VALERIE M. GRUBB

CLASH OF THE GENERATIONS

MANAGING THE NEW WORKPLACE REALITY

WILEY

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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.

Timothy T. Baldwin, Professor and Chair
Department of Management and Entrepreneurship
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!

Chip Espinoza, PhD
Author, *Managing the Millennials: Discover the Core Competencies of Managing Today's Workforce*

From the first page, *Clash of the Generations* hits you with staggering statistics and hard facts. Grubb has written a masterful book that captures the essence of generational conflict and provides savvy solutions. *Clash of the Generations* is not a life preserver but a speedboat to multigenerational success.

Meagan Johnson, Generational Humorist
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*

CLASH

OF THE

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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.

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.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is the result of many lessons learned over the years from managing thousands of employees—from my first Plant 8 maintenance crew at Allison Gas Turbine in 1989, to those who work for me now at my own consulting company, and everyone in between. Thank you for teaching me what it means to be a good manager. This journey has been a blast, and no matter where you are now in your lives and careers, I wish you all the best.

I would also like to thank my dear friend Marsha Jane Brofka-Berends, who continues to amaze me with her editorial prowess. I thought this book, a huge and challenging undertaking, would send her running, but fortunately it didn't (and she's already committed to working on my next one!). I am also grateful to Sarah Barasch for her stellar research, in which she left no stone unturned. We worked together at Oxygen years ago, and it's been wonderful to reconnect with her through this project. My thanks also go out to Jenna Rose Robbins for her invaluable research and editorial contributions to this work.

Many thanks to Jeanenne Ray, my editor at John Wiley & Sons, for recognizing the importance of this topic. Thanks, too, to Heather Brosius for answering all my questions along the way. It's been a pleasure working with both of you.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't thank my mom, Dorothy Grubb, and my brother, Eric Grubb, for putting up with me when I write. I can be a bear, but you love me anyway—and for that I am forever grateful. Thank you! I love you both dearly as well.

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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*[1]

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.[2]

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).[3] 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.[4] 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."[5] 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 more challenging. Senior leaders, managers, and HR professionals need to be prepared to manage a workforce spanning multiple generations with wildly different ideas about work ethic, work-life balance, and long-term career goals, among many other issues. Each age cohort brings its own expectations, goals, motivations, and experiences into the office every day, and company leaders, managers, and human resources executives who want to succeed must understand those differences in order to minimize conflict and create a productive workplace.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF LEADERSHIP

As the Loretta Lynn song says, "We've come a long way, baby." Over the past half century or so, workplace practices and expectations have changed dramatically—and for the better. When the first Baby Boomers entered the workforce, they were taught that leaders give orders, ensure that the orders are followed, and deal with employees who don't comply. The dictatorial leader is rapidly disappearing from today's workplace, though, having been replaced by leaders who are expected to build partnerships both inside and outside the organization—a shift in leadership styles that recognizes that coalition building can be more effective for companies than rigid control. Does this shift mean that a manager can't make decisions unless all of his or her direct reports agree with them? Of course not. It *does* mean, though, that employees of any age will expect to have input on decisions that affect them, and that the lack of such input will significantly diminish their commitment to accomplishing the company's goals.

The changing expectations for company leaders are also being shaped by the fact that employees of all ages lack trust in corporate America. During the 1980s, Baby Boomers and Generation X lost that trust during the heyday of building shareholder value through layoffs, when even healthy companies joined the downsizing movement in order to increase their market shares. Millennials, too, aren't exhibiting great faith in the business world today, and if these trends continue, this lack of trust is likely to still be around when Generation Z begins to enter the workforce. Regardless of the decade or the generation, though, this lack of trust—and the resulting lack of strong loyalty to a company—can affect *everyone* negatively, particularly when employees favor pursuing career advancement elsewhere over staying with their current organizations. In order to prevent that exodus, managers need to figure out how to adapt to changing expectations about employee loyalty.

The changing demographic within the United States (nay, the *world*) is another cultural shift that will require leaders to rethink not just their leadership styles but their entire business plans, because the employee base isn't the only population that's changing: customers and suppliers are changing as well. Over the next few decades, the United States will become an older and more ethnically diverse country. For example, according to the US Census Bureau, over the next few decades, nonwhite ethnic groups will increase in number dramatically, and by 2042 no single ethnic group will be the majority. The Hispanic population will be the leaders of this demographic shift, with its size "more than [doubling], from 53.3 million in 2012 to 128.8 million in 2060."[6] Also expected to double in size by 2060 is the population age 65 and older, which will grow from 43.1 million to 92.0 million.

Many would argue that corporate leadership has had to deal with managing change for at least the past decade or so. As Ad J. Scheepbouwer (then-CEO of Royal KPN) pointed out in IBM's 2008 survey of 1,000 CEOs, "We have seen more change in the last 10 years than in the previous 90."[7] Technological advances drove most of that change and continue to do so, with Scheepbouwer's words still applicable nearly a decade after he uttered them. In spite of widespread awareness of such change, many companies' management practices have failed to respond to the new workplace reality.

Shocking but true: even though the first Millennials joined the workplace roughly 10 years ago, many companies *still* struggle to figure out how to cope with the Millennials in their midst. And with the first members of Generation Z poised to enter the workforce full time in just a few short years and other changing workplace demographics, the stage is set for disaster for those companies still lagging in their management practices. Even with these realities staring them in the face, though, many companies *still* resist change. Why? Because change is hard—even when (and sometimes especially if) it's absolutely necessary. But market-leading organizations recognize the importance of change and achieve success in part because of their ability to adapt rapidly to the changing needs of their customers and clients. Those companies embrace change because doing so lets them create new opportunities *ahead* of their competitors.

Enacting change at your organization means updating your leadership tactics, which in turn means letting go of old habits and instead thinking about motivation and engagement in a new light—a task that isn't easy to accomplish in even the most relaxed and low-stakes situations, let alone when engaging in something as difficult (and somewhat esoteric) as managing employees. Unfortunately, managing employees is even more complicated by the fact that according to Gallup only "one in 10 people possess the inherent talent to manage"—and companies fail to pick good managers a staggering 82 percent of the time.[8] When this is combined with the added challenge of having four generations in the workplace, the odds increase that companies will experience high turnover or low employee engagement (both of which can hugely affect an organization's bottom line)—and managing becomes a lot more complicated.

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE MANAGER

Managing employees has always been tough for newbie and veteran managers alike. If you're like most managers, you didn't start your career in management but got promoted to a supervisory role based on your superior contributions as an employee. Consequently, you may find yourself with direct reports who may or may not be at your skill level (and may even be more skilled than you). As a

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