

The Modern Workforce: Adapting to a rapidly changing environment

Generational Analysis Deep Dive



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When thinking about the modern workforce, we have to consider generational segments. Defining “generations” is not an exact science. The breakdowns are subjective and the traits of each cohort are generalized. For the most part, date ranges for generations are based around common economic, social or political factors that happened during formative years.

This guide will take a closer look at:

- Who are they? What characteristics and traits define the group?
- What are their overall belief systems and approach to society?
- What are their shopping and commerce habits?
- What does the workforce breakout by industry look like?
- What do they value in the workplace?



Demographics, Employment, Key Facts

Data as of 2020

	Silent Generation Page 4	Baby Boomers Page 7	Generation X Page 10	Millennials Page 13	Generation Z Page 16	Generation Alpha Page 19
Year Born	1928–1945	1946–1964	1965–1980	1981–1996	1997–2010	2011-2025
Age Range	76–93 years old	57–75 years old	41–56 years old	25–40 years old	11–24 years old	10 years old or younger
Race	85% white, 9% black, 4% asian, 2% other	81% white, 11% black, 5% asian, 2% other	77% white, 13% black, 7% asian, 3% other	73% white, 15% black, 7% asian, 4% other	73% white, 15% black, 6% asian, 7% other	71% white, 15% black, 6% asian, 8% other
Population Distribution	7%	21%	18%	23%	18%	13%
Employment Distribution	1% (1.8MM)	23% (33.4MM)	31% (45.4MM)	34% (49.9MM)	12% (17.2MM)	N/A
Employment-Population Ratio	8%	45%	75%	75%	46%	N/A
Top Industries Employed	N/A	Healthcare and social assistance, manufacturing, retail trade	Healthcare and social assistance, manufacturing, education services	Healthcare and social assistance, professional and technical services, manufacturing	Retail trade, accommodation and food service, healthcare and social assistance	N/A
Top Values and Attitudes	Traditional, responsible, self-reliant, obedient, hardworking	Optimistic, focused, competitive, independent, seek stability	Skeptical, realistic, resourceful, adaptable, seek work/life balance	Collaborative, ambitious, resilient, confident, questioning	Entrepreneurial, pragmatic, values change and inclusion, takes action	Technological, hyper connected, diverse

Population Distribution: % of what each specific generation makes up in the total U.S population **Employment Distribution:** % of what each specific generation makes up in the total U.S employed civilian labor force population **Employment-Population Ratio:** % of the total U.S employed civilian labor force population out of the total U.S civilian noninstitutional population **Civilian Noninstitutional Population:** people 16 years of age and older residing in the 50 States and the District of Columbia who are not inmates of institutions, and who are not on active duty in the Armed Forces **Civilian Labor Force Population Employed:** all persons in the civilian noninstitutional population classified as employed



Silent Generation

The Traditionalists

The Silent Generation grew up as children of crisis, seeing older people fight in wars and live extra lean. Rather than trailblaze, they tend to conform and adapt just as they did post WWII. Patriotism, sacrifice and doing more with less very much define the overall attitude of this generation.

Age:
76–93 years old

Life Event Context:
Great Depression, WWII

Representation of labor force:
1% (1.8MM people)

Values and attitudes:
Traditional
Responsible and self-reliant
Willing to sacrifice
Obedience over individuality
Moral
Respect for rules and authority
Hardworking



Work

A vast majority of Silent Generation professionals are retired, but those that do still work, often work for mental stimulation, connection or extra spending money.



What they value in work:

Experience

Believe advancing in a career requires tenure and experience.

Financially motivated

Having experienced financial insecurity at a young age, motivated to provide for themselves and their families and thus seek financial security in their jobs.

Self-reliance

Place an emphasis on getting tasks done independently.

Traditionalism

Comfortable with hierarchy and authority, used to more traditional work environments and may struggle with concepts like open office plans, shared workspaces or the more friendly tone of the modern workplace.

Shopping and commerce

Preference for in-store experience ultimately characterizes the Silent Generation's approach to shopping. Nearly one quarter of Silent Generation members shop strictly in store, more than any other group. And when they do shop online, it's about the ease of not leaving home.

As consumers, they value:

Money over brand name

Only 3% buy a product for its brand name, prioritizing value first.

Reliability and guarantees

Want assurance money is well spent with things like quality guarantees.

Go-to retailers

More likely to shop at a particular outlet than searching for specific brands like other generations.

Highest annual spending categories:



Retail



Travel



Food/convenience/
drug store

Baby Boomers

Hardworking Dreamer

Born during the post World War II baby boom, Baby Boomers in the United States experienced a period of high economic growth, employment and prosperity as adolescents in the 1960s. Raised by hard workers who lived through the Great Depression, Baby Boomers were raised to value hard work, but with the new promise of 'the American dream.'

Age:

57–75 years old

Life Event Context:

Vietnam War, Civil Rights Movement, Cold War, space exploration (Apollo II), JFK assassination

Values and attitudes:

Optimism
Relationships
Hardworking and focused
Competitive
Independent
Seek stability

Representation of labor force:

23% (33.4MM)



Work

The number of retired Baby Boomers rose more from 2019 to 2020 than in prior years. And by September 2020, 40% of Boomers were retired.



What they value in work:

Visibility

Want managers to see them showing up and working hard (remote work may be a greater challenge for Baby Boomers in this regard).

Self-sufficiency

Raised with the idea of 'the American dream' and hold a belief they have to work hard to get where they want to be.

Work is an identity component

Invested in families and hobbies, job/career is also a defining part of their identity. Take pride in their careers and companies.

Top Industries

- Healthcare and social assistance
- Manufacturing
- Retail trade
- Education services
- Professional and technical services
- Construction
- Transportation and warehousing
- Finance and insurance
- Management and administration

Shopping and commerce

Baby Boomers demonstrated the largest shift to e-commerce since the start of the pandemic, with an increase from 25% to 37%. Yet they still prefer to buy products in-store rather than online.

As consumers, they value:

Customer service

Quality interactions with brands and their employees (online and in-store).

Trusted recommendations and reviews

When making purchase decisions, look to others for validation.

Good value for money

Not just about affordability, but getting a quality product at a reasonable price point.

Loyalty programs

As of 2020, 79% of baby boomers were active in at least one loyalty program, the highest percentage of any generation.

Highest annual spending categories:



Finance



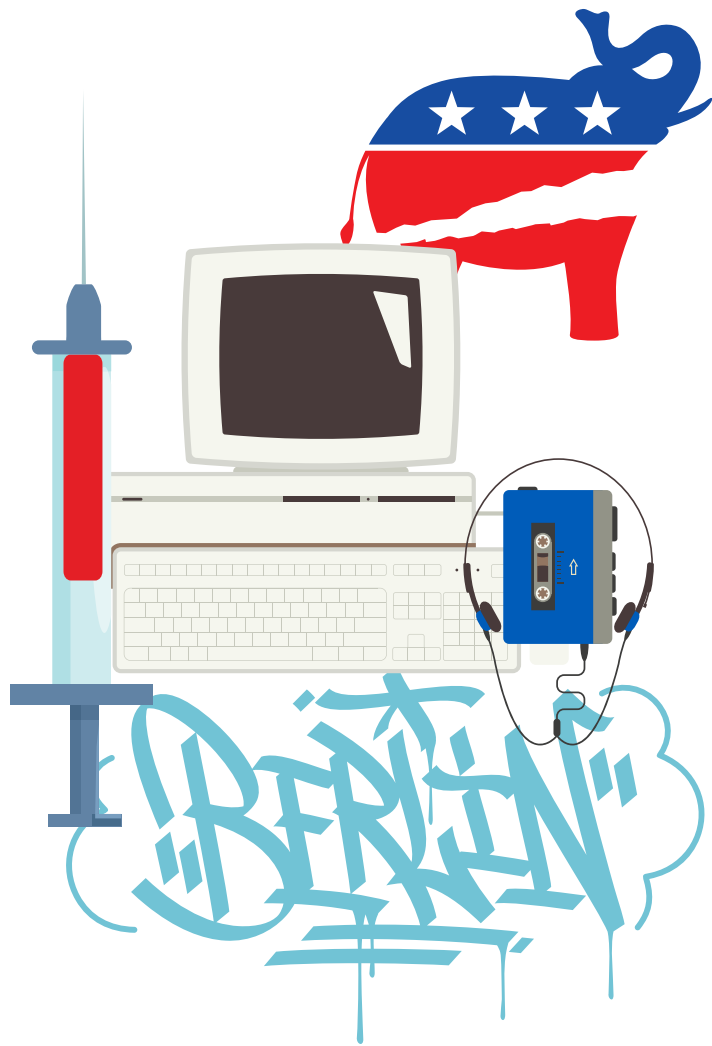
Health



Science



Home & garden



Generation X

The Middle Child

Best known as “America’s middle child”, Gen Xers pride themselves on their individualism and nonconformist outlook, having grown up during radical social, technological and economic changes. They’re now in their highest earning years professionally, while balancing taking care of both children and parents.

Age:

41–56 years old

Life Event Context:

Fall of the Berlin Wall, AIDS epidemic, Jonestown massacre, Watergate, dot-com boom

Representation of labor force:

31% (45.4MM)

Values and attitudes:

Skeptical and realistic
Independent
Resourceful
Seek work/life balance
Adaptable
Entrepreneurial

Work

Gen X experienced less frequent job loss than their younger or older generational counterparts during the pandemic. But nevertheless beared financial struggle, with one quarter of them experiencing an income drop by 50% or more in 2020.



What they value in work:

Autonomy

Having grown up more independently, with the rise of two working-parent households, used to being resourceful and problem solving on their own.

Flexibility

Want the freedom to complete tasks and reach goals using the methods that work for them.

Clarity

Motivated by reaching specific goals, needs clarity on objectives and desired outcomes first so they can chart the best path forward.

Balance

While valuing work and career greatly, prefer a separation between work and personal, and the flexibility to prioritize life outside of work.

Top Industries

- Healthcare and social assistance
- Manufacturing
- Professional and technical services
- Construction
- Public administration
- Finance and insurance
- Retail trade
- Transportation and warehousing
- Education services

Shopping and commerce

Known in the past for being brand loyal, Gen X members shifted focus to online bargains and purchasing store brands due to the pandemic's impact on their finances.

As consumers, they value:

Customer reviews

Spends time evaluating via customer reviews as part of their bargain hunting, especially as online shopping has risen in popularity.

Self-indulgence, when called for

Looking ahead for the right time to make big purchases on travel, cars and household goods.

Sustainability

Sustainability conversation tends to center around demands of younger generations. But a great majority of Gen Xers prefer to buy from sustainable brands and are willing to pay more for them.

Recommerce

Reports shopping second-hand markets, like consignment retail, at levels on par with Millennials.

Highest annual spending categories:



Transportation



Health



Travel



Home & garden



Millennial

Purpose Seekers

Millennials were the first generation to have digital technology as adolescents, and grew up exposed to the growth of intense political polarization. Coming into adulthood during an economic recession gave way to Millennials having delayed or opted out of getting married or having children.

Age:
25–40

Life Event Context:
9/11, 2007–2009 recession, Afghanistan/
Iraq wars, legalization of gay marriage, tech
revolution

Representation of labor force:
34% (49.9MM)

Values and attitudes:

Collaborative
Ambitious
Resilient
Values-driven
Social change
Confident
Questioning

Work

Having largely gotten their foot in the door professionally, Millennials are now primarily focused on career growth and stability. It's meant many have had the confidence to make job leaps.



What they value in work:

Flexibility

Prefer flexible work schedules and work places, often wanting hybrid or remote options and the chance to work outside the traditional 9-to-5. Currently, 70% say that the ability to work from anywhere in the world is important.

Work life balance

Prefer jobs that allow pursuit of passions and family time, and may even take jobs that offer more flexibility in exchange for lower pay.

Praise and rewards

Having grown up with consistent feedback loops with digital communication and social media, more reliant on praise and encouragement to achieve goals.

Innovation

Discontent with the status quo, question the way of things to find improvements and efficiencies.

Top Industries

- Healthcare and social assistance
- Professional and technical services
- Manufacturing
- Retail trade
- Education services
- Construction
- Finance and insurance
- Accommodation and food service
- Public administration

Shopping and commerce

Millennials are conscious consumers who believe their purchases can align with beliefs, spending their money on higher quality products online. And they're the only generation focused more on experiences than product. The pandemic gave rise to more indulgent, consumable purchases – which, for them, means convenience meals and sweet and cheesy snack foods.

As consumers, they value:

Ethical/environmentally focused

Shops second-hand markets more than any other generation, and expect brands should try to become more sustainable.

Online ease and accessibility

Spend lots of time shopping online, and want features that add ease (like AI chatbots and quick payment methods).

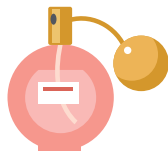
Influence of peers

25% more likely than others to say that having a friend's recommendation for a product or service would encourage them to pay a bit more.

Highest annual spending categories:



Games & toys



Beauty



Sports



Apparel & fashion

Generation Z

Connected Changemakers

More racially and ethnically diverse than any other generation, Generation Z is also likely to be the most educated. They're true digital natives, and for now, seem to hold similar progressive values as their elder Millennial counterparts as they enter their most formative years. Having grown up hyper aware of political, social and environmental issues, they're proponents of change, collective action and the power of social media for good.

Age:
11–24

Life Event Context:
Gun violence, climate change,
polarizing politics, COVID-19

Representation of labor force:
12% (17.2MM)

Values and attitudes:
Change
Inclusion
Action
Pragmatic
Financially conscious
Entrepreneurial



Work

As the youngest generation in the workforce, Gen Zers were hit hardest by job loss, with half of the oldest Gen Zers (ages 18 to 23) reporting that they or someone in their household had lost a job or taken a cut in pay.



What they value in work:

In-person interactions

Desires human connection, despite wanting remote flexibility. Recent study found that 75% of Gen Z respondents said they want to receive in-the-moment feedback from a manager in-person.

Being heard

Native to social media, used to expressing ideas and getting immediate feedback. Want to be heard out in the workplace.

Flexibility and stability

Like Millennials, want to work hard in return for flexible work policies without losing stable benefits like generous healthcare coverage.

Top Industries

- Accommodation and food service
- Healthcare and social assistance
- Manufacturing
- Education services
- Construction
- Trade and warehousing
- Professional and technical services
- Finance and insurance

Shopping and commerce

Having been hit hard by the pandemic as the youngest in the workforce, 70% of Generation Z members are being more frugal and monitoring spending due to the pandemic. But when they do spend, it's on higher quality items and on any channel.

As consumers, they value:

Higher-priced and quality items

22% of Gen Zers have used a buy-now-pay-later solution since the start of the pandemic to buy more expensive products.

Environmentally conscious

Most willing to pay more for sustainable products (73%).

Support local and BIPOC owned

76% plan to return to their pre-pandemic brands, but continue commitment to local, Black- and minority-owned and domestic products.

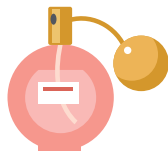
Convenience enabled by technology

Value innovation, not just for innovation's sake, but when it removes friction and adds ease into their digital interactions with brands.

Highest annual spending categories:



Games & toys



Beauty



Art



Apparel & fashion



Generation Alpha

The Adapters

Generation Alpha, kids of mostly Millennials, stand to be the most diverse, wealthiest and most well-educated generation yet. They will grow up interacting with humans as well as AI and robots, making them the most technologically immersed generation from a young age. They care about climate change and social justice, and while we know they're being shaped by an era of personalization and customization, defining traits will still evolve.

Age:

10 and younger

Life Event Context:

Gun violence, climate change, polarizing politics, COVID-19

Values and attitudes (thus far):

Diversity
Hyper-connectivity
Ownership and individuality
Adaptable
Lifelong learners

Shopping, commerce and work

What we can expect of them as workers:

Emerging fields

Work in fields such as cyber-security, app development and cryptocurrency.

Tech with purpose

Half want to use technology to make a difference in the world.

Environment-conscious work

63% said they are more interested in jobs linked to environmental protection than any other issue.

Seek training

By necessity, upskill constantly to adapt to the rapidly changing future of work.

Whole human-first approach

No tolerance of workplaces that don't foster well-being.

What's emerging as young, influential consumers:

Inclusion and non-binary existence

Avoid gendered products, embracing for themselves or others, a non-binary identity.

Purpose-driven

Following their Millennial elders, 66% say they want to shop brands that contribute to a better world

Native to environmental consciousness

Expect brands to adapt to a greener future. Brands with environmental initiatives start including Gen Alpha (GM, Everybody In spot).

Mindfulness and mental health

Use products that help with self-soothing, mindfulness and coping with mental illness.

A strong company brand starts from within.

What do the benefits you offer say about your company?
Why should a prospective employee choose your organization and why should the employees you currently have stay?



One thing is certain, there is a growing trend of employees wanting employers to play an expanded role to support their work-life balance. The workforce of today — and tomorrow — wants their employer to support 3 facets of employee well-being:

- 1 Physical** - flexible work and leave policies, childcare and senior care provisions
- 2 Mental** - more mental health resources and open conversations at work about mental health
- 3 Financial** - financial wellness programs and benefits to promote financial well-being

Your Strategic Partner

As the state's largest health insurer, companies look to Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas to set the pace for health and wellness product innovations driven by evolving member needs. Recently, as the need for mental health services increased, BCBSKS offered **MiResource** to enable members to access behavioral health services more efficiently in Kansas.

Blue Cross can be a strategic partner to help employers audit their current benefit offering and most importantly, help them determine what new benefits are feasible within already tight budgets.

Contact a representative

866-861-5564