



## **MILLENNIALS DON'T WANT TO LEAN IN** **Why Generational Differences Among Working Women Matter To Companies**

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Recent media coverage of Sheryl Sandberg's book, [Lean In](#), highlights the roles of women in the workplace and the bias and unfairness experienced by female professionals. Sandberg's powerful message is, however, distinctly shaded by her own generational lens and experience as a woman coming of age and entering the workforce in the wake of the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Her "mission to reboot" feminism and to reframe discussions on gender uniquely reflects her Generation X values of autonomy and work-life balance, and misses the mark with Millennial women, who do not see gender inequality in the workplace and are either confused or annoyed at the negativity they think older generations bring to the subject.

In order to understand women's issues in the workplace and to retain and engage them as employees, companies must recognize that generational differences among working women exist and that each generation has an equally valid perspective on the topic.

The following is a critical reference guide for organizations on the generational traits, experiences and attitudes of American working women.



### ***Generational Differences Among Working Women***

At no other time in history have four distinct generations, Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and Millennials, co-existed in the U.S. labor force. Each cohort has its own unique values, attitudes and approaches toward work and life that are creating major communication conflicts among employees, and recruitment and management challenges for employers. A closer look also reveals gender differences across the generations, adding an additional layer of complexity for companies that want to effectively engage and retain women in their workforce.

#### 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 in non-management positions with little opportunity for advancement; 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; Plan to continue working beyond traditional retirement age
- *Female Role Models:* Gloria Steinem; Julia Child; Hillary Clinton
- *Attitudes & Approaches to Work/Life Balance:* “You-can-have-it-all” mentality; Superwomen responsible for ongoing family care while maintaining careers
- *Career Models:* Women compete with men until “glass ceiling” is reached and challenged; Professional identity is critical; 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; Michelle Obama
- *Attitudes & Approaches to Work/Life Balance:* Family comes first, but may be delayed until their late 20s and early 30’s; Financial pressures increase need for dual income families, while single women have a harder time economically
- *Career Models:* Multiple careers over a lifetime; Professional identity is important but not a driving force; Increased opportunities for “stay-at-home” moms with entrepreneurial side businesses

### Millennials (born 1982-2003)

- *Generational Traits:* Realistic; Optimistic; Confident; Multi-taskers; Civic minded; Value teamwork but not hierarchy
- *Female Role Models:* Princess Kate; Ellen DeGeneres; Lena Dunham
- *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
- *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; Experiencing rapid promotions and equitable pay

Addressing gender in the workplace is not a one-size-fits-all issue. To understand and meet the needs of professional women, organizations and the leaders who run them must have a high degree of generational savvy and be able to communicate effectively across generations. How much do you know about the perceptions and attitudes of the women in your workplace?

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