



# A Special Report

## Legislative Staff Managers Look at Workplace Issues

*From the CSG-WEST Legislative Service Agency/Research Directors Committee*

*The Legislative Service Agency and Research Directors (LSA/RD) Committee of the Council of State Governments-WEST met in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 2002 for annual training on management issues in the legislative workplace. This report highlights training delivered by human resource experts from the University of New Mexico.*

*In addition to the special university training, LSA/RD members also discussed lobbyist-legislative staff relations, orientation sessions and how the New Mexico State Capitol became an art gallery. Carl Bianchi, Idaho's Legislative Services director and chair of the LSA/RD Committee, presided over the two-day meeting. Staff managers from Alaska, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada and New Mexico attended, along with CSG-WEST staff.*

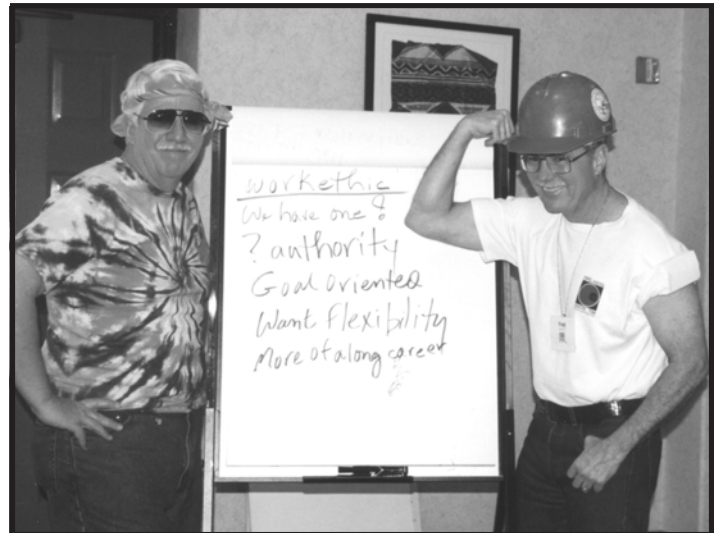
## Generations Communicate at Work

### Building Bridges across Generations

According to University of New Mexico human resources trainers and dispute resolution experts Jonathan Armendariz and Kathy Jackson, the generation gap is more apparent at work than anywhere else. Led by university facilitators, Western legislative staff directors discussed how to manage different generations in today's workforce.

The four generations now in the workplace are:

- The Veteran or Silent Generation (Born 1922-1942).
- The Boomer Generation (Born 1943-61)
- Generation X (Born 1962-1981)
- Generation Y, also known as Nexters (Born 1982-1998).



*Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau staff wear boomer attire from the '60s. Bob Erickson is pictured left, and Fred Welden is shown right.*

*Members of the CSG-WEST Legislative Services Agency/Research Directors Committee elected Carl Bianchi as chair for the 2003-4 biennium. Bianchi directs the Idaho Legislative Services Office. Oregon Legislative Administrator Dave Henderson was elected as vice chair.*

*The goal of the LSA/RD committee is to improve service to legislators in the West. Members receive annual management training from such groups as Great Places to Work, Inc., Southwest Airlines, Eastman Kodak, as well as from human resource experts in Western universities.*

## Veterans

Veterans make up about five percent of today's working population. These employees want clear expectations and roles. They are loyal, they value respectful communications, they want acknowledgement of their experience, and they want to keep their family life and their work life separate. Veterans don't much like ambiguity, and they are driven to get the job done whatever it takes.

Managers must pay attention to these veteran characteristics to get the most from these employees. And managers need to be aware of how other workers react to veterans too. For example, boomers report that veterans are inflexible and can't keep up with technology, but boomers also say that veterans on the work team keep people focused on getting the job done.

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### **Veterans won't let go of a job until it's done...**

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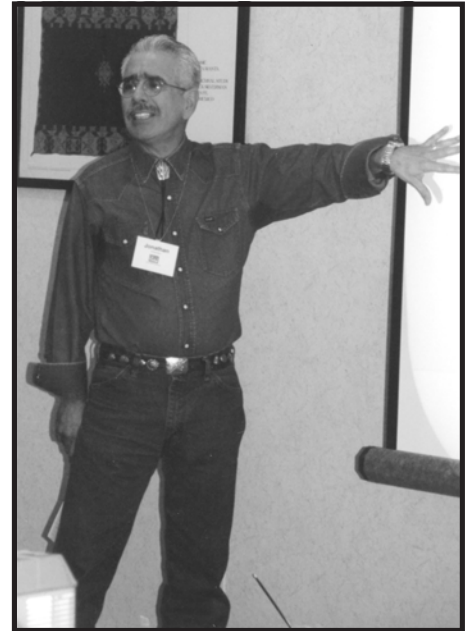
Gen Xers also criticize vets for their lack of technical skill, but agree that they're fun to teach and that veterans won't let go of a job until it's done—no matter how late it is. Nexters appear to be quite positive about veterans and say they are reliable and know how to lead.

*University of New Mexico trainers Jonathan Armendariz and Kathy Jackson provided the information in this report on generational differences in the workplace. They summarized multigenerational management principles with five points:*

- Acknowledge employee differences
- Develop options for employees
- Expect and honor competence and new ideas
- Be flexible in management style
- Make retention a goal

## Boomers

As a whole, boomers make up 45 percent of today's workforce. In the LSA/RD seminar, 18 out of 20 participants fell into the boomer category. Boomers will dominate the workplace until the year 2015.



*University of New Mexico trainer Jonathan Armendariz explains the four different generations now in the workplace.*

Some researchers divide boomers into two groups—those born from 1943 to 1950 and those born 1950-61. Thanks to the post WW II prosperity, the earlier group of boomers is generally more financially successful. The early boomers overwhelmingly value work and many

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### **Boomers will dominate the workplace until the year 2015.**

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of them are social activists. Later boomers appear more sarcastic and cynical. This group of younger boomers sparked the movement away from traditional roles for males and females. Overall, boomers began to change workplace rules to meet their own personal needs.

At work, boomers want teams and participatory management styles. Many of them define themselves by the work they do. Boomers are good at relationships and delivering good

service. They prefer a caring, informal workplace.

Other workers accuse boomers of being too self-centered and say boomers tell too much about their personal lives at work. Gen Xers find that boomers work too much, are too political and calculating and take work too seriously. Nexters also think boomers work way too much.

Those who manage boomers need to acknowledge their strong work ethic and long hours. Managers who give boomers name recognition and reward them with status will be well served. If possible, managers should be egalitarian and put boomers in charge of something.

### **Generation X**

With about 40 percent of their numbers in the workforce, Xers are a powerful force. Many of them come from divorced families and are latchkey survivors. One-fifth of the Xers lives in poverty.

How do other generations regard the Xers at work? The veterans complain that Xers hold too many certificates and not enough real education.

### **Do You Know?**

1. What builds strong bodies 12 ways?
2. What product boasted that "a little dab'll do ya?"
3. What TV show opened with:  
"Hey kids, what time is it?"
4. What character fought for truth, justice and the American way?
5. Who closed every show with  
"Goodnight, Mrs. Calabash, wherever you are?"

*See page 4 for answers.*

Veterans say Xers arrive late and leave early and challenge appropriate channels. Xers say the veterans don't value the experience of veterans.

Boomers say Xers are lazy, direct to the point of incivility, impatient and spend too much time with computers instead of people. Nexters appear to be more laid back about their differences with Xers and try to resolve conflicts between boomers and Xers.

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## **Gen Xers make great change agents...**

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Managers need to know that Xers are multi-task-oriented, autonomous, creative and adaptive to change. They are extremely techno-literate. Xers make great change agents, and they work well alone. They expect to have a number of careers with different employers. They embrace failure as an option in the course of trying new things at work. They place considerable

*LSA/RD participants work on a hypothetical legislative case study to understand generational differences in the workplace.*

### **Generational Markers**

*Legislative staff managers were asked to bring in artifacts from their generation that clearly “mark” their era. Markers included:*

- Madonna cassette
- Glee club tie
- T-shirt with cigarettes rolled into the sleeve
- Yo-Yo
- Steve Miller album
- Charm bracelet
- Mickey Mantle baseball card replica
- Nancy Drew novel
- Tie-dyed shirt and headband
- Hippie sandals
- Leather fringe jacket with beads
- “War is not healthy” beads
- Photo of kids on a 1940 Olds
- Bruce Springsteen album
- Rod McKuen album
- June Cleaver pearls
- Penny loafers with white socks

emphasis on immediate gratification at work, and they want a strong balance between personal life and work.

Xers expect to participate in decisions at work, want recognition and bring a sense of humor to the job. More than the generations that precede them, Xers are accepting of different lifestyles, roles and cultures. Xers are impatient for change, very direct with requests and feedback and are unimpressed by the status of others.

### **Nexters**

The new kids on the block are the nexters, those from Generation Y. They represent about 10 percent of today’s workforce. Because they are relatively new employees, they need more direction and structure and are only developing people and leadership skills. Nexters have a positive outlook on work and enjoy working in groups.

The nexters are wizards with technology and multi-tasking. On the job, nexters are inventive, creative and value responsible supervision. They want workplaces that are sensitive to the environment (no smoking, recycling etc.), and they expect an accommodation to varied lifestyles. They want their work to connect to the community.

Veterans say that compared to Generation X, the nexters have great manners, know a lot and with more experience will become like veterans! Veterans complain about crude language they associate with nexters.

Boomers want nexters on the team to do web page work and other technical activities. Boomers wish nexters were more disciplined and that they could work more independently. Xers call nexters spoiled and selfish—just a new breed of boomer. However, Xers like to work with nexters on high tech projects and say nexters seem to work well with almost everybody.

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## **Nexters are wizards with technology.**

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Managers must work with nexters to develop their experience both individually and in groups. Managers need to help nexters develop intellectual curiosity and motivate them to

### **Answers That Will Date You....**

1. Wonder Bread
2. Brylcream
3. Howdy Doody
4. Superman
5. Jimmy Durante

*Answers from page 3 box*

participate. Nexters should be appreciated for their innovative ideas.

### **Staff Discuss Generations at Work**

Being mostly boomers, Western legislative staff managers had a lot to say throughout their management seminar on generations at work. Both legislative staff and university experts agreed that there is tremendous “bleeding over from one generation to the next.” For example, some boomer participants said that their parents’ Depression era definitely influences their own behavior, even down to small things like saving garbage ties.

One manager noted that when managing Xers, one-on-one management works better than simply distributing general office policies. You are not making a “work family” for Xers, said one manager. Work will not satisfy all their needs.

Another participant suggested that more than boomer men, boomer women want greater balance between work and home. Boomers, said some, question authority more than those who came before them but less than those coming after.

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## **Create a Great Work Environment**

In a session that featured a video, skits and non-stop puns, University of New Mexico trainer Don Shapiro “fishilitated” a session on how to create a work environment that will energize staff and delight customers. The FISH philosophy is based on concepts observed at the World Famous Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle.

Although once a ho-hum “business as usual” kind of place, under new management the fish market became a place where applicants wait in line to get a job and where customers get a lot more than salmon for their money.

Although the World Famous Pike Place Fish Market environment is difficult to replicate in narrative, the FISH video shows what is harder to tell. Mostly young people are creating a high-

energy, high morale workplace even as they wrap and sling smelly, dirty fish.

### **So what is the FISH philosophy?**

- **Play—**  
Have fun at work, be spontaneous, be creative.
- **Make Their Day—**  
Do something special for your customers or co-workers
- **Be There—**  
Totally focus on the moment and the person with whom you are engaged.
- **Choose Your Attitude—**  
You can’t always control what happens, but you can control how you respond. A positive attitude is a decision we make, moment to moment.

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**The FISH philosophy is based on concepts observed at the World Famous Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle.**

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The corporate culture of the FISH workplace comes to life. Loud fish patter dominates the scene (this is PLAY). Customers form an audience as the business of fish selling becomes theater (this is MAKING THEIR DAY).

## *“The FISH Philosophy” Continued from Page 5*

A fishmonger puts his arm around an old man who looks like a regular (this is BEING THERE). And a young man talks himself into taking an upbeat approach to the workday despite having had only a couple of hours of sleep the night before (this is CHOOSING YOUR ATTITUDE).

CNN, CBS and Forbes magazine among others have featured the FISH philosophy of management. Southwest Airlines is perhaps the best-known practitioner of FISH-like concepts. At Southwest, managers hire for attitude and train for skill. (Pilots, we hope, have both.) Instead of directing passengers to exits in a monotone voice, one creative employee advised: “There

may be 50 ways to leave your lover, but there are only four ways out of this plane.” Southwest employees have become famous for their “playfulness.”



*Participants in the CSG-WEST LSA/RD Committee demonstrate how to “Choose an Attitude” in the workplace.*

After the video, “fishilitator” Shapiro called on legislative staff managers to put FISH into action with practical exercises. Participants privately rated their workplaces on a FISH scale

and had Fish Bowl conversations with others. FISH partners worked on “Day Making Ideas” to take home. At the end of the FISH training, managers broke into teams where they selected a single FISH concept and produced a skit to depict it—in less than 15 minutes!



*Western legislative staff managers demonstrate how to make their work environment more joyful.*

## Gender Communications at Work

University of New Mexico training consultant Don Shapiro briefly introduced legislative staff managers to gender communications and how they influence the workplace. Shapiro showed participants the video "Talking 9-5" written by linguistics expert, Deborah Tannen.

According to Tannen, men and women learn conversational

rituals as very young children. These rituals influence their communication styles throughout their lives. In the 9-5 video, candid shots of small boys are shown as they one-up each other about how far they can throw a ball up into the air. "I can throw it up to the sky. I can throw it up to heaven.

I can throw it up to God."

Tannen

says from a very young age boys learn to converse in a style she refers to as "status" communications.

The Tannen video also shows candid photos of young girl playmates who communicate in a different style called "connecting." One playmate says: "My babysitter just got contact lens." The other young girl tries to find common ground. "My Mom just got them too..."

In another exercise depicted in the video, Tannen has placed two chairs side by side in a

room. She then tapes sets of boys and sets of girls at different ages to see how they will

position the chairs as they converse. No matter what the age, the boys left the chairs side by side during conversations. The girls turned the chairs to face each other so that they could have eye to eye contact while talking.

The video then moves into workplaces around

the U.S. and lets viewers see how men and women engage in conversations with each other and with colleagues of the same gender. At *Money Magazine* a male manager routinely uses "devils' advocate" conversational gambits—not intending them to be negative,



*Alaska Legislative Council staff Karla Schofield spars with University of New Mexico management trainer Don Shapiro.*

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**Boys left the chairs side by side during conversations...  
Girls turned the chairs to face each other.**

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but to flesh out ideas. This style appears to work fine with male colleagues, but not as well with females who may feel attacked.

In another instance, women engage in a style called "ritual apology." A woman manager uses apology as a conversational transition ("I'm sorry, I've lost my place...") that is not intended as a real apology. Over time, her male colleagues may take constant conversational apologies seriously, which will reflect negatively on the woman manager.

*“Gender Communications” Continued from Page 7*



According to Tannen, small talk is very important to grease the wheels for productive work. Women are more likely to engage in “troubles talk.” For example, the woman manager comes into the

room and says something like: “I am so tired...last night the kids...”

Men, on the other hand, are more likely to engage in “report talk” or details about a project or hobby. “Do you see how the drawers fit here?” the male manager asks as he describes a chest he is building at home.

Differences in their respective conversational rituals make small talk between sexes more difficult, which is important for managers to understand. Men tell employees what to do in direct ways. Women are more tentative, using qualifiers. This tentativeness can blur the

message to the point that it is missed altogether.

Women, says Tannen, also are in a double bind. The language women use can force them to choose between perceptions of competency and femininity.



Behavior learned as a child can be modified or at least understood. Women can learn from men to be more direct. Men can learn from women to offer more praise. Tannen concludes that shared conversational rituals can help men and women “get heard, get credit and get the work done.”

*To rent or purchase “Talking 9-5,” call ChartHouse Learning at 1-800-328-3789. The video also may be available through universities or human resource departments.*



*“Serving Western Legislatures”*

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