

## **GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES AMONG WORKING WOMEN**

At no other time in history have four distinct generations, Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials, co-existed in the U.S. labor force. Each cohort has its own unique values, attitudes and approaches toward work and life which are creating major communication conflicts among employees and recruitment and management challenges for employers. A closer look will also reveal gender differences across the generations, adding an additional layer of complexity to the struggles of female workers. To help employers better understand and overcome the challenges facing the 89 million women in today's workforce, the Interchange Group has provided a quick reference guide.

### **Traditionalists (born 1925-1943)**

- *Generational Traits:* Loyal; Patriotic; Financially conservative; Faithful to institutions; Respect for authority and hierarchy
- *Female Role Models:* Rosie the Riveter; Eleanor Roosevelt; June Cleaver
- *Attitudes & Approaches to Work/Life Balance:* Strict boundaries between gender and work; Family first
- *Career Models:* Working women<sup>1</sup> in non-management positions with little opportunity for advancement (e.g. sales and secretarial jobs); During World War II, occupied temporary positions previously held by men

### **Baby Boomers (born 1944-1962)**

- *Generational Traits:* Competitive; Value materialism and professional identity; Challenge authority; Want to continue working beyond retirement
- *Female Role Models:* Gloria Steinem; Julia Child; Hillary Clinton<sup>2</sup>
- *Attitudes & Approaches to Work/Life Balance:* "You-can-have-it-all" mentality; Superwomen responsible for ongoing family care while maintaining careers; Navigate balancing act using technology and working long hours
- *Career Models:* Models range from linear models where women compete with men until "glass ceiling" is reached to non-linear models encouraging "time outs" from careers (actual or metaphorical) to raise families; Likely to engage in new, late-life careers

### **Generation X (born 1963-1981)**

- *Generational Traits:* Independent; Skeptical; Resourceful; Value autonomy in their work
- *Female Role Models:* Madonna; Sandra Day O'Connor; Oprah
- *Attitudes & Approaches to Work/Life Balance:* Family comes first, but may be delayed until late 20's or 30's; Unprecedented financial pressures increase need for dual income families, while single women have a harder time economically; Guaranteed maternity leave allows temporary time-off without paying a significant professional price
- *Career Models:* Multiple careers over a lifetime; Professional identity is important but not the driving force of the Boomer generation; Increasing opportunities for "stay-at-home" moms with entrepreneurial side businesses (e.g. "mompreneurs")

### **Millennials (born 1982-2003)**

- *Generational Traits:* Realistic; Optimistic; Confident; Multi-taskers; Civic minded; Value teamwork but not hierarchy
- *Female Role Models:* Princess Diana; Mia Hamm; Reese Witherspoon
- *Attitudes & Approaches to Work/Life Balance:* Complete integration of work and life through technology, i.e. no need to "balance" work and life; Entering marriage and starting families at a later ages than predecessors; Volunteerism a high priority
- *Career Models:* Non-linear progression, with less expectation of early jobs being a stepping stone to later career opportunities; Parallel careers and multiple jobs at the same time and over a lifetime

<sup>1</sup> Contrary to popular beliefs, over 75% of women in this generation worked outside the home.

<sup>2</sup> Gender studies reveal that few female role models existed for this generation.