-X knows how to accept those who are different from themselves, even if they get frustrated sometimes. With patience, they will settle young Millennials in the workplace and teach good, practical habits. They will also be able to lead the older Millennials as they move up into management roles. If you can nurture and engage your Gen-X employees, they no longer need to be the forgotten generation stuck in the middle. They can, and should, help you bridge the gap between the Boomers and the Millennials by finding a common ground for collaboration.



CONCLUSION

So what does this all mean for HR? It means that Generation X can make or break your organization. They are your leaders, and they want to perform. But, they have real concerns about their past, present and future. You will need to align benefits to their needs in order to help them problem solve.

Most importantly, however, when it comes to managing people, regardless of generation, sweeping generalizations are rarely productive. It's important to assess all talent in order to get a real sense of the motivations, challenges and strengths of your employees.

CITATIONS

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