

Now includes Gen Z!

# Sticking Points

How to get 5 generations working together  
in the 12 places they come apart.

## Haydn Shaw

*Foreword by Stephen M. R. Covey*

AUTHOR OF *THE SPEED OF TRUST*

Companies need to understand how each generation behaves at work, how they want to be managed, and their needs in order to retain them and keep them engaged. Haydn's book will help you unlock the value behind the generations and bring them together for the benefit of your company.

DAN SCHAWBEL, *Forbes* contributor and author of *Me 2.0* and *Promote Yourself: The New Rules for Career Success*

Johnsonville Sausage has always been about the people who ensure we produce the highest-quality products. When Haydn spoke to our leaders, he got us thinking about generational differences in new ways that help us better attract and empower employees of all generations. I'm glad Haydn's put the insights he shared with us into a book that can help thousands of others. You need this powerful book.

RALPH C. STAYER, owner and former CEO of Johnsonville Sausage

The secret to future success lies in GQ: generational intelligence. Read this book and get smart about how to connect generations to unleash innovation and productivity.

TIM SANDERS, CEO of Net Minds and author of *Today We Are Rich* and *Love Is the Killer App*

When it comes to troubleshooting workplace issues and facilitating harmonious interactions among employees, FranklinCovey is the undisputed leader, and those who are currently managing five disparate generations need look no further than practice leader Haydn Shaw, whose book *Sticking Points* zeroes in on the areas—like organizational structure and use of social media—where communication is most likely to break down and cause a negative impact on the bottom line.

ALEXANDRA LEVIT, author of *#MillennialTweet: 140 Bite-Sized Ideas for Managing the Millennials*

*Sticking Points* contains insights and processes that do indeed work. We've had Haydn back many times to teach our managers the tools he has put into this book. I found it so valuable and enjoyable that I invited my wife to come hear his presentation. You'll come back to this book again and again when you run into a new generational challenge. But more important, it will improve your ability to speak the language of other generations at work and in your personal life. A must-read.

JIM THYEN, former president and CEO of Kimball International, Inc.

I go all over the world speaking to organizations about leadership, and Haydn has made a slam dunk with *Sticking Points*. He explains why people from different generations think and act the way they do. Why does this matter? When we understand the “why,” we can work with people to get outstanding results as teams or individuals. Understanding the “why” enables leaders to celebrate differences and capitalize on the creativity and innovation of each generation. It's a must-read for leaders.

PAT WILLIAMS, cofounder of the Orlando Magic

*Sticking Points* provides a practical road map for sidestepping the stumbling blocks that come with a multigenerational workforce. It is a great guide for business leaders feeling the pain of managing five completely different generations. I agree with Haydn Shaw—don't try to change them; lead them. This astute and entertaining book is an important one.

TAMARA ERICKSON, a McKinsey Award-winning author and expert on organizations and the changing workforce

Five generations are challenging associations like the American Business Women's Association to rethink how they attract, retain, and engage their members that are in various stages of their lives and careers. What works for Traditionalists and Boomers doesn't necessarily work for Gen Xers and Millennials. *Sticking Points* is an excellent read that gives organizational leaders, teachers, and families essential tools to help them connect with every generation effectively. Our multigenerational membership loved Haydn Shaw's breakout sessions, and I know you will appreciate his book.

RENÉ STREET, executive director of National American Business Women's Association

Understanding the five generations in the workforce is critical today for maximizing customer satisfaction and team productivity. Haydn is a true guide to better understand the differences of this issue and take advantage of the opportunities! I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants a well-researched, easy-to-read, and practical guide to this important subject.

STEPHEN G. OSWALD, Chairman, President, and CEO of Ducommun, Inc.

In his book *Sticking Points*, Haydn Shaw presents timely advice for executives and managers struggling to understand the newest generation of employees. His insights helped us unravel this mystery and provide a path to better communication, greater productivity, and exceptional performance and will do the same for you.

MICHAEL ENGLER, PhD, Chairman/CEO of Cactus Feeders, Inc.

Don't make . . . generational mistakes inside and outside of your business. Let Haydn put a smile on your face as he helps you navigate through the sticking points in every facet of your company and show you how multigenerational leadership wins out.

TIMOTHY P. BAILEY, retired chief credit officer and vice chairman,  
TCF National Bank

Thinking about my younger teammates—and teenage daughters—as “from another country” makes me smile. And it has improved my ability to listen and understand. This book is a must-read for those who want to work with, live with, and lead other generations effectively.

JENNIFER COLOSIMO, Senior VP of FranklinCovey; coauthor with  
Stephen Covey of *Great Work, Great Career*

Haydn Shaw's new book *Sticking Points* is definitely the right resource at the right time for twenty-first-century organizational leadership. Having experienced Haydn's practical wisdom at numerous retreats, I have learned that the principles laid out in the book are widely applicable across different types of organizations. I unreservedly recommend *Sticking Points* as a must-read for any organization's leadership team.

ROBERT VAN ALLEN, PhD EE, cofounder of SVS Inc. and executive/  
program manager for the Boeing Company (retired)

*Sticking Points* is an excellent book, a valuable glimpse of how generational differences impact organizations. We've brought Haydn to our staff and events we've hosted for other universities because our students and staffs span the generations. Leveraging the generational differences is critical to our success and yours. You need this book.

JUDITH FLINK, former executive director of student financial services for  
the University of Illinois

This generation that has grown up digital continues to bring big changes to the workplace. *Sticking Points* provides a practical way to turn generational tensions into team results so we don't miss the *many* benefits this new generation can bring. Your whole team will want to read and talk about this book.

DON TAPSCOTT, author of 16 widely read books, including *Macrowikinomics: New Solutions for a Connected Planet* and *Grown Up Digital*

*Sticking Points* by Haydn Shaw helps readers sort out how to get all five generations working together rather than complaining about each other. Insightful and well balanced, this book will make you smile while it explores generational myths and provides a practical process for leading every generation more effectively.

KEN BLANCHARD, coauthor of *The One Minute Manager* and *Trust Works!*

Haydn's caring, sincerity, and inspirational sense of humor put him in the top one percent of speakers in the nation. Now he's going to the top as an author. *Sticking Points* tackles one of the major problems in organizations all over the world—the friction between generations. And now, in one book, you can gain understanding and learn how to deal with all five generations in a very practical hands-on approach so that your organization can achieve its highest priorities.

RUTH WILLIAMS, author of *How to Be like Women of Influence* and *Happy Spouse, Happy House*

With over 30,000 employees around the world, it was imperative that we build collaborative and effective teams across multiple functions and geographies. Haydn was able to unlock the obstructionism we saw across generations. His delivery

was motivating, and his methods and insights were clear and empowering. With the path illuminated, our teams rose and worked effectively and passionately, from 22 to 62.

MATTHEW RUBEL, former chairman, CEO, and president of Collective Brands (Payless ShoeSource)

In *Sticking Points*, Haydn does an amazing service. He not only turns automatic contention between the generations into understanding, but he also reveals the opportunities for creating true synergies. This book is a must-read for leaders of all ages.

RON MCMILLAN, coauthor of four *New York Times* bestsellers, including *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*

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Haydn Shaw

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# Foreword

WE ARE ALL seeing generational sticking points pop up in our own organizations or families more and more frequently. As Haydn explains, we've never had so many generations in existence at once, and we're not quite sure what to do about it. That's why we need this book.

I have known Haydn Shaw from the time he started at FranklinCovey at the ripe age of twenty-eight. He was one of our two youngest consultants, but honestly, he didn't look a day over twenty! I was still managing a sales team at the time, and my team worried that clients would wonder what they were getting when we first sent Haydn out alone. It didn't take long for us to realize what our clients quickly discovered: Haydn is exceptionally smart, practical, and funny. He quickly became an in-demand presenter and consultant—one of our very best. In short, he succeeded tremendously at what in our business is a very young age, so he knows from personal experience that younger people can contribute, and he wants to show us how to let them.

Over the last twenty years I've watched Haydn lead large client projects, develop multiple training programs, and provide thought leadership for FranklinCovey's leadership practice.

More than just spouting theories, Haydn has real-world, hands-on “generations” experience with literally thousands of people, enabling him to connect with people (and readers) in profound ways. As Carl Rogers put it, “That which is most personal is most general.”

As you’ll see in this book, Haydn can see the big picture through vast amounts of information in multiple disciplines while simultaneously providing practical insights and tools that can be used immediately. Haydn has the rare gift of taking complex things and making them simple—without being simplistic, which is what he has powerfully done with *Sticking Points*.

When I wrote *The Speed of Trust*, my foremost objective was to help people *build* trust, not just talk about it. That’s what I love most about *Sticking Points*. Haydn doesn’t simply explain the differences between the generations; he shows us how to use his five-step process to work through and transcend each of the twelve most common generational conflicts—what he calls “sticking points.” He beautifully teaches the *why* behind the *what* and helps us gain real understanding of our generational differences, enabling us to leverage today’s opportunity of having multiple generations at work at the same time.

Haydn is particularly witty and funny. His approach is to get us laughing at ourselves so we are more open to understanding and trusting other generations. Even though this book addresses a serious topic, you’ll catch glimpses of his sense of humor that makes his generational presentations both engaging and penetrating. Haydn’s experience and capabilities are what make this book smart and practical; his personality is what makes it interesting and funny.

Most of all, Haydn has a vision for organizations empowering people and running with the strengths of each of the generations like no one else I know. He sees a future for your

organization where generations can work together in order to produce extraordinary results. More than anything else Haydn sees generational differences not as problems to be solved but as opportunities to be leveraged.

The problem is that both Haydn and I see too many corporate cultures poisoned by frustrations between the generations. We witness lunchtime conversations about out-of-date technology and management styles. We hear older colleagues whispering about new hires who don't seem loyal to the organization. We walk into workplaces that can't attract new and younger people to work there or keep the Boomers from longing for retirement.

What excites me about this wonderful book is how it paints a vision of another way—a *better* way. A way to transform a team stuck in generational differences into a team that sticks together.

*Sticking Points* will be my reference guide for years to come as a go-to resource for both understanding and resolving generational differences. I predict it will become a reference guide for you, too, filled with ideas and insights you can apply from a person you can trust.

*Stephen M. R. Covey*



# Preface

ONCE A WEEK someone asks me when I am going to update *Sticking Points* and my workshops to include Generation Z. Or they say it more bluntly: “This is feeling out of date. Why not drop the Traditionalists and replace them with Gen Z?”

But really, beyond adding Gen Z, it is time to update *Sticking Points* because the conversation around generations has changed:

- People who teach my workshops tell me that participants have begun to point out that the Millennials are pushing forty, and the material should reflect that. (It should. Now all three life stages of the Millennials are in the book.)
- Increasingly, older Millennials have told me that they are tired of people talking about Millennials because it’s often to bash them. Can’t we move on?
- Some organizations are not discussing the topic of generations at all and talk instead about unconscious bias. Occasionally some younger Millennials or Gen Z Cuspers stop me in a workshop because they don’t think generational differences are much of an issue; people

should not be categorized but understood uniquely. (More on this in chapter 7.)

- There were *strong* reactions to my TEDx talk explaining why Millennials get blamed for things that are related to a new life stage!<sup>1</sup> I was not surprised that some in the older generations complained that I was using emerging adulthood to explain away “irresponsible behavior.” But I did not anticipate the number of Millennials who thought I had betrayed them because I did not blame that behavior on the older generations who made them this way and ruined their economic opportunities, or that I only understood Millennials of privilege.

These comments show how the conversation has changed since 2013. They also demonstrate that life stages are the cutting edge of generational research. That’s why for the past seven years I have focused on life stages as much as generations in my research. That approach moves beyond flat generational categories and opens up new understanding.

You now hold in your hands the result of that research—an updated handbook to all five generations, including fully revised information about Millennials and a guide through the maze of contradictory and occasionally scant Gen Z data.

This book was specifically written for the workplace context, but it has broader applications. Generational differences don’t just show up in the conference room. They surface in the home, on the school or nonprofit board, and at religious organizations. Anywhere people get together, what I call the “ghost stories” of the different generations impact the way they think. When we understand why another generation thinks the way they do, we are much more likely to appreciate their differences and speak their language.

A quick note about my research. This book is . . .

- based on conversations and interviews with thousands of people as well as the latest published research.
- about all five generations (with extra attention to Millennials and Gen Z, since they are the newest) so the whole team can read it together and then put it to work.
- quick to read, with a touch of humor. (If we can't laugh at our generational differences, they'll always irritate us.)
- practical. (If you can't apply what a book recommends, what's the point?)

I've been most pleased that readers love the practical ideas in *Sticking Points*. One client said they read ten generational books and picked *Sticking Points* for their firm because it was more practical than the others.

To make it practical, I've included . . .

- comparisons of how generations think, which a major client described as “the answer key to the generations.”
- a five-step plan for leading rather than managing generational differences.
- ways to apply this five-step plan to each of the twelve generational sticking points you face at work (or home).

I wrote this book in such a way that you wouldn't have to read it straight through. Really: I wrote it so you can find what you need quickly and skip what doesn't apply. But my biggest surprise has been how many people have read it cover to cover.

Everyone told me the rule of thumb for a second edition is to change only 10 percent. If you change more than that, they said, write a new book. I did the opposite. I and my team went

through every page, updating statistics, validating examples, and changing applications to fit today's conversation and to reflect what I have learned in seven more years of helping clients.

I didn't want to write a brand-new book because now, as then, there is no other widely used book that covers all the generations. Thousands of people have used *Sticking Points* as their guide to all the generations. Now that it is current, they still can.

# 1

## Sticking Together or Coming Apart

CINDY SNEAKED OUT before the conference wrapped up. Seeing me by the registration table, she looked at her watch and asked, “Can you answer a question about your presentation? I’ve got a big problem on my team.”

“Sure,” I said. “We have a few minutes before people start coming out.”

She glanced at her watch again and started in. “For six months I’ve been working with Human Resources, trying to figure out what to do with Cara. I’m leaving the conference early to finalize the paperwork to fire her. But after listening to you, I’m wondering if maybe there’s something generational about this. I lead an information technology department, and Cara surfs the Internet three hours a day.”

“Sounds like a lot,” I said. “If she’s surfing that much, her work must not be getting done. Who on your team is picking up the slack?”

“No work falls to other people,” Cindy said. “She actually carries the heaviest workload in my department. She supports more software programs and more users than anyone else.”

“Oh,” I said with surprise. “Seems strange to fire your highest producer. Do her customers complain about her work?”

She hesitated. “No . . . she has the best customer satisfaction scores of anyone in our department. The vice presidents often tell me to do whatever it takes to keep her because she is the best in my department. That’s why Human Resources and I have been trying so hard to figure out how to make it work with her. But we are stuck.”

“If she does more work and has better results than anyone on your team, why are you firing her?” I asked.

“Because she sets a bad example for the rest of the department. I have other techs asking me why they can’t surf the web if Cara can. Plus, we pay her for a full day, and she’s not working three hours of it. What if everyone did that? At first I offered to promote her since she is so good; I knew that would fill her plate. But she says she likes the job she has. I’ve coached her for a year now that she needs to stay busy. I’ve offered her extra projects, but she says it wouldn’t be fair.”

I finished her thought. “She says that being able to surf the Internet is her reward for getting her work done faster. She shouldn’t be punished by having to do 30 percent more work than everyone else without 30 percent more pay.”

Cindy almost shouted, “That’s exactly what she said!”

Cindy was in the middle of a sticking point.

---

“My wife and I have two kids in their twenties, but they are certainly not like we were,” Stan, a fifty-six-year-old accountant, stated once we had found a seat. We’d met in the food line at an open house for a recent high school graduate. At first when people find out I do leadership training and consulting, they nod politely. But when I mention I’ve been researching the different generations for almost thirty years, they can’t stop talking.

As I started eating, Stan continued. “By the time I was twenty-five, I already had a house, a kid, and another on the way. But my kids don’t look like they’re ever going to settle down.”

The brisket was good, so I kept eating and listened to Stan. He went on, “Our oldest son, Brandon, is a good kid, but he’s taking his time figuring out what he wants to do. He’s twenty-six, and he moved back home five months ago because he says things are just too expensive on his own. Living with his parents doesn’t seem to faze him or his friends. I would have died of embarrassment. And I know his mother would never have dated me if I’d lived at home, but it doesn’t seem to bother his girlfriend, either. She’s a really nice girl with a good job, but after dating for four years, they never talk about marriage. Most of my friends were married by twenty-six; most of Brandon’s are still dating.”

“That seems about right,” I said. “The average age for marriage has jumped. My oldest son had thought about getting married at twenty-two, and everyone said he was crazy. *I* thought he was crazy, and I got married at twenty-two. Actually, his *grandmother* thought he was crazy, and she got married the day before she turned seventeen. It’s a different world.”

Stan hadn’t touched his food. “I’m not saying he should get married. He hasn’t finished his college degree or found a job he wants to stick with, and he still plays a lot of video games. It’s not getting married later that I don’t understand; it’s that he and his girlfriend don’t want to get serious. I’m a little worried about what’s going to happen to him and his friends.”

Stan was stuck (and his brisket was getting cold).

---

Hector had asked if we could talk at a seminar lunch break, and he got straight to the point: “Haydn, my team is stuck. We

had an important presentation recently that started out fine but ended in disaster.”

Hector Perez was a forty-three-year-old vice president of a new division formed to help his midsize manufacturing company move into green technology. Even discouraged and noticeably tired, Hector never stopped moving his hands. He waved his fork like an orchestra conductor as he talked: “Larry Broz, our CEO, is great. He asked me to fly in my team, who are mainly Generation Xers like me, to make our pitch to the management team for increasing research and development spending on green technologies. Larry’s why I left a great company to come here. He may be almost seventy, but he thinks as young as I do. And my team did great. They looked professional, they knew their stuff, and even when the executive team began to throw out strong challenges, they listened and responded like they were old pros.

“But then the meeting crashed, and our proposal went with it. One of my team members, Rachel, was taking notes on her phone. She finished quickly, but later, when the head of operations launched into one of her pet topics, which we’ve all heard many times before, Rachel began working on Slack on her phone again, in full view of the others in the meeting. The head of operations stopped speaking and stared at Rachel’s phone. Rachel didn’t apologize and mentioned how she was taking notes for the team on Slack. The head of ops had never heard of Slack and asked me why my team ignored meeting etiquette. I tried to make a joke about my team being on their phones in my meetings to ease the tension, but that got the head of ops even more fired up.

“The whole meeting just fizzled,” Hector said. “Once the CEO got the head of operations calmed down, we met for another half hour, but it was awkward, and the energy was gone.

People were still thinking about Rachel using her phone rather than the strategy. Larry finally put the meeting out of its misery and asked the executive team to submit additional comments in writing. He pulled me aside and said he has heard of Slack and his grandkids take notes on their phones faster than he can type, but I need to help my team know how to communicate with other generations.”

Hector continued, “Rachel was just doing what our whole team does in our own meetings. She’s doing stuff on her phone while I’m talking, too, but it doesn’t bother me because I know she’s dialed in to what we’re doing. On the flight home, the team agreed that Rachel should have left her phone alone but wondered how senior management could be so out of touch with how people work now. I’m stuck in the middle. The senior execs want me to coach my team to be more ‘buttoned down,’ but my young team members wonder if they’re just spinning their wheels here, if this is the place for them long term. Two of them referred to our senior team as ‘OK Boomers.’ If senior management can’t adjust to current meeting etiquette, will they ever be able to embrace these new green technologies they want us to implement? I came here to make a difference, not keep the peace.”

Hector was stuck between generations.

---

Cindy’s and Hector’s companies didn’t know it, but they had run into seven of the twelve most common generational sticking points I’ve identified from interviewing and working with thousands of people. And Stan’s family was tangled in four different sticking points as well. When people from different generations answer the same question differently and assume their answer should be obvious to everyone else, that’s a generational

sticking point. Each generation in these situations thought the others were the problem. The groups tried in vain to ignore or avoid their generational differences. Typically, as at Hector's company, the generation in charge tells a younger generation to get it together, hoping that will solve the problem. But it never does.

These groups' approaches predictably didn't work, and they weren't sure why or what to do about it the next time. Generational friction is inevitable today, and "the next time" will come more and more often and create more and more tension. If only the companies and family I described had known the following:

- For the first time in history, we have four and sometimes five different generations in the workplace. These generations might as well be from different countries, so different are their cultural styles and preferences.
- Of the four approaches organizations can take to blending the generations, only one of them works today.
- Focusing on the "what" escalates tensions, while focusing on the "why" pulls teams together.
- Knowing the twelve sticking points can allow teams to label tension points and work through them—even anticipate and preempt them.
- Implementing the five steps to cross-generational leadership can lead to empowering, not losing, key people.

But they didn't know these things. And neither do most organizations or families. Sticking points are inevitable, and they often get teams and families stuck. But they don't have to. *The same generational conflicts that get teams stuck can cause them to stick together.*

Stuck in the past or sticking together going forward: it's a matter of turning a potential liability into an asset. And it's not that hard to do, as you will soon discover. (In later chapters, I'll pick up the stories of Cindy, Stan, and Hector and share the advice I gave them about working through their generational sticking points.)

## “They Don't Get It”

The most common complaint I hear from frustrated people in all generations is “They don't get it.”

“They,” of course, means a boss, coworker, or family member from a different generation who the speaker believes is the cause of a problem. And in my experience, “it” usually refers to one of the following twelve sticking points—places where teams get stuck:

1. communication
2. decision-making
3. dress code
4. feedback
5. fun at work
6. knowledge transfer
7. loyalty
8. meetings
9. policies
10. respect
11. training
12. work ethic

Anyone in today's workforce can identify with most, if not all, of the twelve sticking points.

“They don’t get it” is usually a sign that a sticking point is causing problems. Team members of the same generation begin tossing around stereotypes, making comments to each other about the “offending” generation. Each generation attempts to maneuver the others into seeing the sticking point their own way.

Surprisingly, “They don’t get it” can also apply to those who think we shouldn’t put people into generational categories as much as to the people who launched the “OK Boomer” memes and T-shirts, or the Boomers whose arrogance inspired them. (It’s my life’s mission to help workplaces so Boomers won’t be viewed as “OK Boomer” coworkers and the younger generations won’t need to mumble the insult under their breath.) Both the judges of other generations and the judges of those who talk about generational differences make the first mistake—viewing a sticking point as a problem to be solved rather than as an opportunity to be leveraged. The goal becomes to “fix” the offending generation or generational conversation rather than to look for ways to work with other generations. The irony is that when we say another generation doesn’t get it, we don’t get it either. Or when we say people who recognize and talk about generational differences don’t get it, we are dismissing their perceptions and concerns. Once we get it, we realize that these sticking points are more than generational differences. They are catalysts for deeper conversations that can, if done right, build understanding and appreciation. Sticking points can be negative if you see them as problems or positive if you see them as opportunities for greater understanding and flexibility. Sticking points can make things worse or better depending on whether the five generations can work together in the twelve places they naturally tend to come apart.

We’ll spend the next two chapters looking at why generational

sticking points usually get teams stuck, and we'll see how we can change them into the emotional glue that sticks teams together to achieve exciting results.

## Five Generations: The New Reality

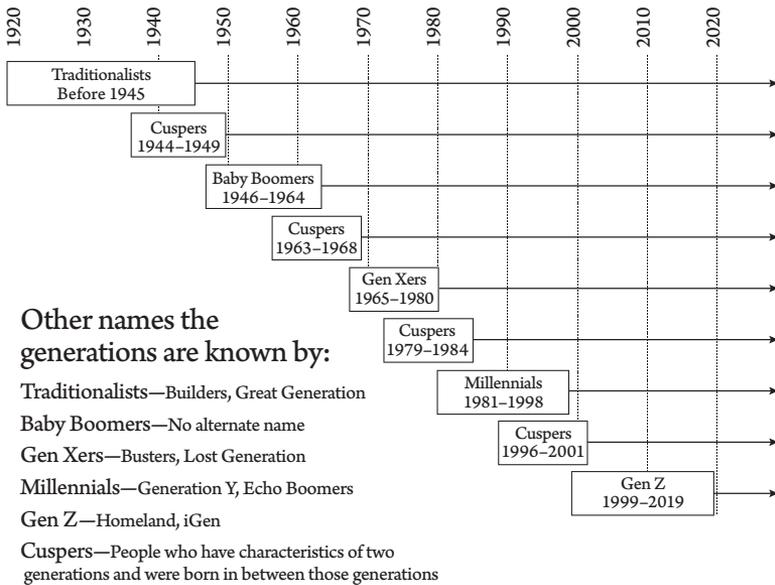
Generational friction is inevitable today because we've never had five generations in the workplace.

Different researchers label the generations—or more technically, “age cohort groups”—using different terms. For simplicity's sake, I've summarized the most common names along with each generation's birth years so you can see where you and others fit.

I'll use the term *Generation X* (or *Gen X* for short), even though the members of that generation don't like the label. Who can blame them? It came from the title of a book about a lost and rootless generation—and *X* is often a symbol for something that's missing or an unknown factor. But unfortunately, that's the name that has stuck.

Not everyone would agree with the dates I assign the generations. While everyone agrees on the dates for the Baby Boomers, some of us disagree by a couple of years about the length of the other generations.<sup>1</sup> Age cohort groups are determined more by the way a generation buys, votes, and answers surveys than by historical markers or birth curves, so of course there is no easily identified date when the Xers ended and the Millennials began.

That is one of the three reasons I waited until now to add Gen Z to this book and my workshop on generations. Because I start Gen Z two or three years later than many sociologists, I think they are still in university and therefore not in the workforce in large numbers. Most workforce surveys bear that out no matter when you start them.



The second reason is that unless you market to Gen Z or your company hires large numbers out of high school, you've had a bigger problem: keeping your Baby Boomers from leaving or getting them to at least transfer their knowledge before they retired. It's natural to be curious about the generation that is coming to the workforce so you can prepare, but not if you are distracted from preparing for the departure of the one that is retiring. (For more information, see chapter 5.)

The third reason is that it was too early. Gen Z is just coming into the workforce, and there hasn't been enough data to draw legitimate conclusions. Books projecting how businesses will need to change based on surveys done of Gen Z even two years ago seem to have missed the mark in some of their interpretations, or Gen Z said something completely different in other surveys. It takes five years for enough data to come out to see through the contradictions, just as it did with the Millennials.<sup>2</sup>

While I am confident in the data on the main points of Gen Z, even now there is not enough data to speak definitively on a few of the twelve generational sticking points. We will need another five years for that.

So why do I believe it's time to think about Gen Z at work if they are still in university? Because the oldest Gen Zs and the youngest Millennials are out of university and in the workplace already, as are those Gen Zs who didn't attend or finish university. Over the next five years, they will pour into the workforce. Either you have them now or you will in a few years, so you need to be ready. This book will help.

To deal with the transitional years when it is impossible to separate generations because people have characteristics of both, marketers developed the term *Cuspers*. For example, I am a Cusper, born in 1963—just when the Baby Boomer generation was ending and Generation X was beginning. Cuspers are a blend of both. I identify in some ways with Boomers and in other ways with Xers. (My wife jokes, “You overwork like a Boomer, and you are cynical like an Xer. I've married the worst of both worlds.”)

While Cuspers can create problems for marketers who can't tell which generational pitch to aim at them, Cuspers are often able to bridge generations. They have one foot in both camps and can sometimes serve as translators and negotiators between generations.

For the first time in history, there are five generations in the workplace and in the marketplace. This new phenomenon complicates our work and our relationships because while people of all generations have the same basic needs and go through similar stages in life, they meet those needs in different ways. The rest of this book will detail the commonalities and differences among the five generations.

## Seven Ways the Generations Will Increasingly Impact Your Organization

If you've never paid much attention to generational differences, here are seven organizational realities you need to be aware of. I'll divide them into internal and external impacts.

### Internal Impacts:

1. *Conflicts around generational sticking points.* How do you get five generations of employees to play nice together in the sandbox? In the past eight years, most organizations have recognized that younger employees don't see things the same way their elders do and that it's impossible to create policies that don't annoy someone. How do you get through the differences and get back to work? Generational friction is inevitable; generational problems are avoidable—that is, if you and your team have a working knowledge of why the generations are different and of how to lead them rather than simply manage them.
2. *Managing and motivating different generations.* Whether it's older supervisors trying to motivate younger employees or Millennial supervisors trying to direct people their parents' age (or to figure out how unlike them Gen Z really is), generational differences complicate things. Not to mention that many Millennial managers tell me their greatest frustration is managing other Millennials.
3. *Replacing the Baby Boomers in the war for talent.* Who will you hire following the coming exodus of Baby Boomers? Even in economic downturns, organizations compete for the best employees,

what's commonly called the "war for talent." Most Traditionalists have already left the workplace. Over the next decade, many of the Baby Boomers will follow—and the ones who return will do so on their own terms. Who will replace them in your organization, and how will you adjust to the younger generation's different approach to work? How will you transfer the Boomers' experience, job knowledge, and customer relationships? Further complicating the shift, lower birthrates in the industrialized world and longer life spans could create a labor shortage over the next two decades.<sup>3</sup>

4. *Succession planning.* Do you trust Generation X to run the place? The president of one of the United States' thirty largest banks confided to me, "Anywhere we have a Boomer in the succession plan for the top spots, we're pretty confident. But if it's a Gen Xer, we don't know. We just aren't sure they get the business." It's a common sentiment. Organizations made their peace with Gen Xers nearly twenty years ago, after a decade of fretting and calling them "slackers." But handing over the keys to the company causes differences in work ethic and loyalty to resurface. I spoke to a medical conference recently about succession planning in doctors' practices. The Boomer doctors I talked to think the Xers in their practice are more committed to making money and work-life balance than to advancing medicine, and they hope to sell their practices to Millennials, whom they see as more idealistic and committed to the advancement of medicine. In the late 1990s and again in the mid-2000s, succession planning was a hot topic as organizations began to do the math on Boomer

retirements. But it faded with the global downturn of 2002 and then the great recession in 2008. You can't put it off any longer. If your organization is typical, well over half your leaders will retire in the next decade. Ready or not, you must have a succession plan.<sup>4</sup>

5. *Leadership development.* Where will you get your leaders? Generation X is a much smaller generation, and Xers do not tend to stay in one company throughout their careers. As we'll see, the leadership development processes that served the Boomers are not working for the next generation.

### External Impacts:

6. *Shifting markets.* What do the different generations want? You thought your website was great, so why isn't it working? We all know generations buy differently. That's the basis of generational market research. If your organization must market to multiple generations, you need to understand what appeals to each generation and learn to speak their language.
7. *Selling to five generations of customers.* Most people relate well to two of the generations but not five. Will your salespeople miss half your customers? How will you prepare your employees to satisfy five generations of customers?

## The People Issue of the Next Decade

This generational math adds up to the people issue of the decade for your business—or hospital or government agency or political campaign or military unit or church or school or nonprofit or foundation or symphony or association or family.

In many ways, the impact on nonprofit organizations will be more intense sooner. Successful businesses can buy a little time with higher pay. Most nonprofits don't have that luxury. They need to know about sticking points now. Here are some organization-specific generational challenges that will need to be dealt with in the immediate future:

- *Hospitals and medicine.* Gen Xers and Millennials did not have Sputnik and the space race to drive national passion in science. While Gen Z is more focused on science-related fields, the average age of nurses in many places is increasing as medicine struggles to attract and retain Gen X and Millennial nurses. Hospitals have been talking about physician shortages for over a decade.<sup>5</sup> (Think of the implications as the Baby Boomers hit their high-medical-need years.) Whereas businesses like Hard Rock Cafe can pick a demographical target, hospitals must serve all five generations. Without generational understanding, a highly skilled Millennial nurse can bring down customer satisfaction scores with a Traditionalist patient just by being more informal in language and approach. What to a Millennial or Gen Z is friendly can seem disrespectful to a Traditionalist.
- *Government.* Millennials went into government studies in much higher numbers than Gen Xers but have not been staying in government jobs. I tell my governmental clients that they have an “empty middle.” With well over half their staff and most of their managers now eligible to retire and relatively few Gen X managers to take over, they have a generational gap that will be a challenge to fill.
- *Political campaigns.* Capturing the vote of the two younger generations was key to Barack Obama's coming

from obscurity to the presidency and then to his reelection.<sup>6</sup> In the 2008 election, the first BlackBerry-carrying president lured away one of the three founders of Facebook, who at twenty-four led the customization of social-networking technology and changed the rules of politics. One example: Obama's Vote for Change site registered over one million voters with only a few part-time staff. In the past that would have required two thousand full-time staff.<sup>7</sup> Campaigns at every level learned from his victory and raced to adopt technology-driven, grassroots-based campaigns. In Obama's reelection, his campaign put even more focus on social media but added precision data mining that has set the playbook since. Further complicating the environment for politicians is that two-thirds of us think that social media harms political discussion.<sup>8</sup> Millennials were the deciding factor in both of Obama's campaigns, and Gen Z is similar or even more left-leaning than Millennials.<sup>9</sup> Campaigns that don't take seriously all generations and their communication technologies will struggle.

- *Military.* I have spoken to hundreds of military leaders about the complexities of Gen Xers leading Millennials and now Gen Z. Maybe the hardest challenge is recruiting. The military is working to reach Gen Zs, who don't respond to phone calls, have an eight-second attention span, and worry if women and minorities will fare well in their ranks.<sup>10</sup>
- *Religious organizations.* People often turn to religion for comfort and guidance in a changing and sometimes confusing world but find that with five generations, it is impossible to keep everyone on the same page. Because religious organizations survive only if they

are able to attract the next generation, this may be the most important issue they face because the younger generations are less interested in organized religion.<sup>11</sup>

- *Schools.* Similar to hospitals, K–12 schools struggle to attract and retain Gen X and Millennial teachers. In many areas, the dropout rate for new teachers is 50 percent. Internally, faculty struggle just as businesses do to understand the different generations. One med school professor told me she asked her dean if she could record herself teaching so she could work on research rather than offering ongoing classes. The school no longer required class attendance, so half her students didn't show up. (He said no.)
- *Nonprofits/foundations.* Without business-level salaries, nonprofits and foundations have to motivate and inspire each generation if they hope to win in the war for talent. Moreover, the generations have different ideas of what volunteer involvement looks like and how organizations should be run. Add to that the changing expectations of donors, and the same changes that have impacted political campaigns will continue to change fundraising.
- *Associations.* When I ask my association clients to name their key challenges, these themes emerge: How do we get younger members to join? How do we get them to attend and, better yet, volunteer? And how do we deal with the tensions between generations when younger members try to jump in but don't want to do things the way they've always been done?
- *Families.* Raising children is different today than it used to be. Teens spend hours online with fifty friends and have to be forced to go outside. You know it's a different world when your child wants to watch YouTubers

play video games more than they want to play them themselves.

All organizations must understand sticking points to ensure that their teams stick together instead of being stuck in generational conflicts. Sticking points are unavoidable; staying stuck in them is a waste. With the right tools and understanding, generational sticking points can instead be huge opportunities to make our organizations more effective.