

How Women from Different Generations Think about Work and Employee Engagement

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Generation Y, that much maligned group of employees entering our organizations, is generally defined as those born from the mid-1980s to late-1990s. Employers and gray-haired managers are trying to figure out how to reach, recruit and retain this dynamic group of workers. Modern Survey's recently published study, *The State of Employee Engagement: Spring 2014*, included some remarkable insights into this segment of the population, particularly Generation Y women.

According to the research, more women in Generation Y than in other generations (Baby Boomers and Generation X) said they participated in decisions that affect their work; that when they have good ideas, management puts those ideas to good use; and that they are recognized when they do good work.

Why the difference? Much of it comes from how they were raised, experts say.

"Generation Y women grew up in a much different environment than Baby Boomer women," says Lisa Quast, founder of Career Woman, a career coaching and consulting company. "The Baby Boomer women were generally born between 1946-1964, a time when most husbands had careers and most wives worked within the home. This was a time when there wasn't an economic necessity for both spouses to have careers and women generally weren't seen as equals to men. Given the environment when Baby Boomer women came of age, it doesn't surprise me that only 45 percent of them believe employees are able to participate in decisions that affect their work."

It's likely that women of the Baby Boomer generation were more inclined to see themselves as having a secondary role at work. "Unlike Generation Y women, Baby Boomer women weren't raised with the expectations of being independent, self-sufficient, and equal to men," Quast says. "These differences in environmental behavioral conditioning between the generations may account for the different survey results."

In contrast, women of Generation Y were raised to ask questions and believe in themselves and likely have a different level of confidence. Parents, teachers and coaches gave members of Generation Y feedback throughout their childhoods, and they have grown to expect it as adults in the workplace. Finally, Quast says, members of Generation Y are not afraid to look for a new job; they do not expect to work for the same company for their entire career.

If the results of your engagement survey show differences between satisfaction levels of men and women at work, break it out by generation and see if the differences hold. Understanding employees' backgrounds and generational differences can help you build engagement among all employees.

