### Who are the generations?

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**Generational Blindspots**

recruit, retain, & engage across generations

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*Generational Blindspots* by WWEMA provides insights into the unique influences and traits of different generations. Understanding these blindspots can help organizations effectively recruit, retain, and engage across various generations.
WHO ARE THE TRADITIONALISTS?

Traditionalists, born 1900–1945, currently make up less than 2% of the US workforce (which Pew admits may be a bit of an overestimate) and 9.8% of the population. Though their numbers may be small, they’ve left a lasting legacy on how we approach work. Traditionalists founded many organizations that are still thriving, and their communication and leadership style have left an enduring mark on our modern world, still shaping how we work today.

Savers + Survivors

Think about your family income. Now slice it in half. Do you feel that... the flood of anxiety, stress, and fear washing over as you frantically strategize how to keep your household afloat? For most of us, this is just an uncomfortable exercise. For Traditionalists, it was the harsh reality of life. The Great Depression wasn’t a chapter in a history book; it was the economic condition they grew up in. Between 1932 and 1933, family income was cut nearly in half. Almost a quarter of the country was unemployed. People waited for hours in breadlines—praying that they’d reach the front before the free bread, likely their only food for the day, ran out. Schools closed abruptly, leaving students without instruction and too much time on their hands. As you can imagine, this meant Traditionalists had to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps,” maximize their frugality, and constantly save their coins; thus the mantra, “Waste not, want not.” Growing up in this environment established strong financial habits early on, especially since Traditionalists didn’t have the safety nets like Social Security, Medicare, or welfare. While few Traditionalists who were teenagers during the Great Depression remain today—they’d be roughly 100 years old—their values and lessons live on in Traditionalist/Boomer Cuspers, Baby Boomers, and the organizations they helped build. Pew admits may be a bit of an overestimate) and 9.8% of the population. Though their numbers may be small, they’ve left a lasting legacy on how we approach work. Traditionalists founded many organizations that are still thriving, and their communication and leadership style have left an enduring mark on our modern world, still shaping how we work today.

The Common Good

From their depression era childhood to war-torn early adulthood to even now in their golden years, when the nation calls upon Traditionalists to serve, they do so proudly, happily, and without complaint. Though Traditionalists in America make up only 9.8% of the population, they account for 26% of all charitable giving. This generation is accustomed to putting aside their individual needs for those of the greater good. They’ve learned that by coming together as a country, we can accomplish incredible feats (e.g., winning two world wars, surviving the Great Depression, building the A-bomb, just to name a few). More Traditionalist men served in the military than any other generation (50%). They learned to fall in line and do as they were told, otherwise, they were putting their lives, or your comrades’ lives, in danger. Their military experiences taught them that using a top-down approach is the most efficient way to get things done. Traditionalists remain, to this day, a patriotic bunch that puts great stock in the effectiveness of the military chain of command style of management and leadership.
Greatest Generation 1901–1924
The Greatest Generation watched their fathers leave home to fight in the First World War, and they had varied experiences in the very contradictory time of the Roaring Twenties. Women were working and voting, dance halls were popular, and the country grew to be more productive thanks to mechanization, but the Ku Klux Klan and the Prohibition were also very present. This generation survived the Great Depression as young adults/adults, and they soon followed in their fathers’ footsteps to fight in WWII.

Silent Generation 1925–1945
Silent Gens are the youngest of the Traditionalists. They are the original “sandwich” generation, as they found themselves smushed between the war-hero Greatest Gen and the many Baby Boomers. While most were too young to fight in WWII, they were in the midst of their early formative years during the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl, and they were eventually drafted for the Korean War. While adults of the time recited that children were to be seen and not heard, this segment of Traditionalists learned to keep to themselves. In 1951, TIME Magazine described the Silent Generation as unimaginative, withdrawn, unadventurous, and cautious, but upon transitioning into adulthood, this gen developed ambitions to rise above their losses from the Great Depression, Dust Bowl, and WWII, and they went on to raise about half of Gen X, our beloved modern sandwich generation.

THEIR LASTING LEGACY ON WORKPLACE CULTURE

Chain of Command:
With over 50% of Traditionalists being veterans, their military experiences taught them that using a top-down approach was the most efficient way to get things done. The Traditionalist management style is modeled on the military chain of command, and it is still an integral piece to many of America’s largest corporations today.

Hardworking:
Surviving the Great Depression and fighting world wars is no easy feat. Traditionalists worked their tails off to carry America through these tough times, and they felt the rewarding sense of unity and patriotism when their collective work paid off.

Loyal:
Upon making it through their formative years, Traditionalists learned that by putting aside individual wants and working together, they can accomplish amazing things. They seek to partner with large institutions to get things done.

BABY BOOMER 101

WHO ARE THE BABY BOOMERS?
During the Boomer birth years of 1946–1964, a baby was born every eight seconds. The label “baby boom” is more than apt for this large generation of 80 million. By 1964, they comprised 40% of the US population. “Boom” defines much of the Boomer psyche. Their huge population size and the booming post-war economy proved to be enormously influential conditions as Boomers came of age.

The Movement Generation
With such strong numbers, Boomers felt they had the manpower to effect great change and leave their stamp on the world. They rejected pre-established societal norms, and took it upon themselves to change things for the better. When the US started drafting soldiers for the Vietnam War, there was an unprecedented opposition movement, uniting people across socio-economic strata. For the first time, teens and young adults were challenging the political decision to enter the war. Pair the image of hippies protesting the war with scenes of youth involved in rallies for women’s rights, civil rights, and gay rights, and you see a generation of born activists. Inspirational leaders like JFK, MLK Jr., and Gloria Steinem helped rally Boomers together, and through a massive collective effort, they saw the fruits of their labor. Boomers were (and are) galvanized by a spirit of change. That belief in their ability to effect positive change, paired with momentous US victories like man landing on the moon, equipped this generation with an idealistic and optimistic spirit.
Youth Culture
Don’t trust anyone over 30. Stick it to the man! From a young age, Baby Boomers pushed back on the status quo established by their Traditionalist parents and leaders. They developed a robust youth culture that embraced disruption (yes, even before Millennials!) and reinvention, and they didn’t blindly defer to their elders. As youth, they rebuilt social structure and flipped the music scene on its head by pioneering rock ’n’ roll and fawning over controversial artists like Elvis Presley and Jimi Hendrix. Boomers continue to reinvent every life stage they touch, and as they approach what has traditionally been seen as retirement age, they’re giving “golden years” a distinctly-Boomer makeover. CrossFit is the new metamucil. Boomers are staying active, considering encore careers, going on voluntourism adventures, and raging against aging.

A Tale of Two Boomers
There was a pretty distinct shift during Boomer formative years and early adulthood. Namely, a decade of prosperity during the bull market of the 60s was followed by stagflation in the 70s and soaring unemployment. Due to this change in conditions, we’ll sometimes break Boomers into subgroups: the Early Boomers and Generation Jones. Jonesers earn their name from jonesin’ to keep up with their neighbors. And why? Because by the time they entered school and the workforce, competition was the name of the game. The American infrastructure was buckling under the weight of the Baby Boom. This meant, at its most basic level, scarcity and competition for resources. In schools, there weren’t always enough desks in classrooms or books to go around. Some Boomers went to fill their cars with gas only to discover that there wasn’t enough gas for everyone due to the oil embargo. When they entered the workforce, many Boomers found that there weren’t enough jobs. As a result, Baby Boomers developed a keen work ethic.

HOW DO BOOMERS SHOW UP IN THE WORKPLACE?

Professional + Poised
Having worked with Traditionalists leaders, Boomers have learned to polish their communication and workplace etiquette to meet expectations. They are experts at crafting their image in order to appear their very best; they know what to wear, what body language to use, and how to navigate workplace politics. Unwritten workplace formality rules are second-nature to them; military chain of command, and it is still an integral piece to many of America’s largest corporations today.

Fiercely Competitive:
With so many Boomers vying for jobs, developing a competitive drive was essential to workplace success. This generation looked for any opportunity to one-up their peers and showcase devotion to their job: working long hours, developing extra skills, and hunting for awards and accolades that would set them apart. Their work ethic is unquestionable. Sometimes earning them the title of “workaholics.”

Networking Savants:
Face-to-face communication is an area where Boomers are absolute pros. When they entered the workforce, the internet and email (let alone instant messaging) were little more than the stuff of Sci-Fi novelists’ dreams. Interpersonal skills were critical to success, and Boomers became excellent conversationalists that could remember your son’s favorite weekend hobby. They are still the gold standard when it comes to the art of networking and building a professional community.
WHO ARE THE XERS?

Generation X, also referred to as the “Slacker Generation,” “Latchkeys,” “MTV Generation,” or “Baby Busters,” were born between 1965 and 1979. They make up a small band of 60 million, and because of their small population size—squeezed between two huge generations—they’re often referred to as “the forgotten middle child.” Pretty bleak, eh? Even though the oldest Xers have hit the big 5-0, their generation has struggled to shake the image of the Nirvana-obsessed, apathetic, plaid-wearing slacker. The truth? They’re leading the workforce as innovative (if sometimes sarcastic) contributors, and are at the forefront of some of the most disruptive workplace shifts we’ve seen to date.

Nonstop Scandal

When Xers came of age, it felt like the world was coming apart at the seams. This perception was probably heightened by the onset of CNN’s 24-hour news cycle. As the news became more of a business than a strictly informational platform, those 24 hours were filled with all the salacious stories that captured viewers’ attention: murder, sex, crime, avarice… it was all a part of the media diet of the day. Long-revered institutions like NASA began being called into question. There seemed to be a tale of wrongdoing under every stone the media turned. The government (Nixon, Clinton, Iran-contra affair), the corporate world (the Tylenol scare, Enron), athletes (OJ Simpson, Pete Rose), and even Hollywood (Milli Vanilli)—nothing and no one was untouchable. But it wasn’t just the stuff onscreen that was troubling. For Xers, even the neighborhood itself seemed to grow more treacherous. As they poured milk into their Count Chocula cereal, they stared into the face of a missing kid on their milk carton. It was a daily reminder of the spiking crime rate, child abductions, and stranger danger. Growing up in this time of uncertainty, Xers developed a healthy skepticism of the world around them.

Latchkey Kids

From 1960 to 1980—smack-dab in the middle of Xers’ formative years—the divorce rate more than doubled. There were also more women in the workforce than ever before. With one or both parents trying to clock in their 40 hours of work (at least), many Xers were left to fend for themselves after school. As many as 40% of Gen Xers were latchkey kids. They sported a key on a cord around their necks and let themselves in while their parents finished out the work day. At home and unsupervised, Xers became pros at organizing their own time. They learned to be independent (if sometimes sarcastic) contributors, and are at the forefront of some of the most disruptive workplace shifts we’ve seen to date.
Masters of Media

As kids, Xers’ favorite babysitter (and often only babysitter) was the good ‘ole TV. During this time of media explosion, Xers found community in shared interests. Music, TV, movies, and video games brought them together as true media darlings. They consumed programming as if their lives depended on it, watching thousands of hours of television before they’d even hit their 20s. Xers were (and are) defined by their pop culture affiliations. Could you sing along to the latest School House Rock dit-ty? Did you know the moves to the Thriller music video? Were you a boss at DK? If the answer was yes, you had instant buy-in into the Xer inner circle. The hours they spent watching the boob tube were formative, for sure, but let’s not forget the impact of the personal computer. While Millennials often get credited as the tech generation, it was young Xers who first learned to navigate new technologies, including the computer and video game consoles like Atari, the Commodore 64, and the NES. They became highly adaptable to change, a trait that served them well when they entered a floundering job market. Their adaptability to change, coupled with a distrust of traditional institutions, created ideal conditions for a generation of entrepreneurs. Elon Musk of Tesla, Jack Dorsey of Twitter, and Sergey Brin & Larry Page, the founders of Google, are just a sampling of iconic Gen X business moguls who have disrupted the world as we know it.

HOW DO GEN XERS SHOW UP IN THE WORKPLACE?

Independent:
As latchkey kids, Xers grew up without the intense supervision that was the status quo for Millennials. Xers learned that “if you want something done right, you’d better do it yourself.” They’ve brought this self-reliance with them into the workplace, and often prefer to work alone, allergic to the (for Xers) endless Boomer meetings and Millennial brainstorming sessions. Trust us when we tell you that Xers prefer, and really value, their solo time and solo projects. If you try to micromanage them, they’ll be out the door before you can say “team meeting.”

Transparent + Honest:
During Xers’ formative years, they developed an unfiltered, direct style of communication, and their no-BS approach can sometimes be misconstrued as blunt to the point of mean (there is some truth to those stories about Millennial tears). In reality, Xers are brutally honest simply because they care. They’ll pipe up and poke holes to vet an idea when they want the person and project to succeed. If they weren’t invested, you better believe that an Xer would just sit back and watch the car-wreck of an idea selfimplode. popcorn in hand.

Work/Life Balance:
Unwilling to sacrifice family time to earn a promotion, Xers reject the notion that more hours in the office = a more productive, hard-working employee. They are fiercely protective of their time, and aren’t afraid to prop up a sturdy barrier between their work and personal lives. To ensure they make it to their kid’s hockey game, their modus operandi is efficient, streamlined, and to the point. They’ll earn that spot on the leadership team the Xer way, by cutting the fat and frivolities and focusing on effective and targeted action. From 9am to 6pm they’ll give you their all, but once 6:01pm hits, as the kids say—they out.

MILLENIAL 101

WHO ARE THE MILLENNIALS?
BridgeWorks defines Millennials as those born between 1980–1995. With 82+ million people in their squad, the Millennial generation is bigger than even the Baby Boomers. As of 2017, the youngest Millennials are graduating college, and the eldest are entering their late 30s and finally starting to #adult (e.g., having children, buying homes, doing their own laundry). Often maligned as the entitled, me-me-me generation that expects a trophy just for showing up, Millennials are actual, real grownups now with responsibilities, accomplishments, families, and an unshakeable desire to make a difference. Huge population size and the booming post-war economy proved to be enormously influential conditions as Boomers came of age.
Technology + Social Media

Listen, we get it. Every generation has witnessed the advent of impressive technological innovations (e.g., radio, television, personal computers), but Millennials saw some of the fastest evolutions in technology the world has ever seen. Most of them were still in school when Apple released the revolutionary iPhone back in 2007. They experienced the shift as personal cell phones popularized and greatly improved and as purchasing options expanded. Millennials experienced this cycle of constantly upgrading while in their formative years, and today they’ve come to expect constant innovation and connectivity. Millennials are also the first generation to grow up with social media. Many still remember their AOL instant messenger screen names. They were on the front lines when MySpace emerged on the scene, which was rapidly followed up by Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms vying for the attention of teens and young adults. Of course, Gen Edge, the generation after Millennials, takes digital know-how and fluidity to a whole new level since they were practically born with it, hence why they’re frequently referred to as digital natives.

Homeland Violence

Technological innovation has touched every generation, but sadly, so has violence. No generation has been spared from experiencing turmoil and tragedy in some form or another. It was spiking crime rates or wars overseas. Unfortunately for Millennials, there was a surge in homeland violence during their teen years, kicked off by the Columbine high school massacre. Schools were no longer a safe haven from gun violence, and the world started to feel like an increasingly scary place. Then came the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and for Millennials, who were still figuring out who they were and learning how to navigate the world, the event left an indelible mark that played a significant role in shaping their perception of the world around them. In an effort to combat rising fear and uncertainty, parents and teachers encouraged Millennials to speak up and share what was on their minds. School counselors gathered kids to special meetings to help them feel safe, valued, and respected. The self-esteem movement of the time encouraged adults to be gentle with their children and support them however they could. which, yes, meant doling out those infamous participation trophies. For good or for ill, Millennials became accustomed to close relationships and open dialogue with their parents, teachers, and other authority figures. At work, they’re the generation that feels no compunction in approaching the CEO for a quick chat or a lunch date.

A Tale of Two Millennials

Like Boomers, Millennials are a huge generation that we sometimes split into two subgroups: Early Millennials (born 1980-1987) and Recessionists (born 1988-1995). The two groups are life stage. Early Millennials are growing their families and settling into careers as leaders or soon-to-be leaders. Recessionists are only just breaking into the workforce and/or thinking about starting families of their own. But the two major factors that distinguish these groups are 1) the evolution of technology and 2) the Great Recession. For Recessionists, touchscreen cell phones were the norm, not the exception in high school. While Early Millennials remember a time when you had to have an .edu email address to get on Facebook, for Recessionists, Facebook is mostly passé (“my Grandma is constantly popping up on my feed…”). Instead, they turn to the still mostly-grandma-free Snapchat or Instagram for their social media fixes. Perhaps most significantly (and where they earn their name), Recessionists were entering, attending, and leaving college as the Great Recession hit full force. They graduated into an economy that wasn’t hiring experienced workers, let alone freshly minted college grads. Despite their idealistic upbringing by Boomer parents, Recessionists...
ists weren’t spared the bleak realities of entering the working world saddled with crippling college debt and no job opportunities in sight. Consequently, this latter half of Millennials tend to be more realistic and financially-conscious than the collaborative and optimistic Early Millennials.

**HOW DO MILLENNIALS SHOW UP IN THE WORKPLACE?**

**Informal + Authentic:**
Millennials bring their whole selves to work: they seek to integrate their work and personal lives. This means a two-way street: they bring their informalities to work, and they bring their work home after hours. You’ll see Millennials with more casual dress at work than Xers and Boomers, and you may get some emails from them over the weekend or at 9pm Wednesday.

**Collaborative:**
As mere youngins, Millennials were taught that the best kind of work was team work. This collaborative mentality was reinforced by the tools (phones and personal computers) they used to stay connected. Social media opened up a whole new world of crowd-sourcing and connectivity, allowing them to always have access to their peers. Did that “teamwork makes the dreamwork” mentality disappear when they entered the workforce? Nope. Millennials love a good brainstorm session, and prefer flatter, more networked organizational structures.

**Tech-Savvy:**
Technology rapidly evolved when Millennials were growing up, so they learned to adapt to and expect change. This means they’ll be on the lookout for the latest and greatest in technology for the workplace, and will be eager to revisit and revise processes and standard ways of doing things. For Millennials, there are no sacred cows.

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**GEN EDGE 101**

**WHO IS GEN EDGE?**
It’s quite easy to refer to all people under age 35 as Millennials. Easy, sure, but so, so wrong! Gen Edgers may be the kid sisters to the Millennial generation, but they’re nothing but replicas of their older sibs. You might have heard this group of 61 million, born 1996–2010, called a variety of monikers. From the clever (iGen), to the literal (Digital Natives), to the boring (Gen Z; sorry, we have to call it like it is), we’ve settled on calling them Gen Edge for two main reasons. First, they’re growing up on a literal cultural edge—they’ll be the last generation with a Caucasian majority and have expanded views of diversity. Second, they’re growing up with an edge—created by exposure to constant streams of violence and first-hand news from social media and as a result of living under the same roof as their honest Xer parents. To majorly oversimplify: if
the generations were animals. Millennials would be the fluffy ‘LOVE ME ALL THE TIME!’ Golden Retrievers and Edgers would be the cool ‘I’ll come to you when I’m ready’ tabby cats. Absurd analogies aside, keep in mind the following three trends that could help predict how this generation will show up in the workplace.

**Financially-Conscious**
Edgers have grown up in the aftermath of the Great Recession, and their realistic, no-BS Xer parents have led by example in such trying times. As a family, Xers and Edgers watched in dismay as Millennials—even Millennials in their own families—got pulverized by student debt and struggled to live independently. Seeing these realities hit so close to home, Edgers are now absolutely concerned about affording college. But so close to home, Edgers are now absolutely concerned about affording college. But instead of just worrying about it, they’re saving for it (and possibly still worrying about it). Sixty-four percent of Gen Edge has started researching and collaborating on financial planning, and as a whole, their generation is using personal finance and payment apps at almost the same rate as Millennials. Gen Xers could write a Surviving Recessions for Dummies book, so they’re no doubt teaching their children how to be successful in an unfair world that’s burned them many times before. End dramatic monolog.

**Digital Natives**
Millennials know their way around an iPhone: if it’s frozen, turn it off and on. Boom. IT professional. But if you thought Millennials were tech-confident, wait till you meet an Edger. These gals and guys are so comfortable in the digital world, one could say they’re digital natives. Gen Edge has high expectations for technology, and they expect the world to keep up with them. What’s more, they’re using their unlimited access to information and their unrestricted, far-reaching voices on social media to empower one another and enact change. They’re quick to tweet at companies for customer service issues and catch first-hand video of an injustice (known as “citizen journalism”). It’s a mad, mad world, but Edgers balance their constant exposure to real-world conflicts and negativity with inclusive online communities and uplifting messages from YouTube stars.

**Unforgiving Exposure to Violence**
Much like in the districts of The Hunger Games, violence is widely publicized in Gen Edgers’ lives; it’s become a condition and, rather unfortunately, a “normal” one, however normal violence can be. Events like Sandy Hook, the Boston Marathon Bombing, the Orlando nightclub shooting, and terrorism in Paris are no longer isolated incidents. These traumatic events happened one after the other throughout Edgers’ formative years, and Edgers got real-time Twitter notifications while trying to figure out their algebra homework or walking the dog. Because of this, Gen Edge has developed an “edge” and sees the world through a realistic and pragmatic lens. Some have become desensitized and assimilated to violence, while others demand and act in the name of change, equality, and inclusion.

**HOW WILL EDGERS SHOW UP IN THE WORKPLACE?**

**Diverse & Inclusive:**
Gen Edge will be the last generation in the United States to be of Caucasian majority. For many, the Obamas were the first presidential family they can remember. Being diverse means seeing diversity and, one step further, expecting it from any and all institutions they align themselves with. And this generation isn’t about the lip service: you gotta walk the walk or they’ll walk... right out of your office.

**Resilient:**
From a young age, Edgers learned to cope, manage, and move on from difficult situations as best they can. As they learned to get past the violence that regularly litters their social media feeds, their Xer parents are also teaching them practicality and resourcefulness. Combined, these circumstances make for resilient Edger employees that will persevere through trying projects, clients, and times. When the going gets tough, refer to a Gen Edge

**Connected:**
Edgers may see a payphone on the street and react much like this kid. They’ve always had cell phones, and they expect up-to-date technology. Physically dialing a phone? Searching the yellow pages? Get a grip. Grandpa Edgers have well-categorized social apps, contacts, and search engines on their devices, and they use them on the reg. This expectation of constant digital connectivity will follow them to the workplace with pros and cons. Pros? They’ll be your go-to for gadget recommendations and may be willing to help others. Cons? They may appear to be tech-obsessed and lacking in person-to-person communication skills. They may also get annoyed if their job description starts to look more like IT.