

VALERIE M. GRUBB

CLASH



OF THE

GENERATIONS



MANAGING THE NEW  
WORKPLACE REALITY

WILEY



## **Advance Praise for *Clash of the Generations***

Leaders are still struggling to motivate Millennials in the workplace—and now Generation Z is on the doorstep. Grubb offers concrete suggestions on how to engage four generations that each have very different expectations of their managers and organizations. If you are only going to read, one management book this year—this is the one. It is a joy to read, with lively writing and practical advice.

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Indiana University Kelley School of Business**

Val Grubb has succinctly and accurately captured the new workplace reality in a voice that is easy to read. Her practical advice for thriving in and building a generationally diverse organization is spot on. I like books that present real-world solutions, but I love books that ask the right questions! I wish I had coauthored it!

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Discover the Core Competencies of Managing Today's Workforce***

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Author, *Generations, Inc.: From Boomers to Linksters—  
Managing the Friction Between Generations at Work***

Grubb's many years of leading and managing generationally diverse teams and consulting to best-in-class companies make *Clash of the Generations* a compelling look into how the workforce is changing—and changing fast. Anyone passionate about developing his or her leadership skills and learning to navigate—and get the best of—rapidly diversifying workforces will find her strategies not only cutting edge, but immediately practical. A must-read for leaders at all levels!

**Jennifer Brown, President and CEO  
Jennifer Brown Consulting  
Author, *Inclusion: Diversity, the New Workplace & the  
Will to Change***



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*For my father, Byron E. Grubb,  
who taught me to respect everyone, regardless of his or her rank or status.  
You are missed.*



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# PREFACE

By 2020, 25 percent of the labor force will be over the age of 55—and they’re not retiring any time soon. The result? A clash of cultures that requires a new management approach.

In recent years there’s been a lot of talk about generation-related issues in the workplace—especially the impending en masse retirement of the Baby Boomers. Senior leaders and HR executives were warned to prepare for the knowledge exodus that would take place when the Baby Boomers retired in droves and to prepare to manage the generations (in particular, the Millennials) that would replace them.

The reality, however, is that Boomers *haven’t* been retiring in the numbers originally expected. In fact, the average retirement age has steadily been creeping up (it’s now at 61), and recent statistics indicate that this number will continue to increase. A recent Gallup Poll found that 24 percent of Baby Boomers are waiting until age 65 to retire, and 49 percent are planning to hold off until 66 or older. In addition, researchers at the Stanford Center on Longevity estimate that by 2020, 25 percent of the labor force will be 55 and over—a sharp jump from 13 percent in 2000. In the near future, we may even see people working to 100 (and beyond!).

Because Baby Boomers are prolonging their time in the workplace, the old business model of “the mature retire to make way for the new” no longer applies. Instead of the previous cycle of succeeding generations, companies now find themselves with workforces that cover a wider range of ages than ever before. Senior leaders, managers, and HR professionals must manage a blended workforce spanning four generations that vary wildly in their work ethics, ideas about work-life balance, and long-term career goals, among other concerns.

Managing employees is a challenging endeavor under any circumstances—and it’s even more difficult in the midst of generational culture clash. Drawing on my experiences over more than two decades of managing thousands of employees and on interviews with representatives of several companies with age-diverse workforces, this book details proven strategies that managers and senior leaders can employ to motivate and engage even their most challenging direct reports.





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## **Chapter 1**

# THE NEW WORKPLACE REALITY



*Clinging to the past is the problem. Embracing change is the solution.*

—Gloria Steinem, *Moving Beyond Words*<sup>1</sup>

Since the first major round of corporate downsizing in the 1980s, the longtime traditional employment trajectory has been in flux. Gone are the days when people entered the workforce as young adults, worked until their mid-50s or so, and then sailed off into retirement while younger generations took their place. Instead, the average retirement age has steadily been creeping up in recent decades as older employees—in particular, the Baby Boomers—stay in the workforce either by choice or by necessity. Medical and technological advances mean we’re living much longer than previous generations. But the financial instability caused by the 2008 recession has taken a massive toll on retirement plans, requiring many older employees to remain in the workforce longer. Boomers aren’t continuing to work only because they *have* to, though: many of them continue to work because they *want* to, thanks in part to the growing availability of office jobs that people can continue to do regardless of age. In addition, many Boomers just enjoy the camaraderie and social connectivity of the workplace. And Boomers often have a lot of pride in their career—a sentiment that can make them inclined to stay in the workplace longer.<sup>2</sup>

In recent years, though, a new generation has become the largest group in the labor market: the Millennials. In early 2015, a Pew Research Center study found that for the first time the workplace included more Millennials (nearly 54 million) than Baby Boomers (nearly 53 million) or members of Generation X (just under 45 million).<sup>3</sup> With so many younger employees joining the workforce, one might assume that the median age of US workers was decreasing. Surprisingly, that is *not* the case.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) at the US Department of Labor, in 2004 the median working age was 40.3 years but in 2014 it had climbed to 41.9 years—and by 2024 it is expected to hit 42.4 years.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, although the Millennial numbers are far greater than the current figures of earlier generations, the BLS report states that “the average annual growth rate of the 55-years-and-older group [is] projected to be 1.8 percent, more than three times the rate of growth of the overall labor force,” adding that “the group’s share of the labor force is anticipated to increase from 21.7 percent in 2014 to nearly 25 percent in 2024.”<sup>5</sup> These projections indicate that not only will Baby Boomers continue to work alongside their current Generation X and Millennial colleagues, but that they will still be around when Generation Z join the workforce.

That is potentially good news for companies experiencing a shortage of workers, particularly in skilled trades. But when three or even four generations are sharing the office, getting everyone to work together toward a common goal becomes even