

# EARLY CAREERIST: NOT ONE SIZE FITS ALL: THE GENERATIONALLY DIVERSE CANDIDATE POOL.

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Picture this! You have an open position in your Accounting Department which asks for one of two different qualifications; 3 years of experience and a master's degree or 15 years of experience and a bachelor's degree. Your company and the position were very attractive to job seekers and, as a result, you have a diverse and exceptional candidate pool! On one hand, you have highly educated millennials with less experience and you have highly experienced Generation Xers and Baby Boomers who may or may not have a master's degree. It's time to set up those interviews and determine who will be the best fit for your company.

Because your talent pool is so diverse, generationally, there may be some considerations to make your hiring process a success. The generational considerations may range from the questions you ask as the hiring manager, to the expectations you have about each generation.

## BABY BOOMERS (1946-1964)

Baby Boomers have a lot of experience. One initial difference that you might notice between your Baby Boomer candidates, your Generation Xs, and Millennials is that they don't job hop. They are looking for a place to call home. When asking questions to Baby Boomer candidates, ask questions such as, "where do they want to take this role?" Because they are so experienced, they may also appreciate the opportunity to be a resource and to mentor younger employees. Asking questions about mentorship interests and providing skills to less experienced employees can be very helpful. One gauge that one might also utilize is whether or not the Baby Boomer is also interested in learning from younger employees. "Give me an example of how you developed an earlier careerist." Furthermore, if change is part of your organizational culture, you might explore their level of comfort with change. "How do you feel about change?" "Can you tell me about a time where you had to support a big change?" Finally, validating the candidate's experience and potential contributions to the company can be an easy way to engage the Baby Boomer.

## GENERATION X (1965-1979)

Remember Generation X is known as the "skeptical generation" and they surely have reason to question. If there is concern about how the Generation X candidate is going to view and respond to authority, ask about it. One great Generation X question is, "can you tell me about your best and worst manager?" Then you can see whether or not the

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## EARLY CAREERIST *continued*

qualities of leadership will work for them or against them. You might also tease out how they manage disagreements with their colleagues. So, for instance, “tell me about a time that you disagreed with your manager and walk me through the process of how you proceeded.” Also, gauging how their previous managers may have viewed them, “if I were to ask your last boss to describe you, what would they say?”

Another strong quality of Generation X is their interest and ability to work independently. Asking a candidate these questions might help sort through preferences on independent working: “How do you prioritize your workload?”, “Tell me how you prefer to receive direction and work on assignments.” It is important to remember that Generation X’ers tend to value not only independence but also the ability to work flexibly and with a high level of trust. If your organization has specifics around whether or not an employee can work from home for instance, you might ensure that the candidate and the organization are aligned. “Do you prefer to work in an office setting? Remotely? Or Both?” Finally, because they saw lack of loyalty from their parents’ employers through layoffs and pension cuts, they do not necessarily put work first over their personal obligations and they surely value their personal life. “What is your view on work-life balance?” “Are you willing to work on the weekends or evenings if needed?”

## MILLENNIALS (1980-1999)

When interviewing Millennials, keep in mind that they may also come across differently to the interview than the other generations. Even though Millennials may not have as much experience, they will likely show up with LOTS of confidence. They have worked hard in school and have heard from their parents, communities, and professors that they have a lot to offer. Because Millennials tend to be honest, you may get an inflated sense of them based on their energy. Ask behavioral based questions about their workplace successes and relationships with colleagues. “Tell me about a time where you had a conflict with a colleague, did you resolve it? If so, how?” “Provide an example of when your team had a rewarding experience.” “Give me an example of a time where you stepped into a leadership role.” “Tell me about a time that you made a mistake at work. How did you rectify it? How did you learn from it?”

Millennials are coming to the interview with the confidence that their time spent gaining their education will stand them well in the workplace. Questions about application of their education to the job are valuable. “How has your education prepared you for your career?” Additionally, Millennials tend to prefer working with teams and for managers who are supportive of them. Assessing their expectations and potential contributions is important to determine if they will be a good fit for your team. “What does your ideal team

look like?” “What would the person who likes you least say about you?” “In what ways are you a team player?” “Walk me through a project that you did with a team. What was your role on the team?” “What did you bring to the team that added value?” “Did you receive any personal recognition from team members?” Assessing their ideal manager can also help you determine if you will be able to optimally work with the Millennial. “Tell me about a manager that you felt helped you succeed, what were some of the qualities?” “Describe a management style that works well for you. Describe one that does not.”

Statistics indicate that Millennials will often change jobs every few years if their expectations of professional development and growth are not met and therefore, it’s important to assess the candidate’s expectations. “What are your professional goals in the next year? 3 years? 5 years?” Be sure to articulate as realistically as possible what growth and professional development opportunities exist. The final area that you should keep in perspective while interviewing the Millennial is their natural affinity with technology. They are surely going to be strong consumers of technology. It may be good to gauge their creativity in how to work without it. “Imagine you come back from lunch and your computer is down, what do you do with your workday until the system is back up?”

ALL three of the generations have something to contribute to the workplace. As a hiring manager, it might be useful to think through ways to assess some of the generational challenges in the workplace. The most important reason to ask questions that tap into many of these areas is to manage expectations and find the strongest cultural fit possible.

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