

## Mediating the Clash of Generations

*"They're dinosaurs. They just won't change!"*

*"She has no work ethic. She always leaves work right at quitting time."*

*"Does he think we owe him a job just for showing up?!"*

*"Texting in a meeting is rude."*

*"If I don't like this job I'll quit"*

Sound familiar? We now have four generations in our workplaces, a greater diversity than at any other time in our history. The challenge of building an inclusive workplace is even more difficult now because of the generation-related challenges. Or is it? Let's take a closer look at the four generations and how they affect the resolution of conflict in the workplace.

The four generations are defined as Traditionals, born before 1946; Boomers, born 1946 to 1964; Generation X, born 1965 to 1980; and Millennials, born 1981 to 2000. These are the four groups although the dates are not absolutes and individuals may share characteristics of the group before or after if they were born within 3 or 4 years of a dividing line.

**Traditionals** are characterized by their loyalty and serious work ethic. Their tendency is to be devoted to the family, regularly attend a church or synagogue and vote regularly. This is the generation influenced by inventions such as the helicopter, zipper, Teflon, DDT, camera, flashbulbs and widespread availability of telephones, running water, electricity, cars, and movies with sound.

**Boomers**, the next oldest generation are characterized as risk takers and creative thinkers who work hard and play hard. Many Boomers have been divorced or are children of divorce or both and they tend to be non-religious. This group is sometimes called the "sandwich" generation because they are helping to look after their parents while still supporting their own children. Inventions that influenced this generation include radar, the atom bomb, Salk vaccine, Polaroid camera, Velcro, microwaves, TV dinners, and widespread availability of television and then colour TV.

For **Generation X**, a key characteristic is the constant use of computers, PDAs and other electronic tools. They love to be challenged, even for vacations when they choose adventure vacations often with physical challenges. Gen X'ers also love possibility and ingenious ideas, don't think about religion and rarely vote. This is the generation influenced by inventions such as transplants, Valium, space exploration, measles vaccine, microprocessors, genetic engineering, pocket calculators and Walkmans.

**Millennials**, sometimes called Generation Y, are the group just entering the workforce, the children of Boomers. This group is highly idealistic and, on their own flexible time schedule, hard-working. Millennials are connected. They are comfortable multitasking with computer, TV, Blackberry and iPod all at the same time. This group is fun loving, has a ready flow of ideas and high expectations – of the workplace and of themselves. Millennials tend to believe in a personal moral compass, moved back in with their parents or got financial help from their parents after finishing school and are not ready to think about children. The millennial employee is likely comfortable

at work wearing jeans, a hoodie and a tattoo, shows up holding a designer coffee and doesn't hesitate to contact the CEO of the company. In their downtime Millennials enjoy participation in sports and spending time in a gym. A few of the many inventions that have influenced this group are: CDs, cell phones, laptops, airbags, email, chat rooms, chicken pox vaccine, ATMs, cloning, virtual reality, body piercing and widespread access to the Internet.

What is the significance of this heightened consciousness about the generations? The wide range of generations can be a source of misunderstandings and problems. It can also be a goldmine of opportunities.

According to an article in the Careers section of the January 25, 2008 Globe and Mail newspaper, "The differences between the generations are not nearly as big as they have been trumpeted to be. Workers of all ages share many of the same core values: work/life balance, for instance, is as important to older staff as it is younger ones. Organizations are forgetting what

*(Cont'd on next page)*

### You Can Mediate

Learning how to mediate is an asset whether you are exploring a career option related to mediation services or whether you are developing skills for your current job. In addition to positions specifically for mediators, job roles such as human resources, management, and customer service all benefit from the application of mediation skills.

This spring is your opportunity to get the mediation training you want in beautiful downtown London, Ontario.

**Fundamentals of Mediation** is an intensive 40 hour course approved by the ADR Institute of Ontario and completion of the course qualifies for application as a mediator member of the ADR Institute of Ontario. The course dates are April 2, 3, 4, 10, and 11, 2008.

Graduates of basic mediation training often ask about taking their mediation skills to the next level. For those who complete Fundamentals of Mediation or similar training approved by the ADR Institute of Ontario, a new educational opportunity is coming up in London, Ontario.

**Mediation Beyond the Basics** is being offered for the first time on May 7, 8, and 9, 2008.

Comments from past participants:

"Kathryn was excellent, thoroughly prepared and very knowledgeable."

"All the material covered was packed with information that was very helpful."

Enrollment is limited so please avoid disappointment by contacting us early. More information and registration forms are available for both courses at [www.munnncrs.com](http://www.munnncrs.com)

really matters: people have different personalities; if employers want to really understand their workers they must realize people are a far greater function of who they are than how old they are.”

The issues that are prevalent in most workplace conflict also are the issues for conflict resolution between the generations. Improving communication and building working relationships continue to be critical. No change there.

Older workers provide value because of their organizational knowledge and their ability to mentor younger workers. Forcing the Traditionals and Boomers into early retirement or making them feel unwelcome may seem like a good solution until the organization realizes the loss of contribution which goes out the door with those older workers.

Organizations are tripping over themselves trying to woo Gen X'ers and Millennials especially those with technical and specialist expertise. Pool tables, up-to-the minute technology, in-house gyms and green policies may entice them through the door but will not be enough to keep them working for the organization. Younger workers expect to feel valued and want to know that their feelings and opinions are considered to be important.

It seems to me that despite what we hear about these four generations in conflict in the workplace, the solution comes back to the same old concepts. People of all ages want to feel valued and will not tolerate double talk from the organization.

The challenge is to build a workplace environment that genuinely welcomes the rich diversity. This is not a task that can be done once and crossed off the managers' "to do" list.

Building that welcoming workplace usually includes designing a system to manage conflict in the organization and within that, to encourage dialogue between employees with specific disputes, discussion within teams or departments to resolve conflicts and employee training to assist with skills of communication and conflict resolution. All of these components need the expertise of a skilled mediator, not just once but over a period of time. It may seem like considerable expense but certainly worth the investment when you stack it up beside the higher costs of not building a workplace that fully welcomes each of the four generations.

## Munn-thly Memo

**Q.** I work for a small owner-managed business. I would like to make suggestions on how to improve things at work, but I don't want to get the reputation as a troublemaker or whiner. Is there a way to offer criticism and not look like a jerk?

**A.** Effective criticism is a challenge and definitely caution is warranted when you want to provide criticism to your employer. You will need to assess the risks of giving your boss the criticism compared with leaving things as they are.

If you decide to proceed with making your suggestions for improvement, schedule a time when you can speak with your boss in private. Here are some guidelines to consider for making your criticism effective:

- 1 Tell your boss your motivation for giving the criticism and ask his or her permission to give the information. If you are motivated by a genuine desire to help, this will create a climate for your boss receiving the criticism less defensively. Ask yourself ahead of time: What is it I really want her or him to hear? Why do I care? What is important here?
- 2 Offer information without trying to force change. Give your boss the opportunity to decide for him or herself whether change is warranted.
- 3 Encourage your boss' involvement. Imagine that you are in her or his shoes. Check that you have been understood and whether your boss agrees or disagrees with you. Ask your boss for her or his opinion – and listen to the answer.
- 4 Describe the subject of your concern neutrally and objectively. Likely as an owner-manager, this business is your boss' "baby" and she or he will be very sensitive to negative judgment.
- 5 Tell your boss what he or she does effectively, using the same neutral descriptive language to talk about the strengths. It may help to put into perspective the changes you have identified.
- 6 Be direct and specific. Make sure you are talking about the real issue and keep it brief so that you do not lose your boss' attention.
- 7 Be willing to ask for and receive criticism yourself. If some of the problem is your fault accept responsibility.
- 8 Be part of the solution. If your boss decides that change is appropriate commit to helping.

More information about criticism is available in Common Ground #24 and 25 at [www.munnncrs.com](http://www.munnncrs.com).

## Mark Your Calendar Upcoming Training Events Presented by Kathryn Munn

### Fundamentals of Mediation

Intensive 40 hour program

April 2,3,4,10, and 11, 2008

9:00 AM to 5:30 PM each day

Course location: London, Ontario

This course is approved by the  
ADR Institute of Ontario.

Registration form available at  
[www.munnncrs.com](http://www.munnncrs.com)

Please call 519-660-1242

(toll-free 1-888-216-3202) or email

[kmunn@munnncrs.com](mailto:kmunn@munnncrs.com) for more information.

### Mediation Beyond the Basics

Advanced 21 hour program

For graduates of Fundamentals of Mediation or  
equivalent 40-hour mediation program.

May 7, 8, 9, 2008

9:00 AM to 5:00 PM each day

Course location: London, Ontario

Registration form available at [www.munnncrs.com](http://www.munnncrs.com)

Please call 519-660-1242

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### Difficult Conversations

April 27, 2008

Elder Care Expo, London Ontario.

For more information see [www.eldercareexpo.ca](http://www.eldercareexpo.ca)  
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make the arrangements.

### Electronic Common Ground

If you prefer to be on our e-mailing list please  
send us an email.

**Kathryn Munn**, LL.B., Cert.ConRes., C. Med., is a  
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