

Who Wastes More Time at Work: Millennials, Gen X'ers or Boomers?

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It's certain that everyone wastes time at work. We can hold that truth to be self-evident. This fact is based partially on our 24x7 dependence on smartphones, tablets and PCs, and on generational differences.

Employees spend a third of their lives at work but mentally escape regularly because it's compelling and easy. Distractions are a click or tap away. But, as a category, who wastes the most time at work: **Millennials, Gen X'ers, or Baby Boomers?**

As a manager, it's important to know how your employees use and misuse their time. This knowledge should impact how you train, monitor, measure, evaluate, and compensate.

For this article, the definitions used herein are as follows:

- Millennial (Gen Y): born between 1982 and 2004
- Gen X: born between 1965 and 1981
- Baby Boomer: born between 1946 and 1964

Today, Baby Boomers are likely to be managers because they're older. Boomers have different expectations of productivity than do their younger counterparts. For example, Millennials inherently mix work and outside life. They more team oriented and are prone to break off into groups to socialize and to date. As employees, they are **four times** more likely to waste time at work than the oldest Boomers, and most don't see that as problematic. Regarding generational differences in time wasting, **one study** shows that Millennials waste more than 2x as much time as Boomers but only slight more than Gen X'ers. The number one distraction cited is Internet use and second was socializing.

The results were as follows:

Group / Time Wasted At Work (per day)

- Baby Boomers / 41 minutes
- Gen X'ers / 1.6 hours
- Millennials / 2 hours

In a survey by MTV, 70 percent of Millennials believe they should have "me" time at work, compared to 39 percent of Boomers. Given that, there's a sense of "me" time entitlement by Millennials. By contrast, if a Baby Boomer was dissatisfied with a policy at work or with management, they just figure it's part of the job. On the other hand, due to a strong sense of independence, a Gen X'er wouldn't waste time complaining; s/he would send a resume out and accept an offer elsewhere.

Contributors to Workplace Distractions

Because Boomers and Gen X'ers are parents with financial commitments, the lackluster U.S. economy and associated layoffs and downsizing have caused many to have "financial" workplace distractions. Many are too economically stressed out to be fully focused in their work. Those who took a lower-paying job (up to 46 percent of employees) use company time to search for a new job. Millennials rightly complain that pay scales have not fully adjusted to the times and therefore are not too driven to productivity.

A more prevalent and likely long-term distraction is technology. From an early age, the Internet and cellphones existed for Millennials and texting is the most common communication medium. Most Boomers didn't use a computer or have a cellphone in college and have relied on email. Gen X'ers are somewhere in the middle. Such differences are strong contributors to workplace distractions.

As a quick aside, consider one alarming element about the next generation of workers. The Kaiser Family Foundation shows that kids today spend over 7.5 hours per day on average using digital devices. If you take out time spent sleeping and time at school, that's practically all day. If you don't believe that, just look around at all the nine-year-olds toting smartphones or gaming devices.

One study said that 51 percent of workers in the U.S. believe work productivity suffers because of social media. But a prevalent attitude among Millennials is that as long as the work gets done, it doesn't matter.

To combat this, another poll showed that 42 percent of employers (likely to be Boomers) prohibit workers now from using social media. The trouble is, one-third of Millennials would forego a higher salary to work at a company without limits to technology access and 56 percent won't accept a job where access to social media is prohibited at work. Specifically, the survey revealed 64 percent of all employees visit non-work related websites every day at work. Not surprisingly, Facebook socializing occupied 41 percent, with

LinkedIn at 37 percent, and Amazon shopping at 25 percent. Other destinations: Yahoo, Google+, Twitter, and Pinterest.

Amongst Millennials, the winners for the time-loss warp are Tumblr (57 percent), Facebook (52%), Twitter (17 percent), Instagram (11 percent) and SnapChat (4 percent).

Generational differences continue. It's more probable that Gen X'ers and Boomers are using LinkedIn than Millennials. And it's likely that if you ask a Baby Boomer about the SnapChat app (sends self-erasing text and video messages), they won't have a clue.

Trend to Mobile: Tough to Track

Desktop computing is declining and mobile is thriving. Because of this trend creeping into all groups of workers, it's virtually impossible to track an employee's use of a personal smartphone. As such, the work day "time out" can and does happen all the time, anywhere. This "bring your own device," or BYOD phenomenon, will likely never diminish. Because it's part of life, Gen X and Millennials won't experience technology "scarcity" and this is part of the challenge.

Social networking apps are the second largest time sink for mobile users with 39 percent accessing social networks. Games are the largest mobile app category and biggest money-maker in the app stores, with 70 percent of Apple's top-grossing apps. (Source: BI Intelligence)

Who's Really to Blame For Workplace Waffling?

There are seasonal distractions like the Super Bowl or March Madness, but a Salary.com study revealed that 35 percent of employees said the number one reason for slacking at work is due to the lack of challenging work. And in close second place, 34 percent said they waste time because they work too many hours.

Next, 32 percent said the company gives no incentive to work harder, and finally, 23 percent said they are bored.

So we should make work more interesting and let employees work less time? Given that U.S. workers are by far the most overworked in the developed world, that issue may not be resolved any time soon. The next logical step is to create a better work environment. And one key there is to make it sustainable.

Managers Can Create A Better Work Environment

Manager must get creative. First, know your employees. Second, establish rules and guidelines that motivate. Third, measure and reward results, not time on the clock. If Millennials are distracted at work but still get the job done, look at what's most important.

For some, it may be motivating to work flexible work hours, to customize a schedule to meet personal needs. There are those that dream of telecommuting, to allow work to be done at home with a reduction in mind-numbing rush hours.

Audit the quality of workflow in your business to see where wasted efforts and rework exist. Make bold changes.

Capitalize on your workforce's connectivity. Provide company news or promotions to employees to share on their personal Twitter or LinkedIn account or on Facebook. You might as well tap into their network, if appropriate, to build up the communication about your products and services.

Try holding shorter meetings. Ask those attending to turn off devices so the meeting can move along quickly. Meetings will go faster and will be more productive. Some Gen X'ers and most Millennials are wired to multi-task.

Or designate one day a week, company-wide, as "meeting free."

Consider your dress code policy. Millennials and Gen Xer's may don't feel comfortable in a pin-striped suit or tie. If flip flops are out of the question because of potential customer visits, try a middle ground.

What about providing work out equipment, foosball, ping pong tables, etc.? Happy employees usually make productive employees. Of course, doing these things at the expense of productivity and budgets is not sound business practice.

Train your team in the skills of time literacy and how to manage daily interruptions. Discuss overcoming procrastination with bursts of time spent on the difficult tasks. Talk about spending time planning to get maximum work done in less time.

Organizations are becoming far more results-oriented and much more skilled at measuring results. Natural selection should take care of all under-performers. Millennials are more prone than others to appreciate regular, ongoing feedback, not just an annual operating plan. But everyone works more productively with regular reviews.

Boomer managers unskilled in new management techniques should branch out and learn about the latest tactics. Concepts like slack, flex, 20% free time (look at Google and Apple as examples), virtual talks, teleworking, telecommuting, local optimization, complex adaptive systems, self-organizing systems, emergence, Scrum, Agile, Lean Startup, Kanban, and others are documented.

The moral of this story is to become keenly aware of your workforce's unique needs, take the most appropriate action, and enjoy the differences.