

HOTELS

PASSION FOR HOSPITALITY

What's the Deal By [Daniel Lesser](#)

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(The views and opinions expressed in this blog are strictly those of the author.)

Like many others industries, lodging is witnessing the extraordinary phenomenon of five generations coexisting in the workforce. The current generations include:

- Traditionalists, broadly aged 70-plus, are working, albeit in small proportions, and usually on a part-time basis;
- Baby boomers, in their late 50s and 60s, continue to go strong, with many planning to work post-retirement for financial security;
- Generation X, in their mid-40s and 50s, focused on their careers, comprise a substantial proportion of the current workforce;
- Generation Y, (millennials), in their mid-20s to early 40s, constitute the largest segment in the workplace today (and are the subject of much scrutiny) and;
- Generation Z, aged 22 or younger, fresh out of college, forming a new cohort that has yet to define themselves in the workforce.

With a span of almost half a century between the oldest and the youngest employees, this unprecedented demographic diversity in the workplace offers unique opportunities while posing myriad challenges.

The hotel sector can, and should, tap the full potential of the cross-generational knowledge and experience available to them today. Identifying the overarching similarities and differences between the five generations while recognizing an individual's personality and aptitude can be helpful in allocating job responsibilities across functions and departments in a hotel. For instance, an individual from a more mature generation may be better suited to create structure and establish process controls, whereas another from the younger generations could offer valuable perspective on its efficiency and user-friendliness.

A diverse age demographic, with varied experiences, backgrounds and perspectives, can make brainstorming sessions on any subject very enlightening and encourage all sorts of options reflecting the generational insights from many different walks of life. Furthermore, hotels can now effectively relate to a wide age group of customers, owing to a team profile that largely mimics their demographic. Companies that acknowledge this and use it to infer consumer trends and preferences shall obtain a distinct competitive advantage in the industry.

A multi-generational workforce can create greater resiliency to hospitality sector labor market changes. Organizations can balance risks by tailoring their HR practices around the key motives of their demographically diverse workforce and build a robust work culture to counter employee attrition, inequity and the high cost of recruitment that the lodging sector continually grapples with.

One cannot dismiss the problems that can surface with a cross-generational workforce. Different working styles, philosophies and varied abilities to adapt to a rapidly changing marketplace often create conflicts. The younger generations may see the older ones as restricting their career advancement (particularly if the latter are in higher positions). In turn, the younger generations can be seen as a threat to job security by the older generation – resulting in workforce attrition and poor interpersonal relationships, both of which are detrimental to any organization, and even more so in a customer-centric industry like ours.

Many employers in the lodging industry are guilty of focusing on the millennials, orienting their organizational culture and processes for recruitment, communication and career advancement to suit these employees. Though emphasis and focus on this generation (which often comprises the largest proportion of their workforce) is understandable and necessary, it has led to the other generations receiving scant attention and limiting the opportunity for such employers to reap the benefits of the larger workforce.

Age-diverse organizations are uniquely positioned to leverage the strengths of each generation. The lodging industry must make a conscious and structured effort to capitalize on this opportunity. Relying on generalizations made via extensive research on the subject to typecast individuals based on their age can be counterproductive and take away from harnessing the positives of multi-generational diversity.

Being truly flexible, respectful and inclusive is the way forward.

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