Preface

When I think of how my study of how to be generationally savvy began, it was conversation by conversation. The first was a problem-solving conversation with my superintendent, who was curious about ways to support the district as increasing numbers of administrators retired and replacements came in quickly. That first conversation led me to design an in-district administrator retreat. The feelings about the topic, both skeptical and curious, were anything but indifferent, and opinions were voiced. This topic had heat. Something was up.

As I crafted the "Being Generationally Savvy" workshop time and time again during the next few months, outside the district and then across the country, I added to my stockpile of stories people told me at coffee breaks and noted the questions people asked as they tried to apply the work in their contexts. I held focus groups after school for different generations to tell me their challenges collaborating with others at work. I brought in lunches for new teachers so they could tell me about their struggles and share what supports they needed. And then the e-mails would come. "Have you seen this article?" or "You have to hear this story from an interview I just did yesterday with this new teacher—such a generational moment!"

The set of questions grew. People pushed and pulled at the generational filter I was describing. How did being generationally savvy change for those in an urban setting? Did it matter as much in a rural setting? What about the filter of culture? Of gender? What about the developmental stages? Wasn't everyone going to change and become like a Traditionalist at age 65?

The work went deeper. Specific requests for assistance helped develop the topic even more.

- What about Millennial supervisors and administrators? What do we do for them since they are so much younger than those they will be leading and evaluating?
- What can we do to create a better succession plan, because we can see our district will have more retirements in the next 10 years?
- What can we do to recruit new employees so they think this is a great place to work? Do we need to change our orientation? What other changes do we need to make?

- What can we do to support veteran teachers as we increase expectations around technology and other new initiatives that change how people will work together? How will we support them in changes that are likely to be uncomfortable?
- How do we talk to 40-somethings who feel so different than Boomers? Do we need to change our policies for them and the Millennials?
- What about professional development? Should we do more online? What needs to be taught face-to-face?

And so this book was written. It compiles the discussions and the research, the e-mails and the articles, the focus groups and the coffee breaks. This book *is* the conversation. Join in.

—Jennifer Abrams

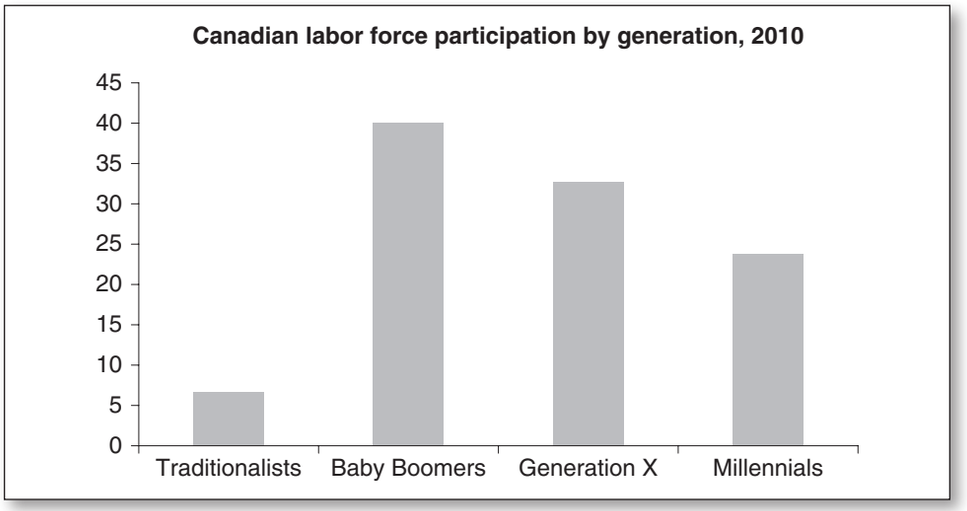
Introduction: Lost in Translation

You might be experiencing a "generational moment" if:

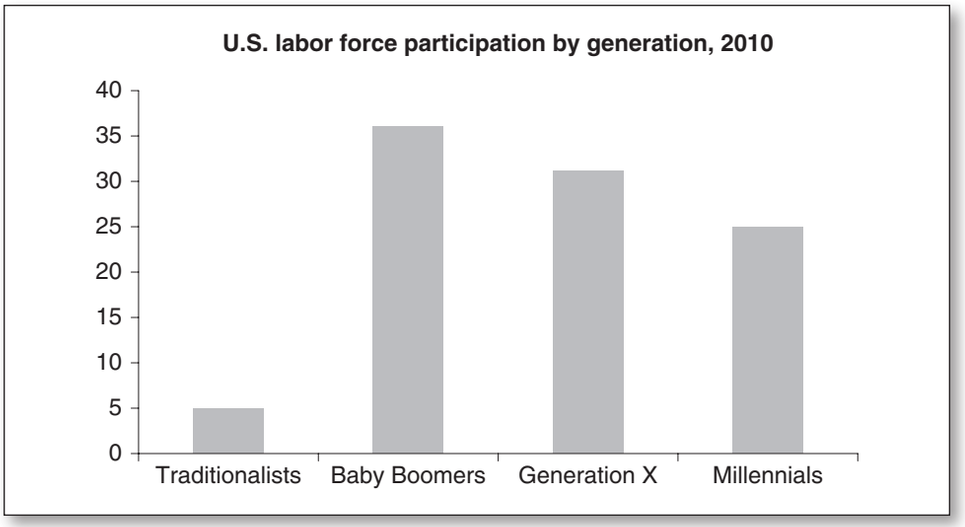
- You pat yourself on the back for getting on Facebook, only to find everyone is now tweeting and tumbling.
- You give someone your e-mail address and get a strange look when you get to the @aol.com ending.
- You hear from a teacher that you need to get the staff meeting over early because she has to pick up her kids.
- You invite an intern to a meeting only to have him offer you suggestions about how it could be run better.
- You get an inbox full of "reply all" e-mails to your department chair's request for an RSVP.
- You have no idea what RSVP stands for—or why you should care.

If you haven't noticed that you're working with multiple generations, then you haven't looked up from your desk lately. For the first time ever—many people say—there are *four* generations at work in many organizations.

Consider these workforce demographics for the United States and Canada from 2010:



Source: Statistics Canada, "Table 282–0001: Labour Force Characteristics by Sex and Detailed Age Group, Unadjusted for Seasonality, Monthly (Persons x 1,000)," Labour Force Survey (May 2012).



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Household Data, Not Seasonally Adjusted: Table A-13: Employment Status of the Civilian Noninstitutional Population by Age, Sex, and Race" (2012).

When you think of how difficult it sometimes was to translate between yourself and your parents, you can understand why one study found that 60% of people say they've experienced "intergenerational tension" at work (NAS Recruitment Communications, 2006). We think the other 40% either were not telling the whole truth or couldn't remember.

This book is meant to help you understand what it means to have four generations together in the workplace and also how to improve understanding so that when you have those generational moments, you can recognize and laugh at them. Otherwise, you might be left bewildered, frustrated, and sometimes angry.

This work is not about nostalgia or self-help. Recognizing the differences among the generations is meant to improve collaboration and deepen our understanding of how—why—others choose to approach a situation in a certain way.

Generational differences can cause the following problems:

- Questions of fairness
- Lower morale
- Problems working in teams
- Decreased efficiency/lower productivity
- Communication snafus
- Increased turnover and hiring challenges
- Gaps in succession planning

These are a few of the stories we've heard from educators just in the last couple of years.

A beginning-teacher support program director said:

> *I've been working with coaches in their 30s and 40s in our new-teacher support consortium and it seems all they want is a "list." What do they need to do with their coachers? How many times do they have to meet?*

> *Which pieces of paper do they need to fill out? They don't seem to understand that working with a new teacher is a process, that they might spend more time in the fall and less in the winter. They don't seem to get the big picture. They just want the boxes to check off.*

A 40-ish teacher said:

> *I get so many e-mails every day that I'm not even sure have to do with me. Everyone needs to be "in the loop" about every little decision. I am actually embarrassed by what people are putting in some of them. When did it become OK to just put things out there without going to talk to the person? And if I'm not making the decision, just let me know the final choice.*

A district office administrator said:

> *I know my most senior colleagues don't want to deal with this too directly because I can imagine it feels too painful, but we don't have a succession planning strategy in place and the majority of us are retiring in the next five years. I have heard comments like, "With who I am seeing coming up in the ranks, thank goodness I am one of the first to go. They just don't have the same work ethic. It'd be too hard to show them the ropes." But it is urgent. We don't have a deep bench. There isn't anyone in the pipeline. Who will take over? This is much more urgent than others realize. How do I explain to those "above me" that we need to put some time and monies into getting some positions designed so new administrators can learn on the job and be ready when we retire?*

If you're still not convinced generational changes may be significant, here are a few facts:

- In 1980, nearly as many (state government) employees were younger than 30, as older than 50, and of managers, 7% were older than 60, 16% were older than 55, and 28% were older than 50. In 2006, there were four times as many over-50s as employees younger than 30, and of managers, 9% were older than 60, 26% were older than 55, and *47% were older than 50* (Lewis & Cho, 2011).
- The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found nearly one-fifth of the national workforce was 55 and older, the highest proportion since the data began to be recorded in 1948, while the proportion of young people age 16 to 24 in the workforce was the lowest since 1949—14% (Pew Research Center, 2009).
- In the 1980s, employees knew three-fourths of what they needed to in order to do a good job. They looked up what they didn't know in manuals or at the library. In 2008, according to research by Robert Kelley, we know only about 10% of what we need to know to perform well and need to find the remainder in some way, often using the Internet on mobile devices.

Who we work with and how we work has undergone dramatic shifts in a relatively short time. And we need not only to recognize it but also to capitalize on it.

A CAVEAT

We are painting with a wide brush when we talk about generations. We recognize that everyone is different and that each individual's unique circumstances tweak that person's view of the world. Our identification with our race, class, region, religion, sexual orientation, political affiliation, and more also influence who we are and how we work.

So when you read about your generation, you're looking at an overall picture, not a self-portrait. We're not holding up a mirror for you to see yourself but a landscape that shows what characteristics certain groups have in common.

In some sessions on being generationally savvy, very religious 30-somethings say they connect more to Traditionalists' values than the Gen Xers'. Some who have been raised by grandparents say the same thing.

Yet those born during a particular span of years were affected by significant social and cultural events at pivotal points in their lives that become the touchstones of the generation, the "where were you when . . . " moments. These are large-scale, such as D-Day, John F. Kennedy's assassination, the space shuttle *Challenger's* crash, 9/11. They are social, such as rock-and-roll or rap. And, of course, we're offering the North American view, as these examples show. (Jennifer's global work with international schools, however, shows that the generational filter is impacting work in schools everywhere.)

So let's "rent" the generational filter for now and see how it might impact our day-to-day communications in the workplace.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

The book is divided loosely into two sections. In the first section, Chapters 1 through 4, we set the stage for understanding. The second section, Chapters 5 through 7, is aimed more at leadership and action planning.

First, we define the generations and describe their characteristics in Chapter 1 to help you get a sense of what holds other generations together. Who are the four generations currently working in our schools? What are their beliefs, values, and expectations? You can use this chapter to explore your own identity and to begin to understand the differences between your generation and others.

Chapter 2 begins to delve into how the differences translate into attitudes toward work and coworkers—beginning to explore the question, What difference does it make? We discuss how the generations view authority, seek validation, relate to a team, and differ in their needs and wants. We outline some of the challenges and advantages of working with individuals from a particular generation.

In Chapter 3, we begin to identify more specifically the widening gap between generations as we discuss how etiquette has changed and the new techtiquette, trying to help you build rapport by becoming more generationally savvy in interpersonal dealings with colleagues.

Chapter 4 adds to the bridge, we hope, with a discussion of communication styles. Again, the work is presented in broad terms. Individuals have more or less skill, or pay more or less attention to communicating, maybe, than the descriptions of the generation as a whole.

Groups of colleagues can use the first four chapters as a unit to explore and strengthen the workplace culture. The three chapters that follow deepen our look at the generations but with a longer-term and more systemic view. This section focuses more on workplace challenges for leaders.

The impact of taking a generational view of recruitment and retention is the subject of Chapter 5. With so many new administrators and teacher leaders coming into positions of influence and leadership, human resources now is a talent development resource.

Chapter 6 looks at differentiating professional learning for generational cohorts. We consider new teachers' needs, particularly, since the next few years will bring in more Millennials.

Lastly, we consider succession planning in Chapter 7. What should new and experienced teachers and administrators do to support the next generations who ultimately will be taking over their place in schools? How do leaders identify needs and plan for succession?

Each chapter offers activities to use with your colleagues to help improve how you collaborate. You may decide to use one activity rather than another, to begin with an activity and then use the text, or to read the book and then use a few activities. One chapter may meet a specific need. The basis for understanding generational differences, however, is always the starting point for improving how we work together, which ultimately improves our ability to meet our purpose—educating students.