FROM BABY BOOMERS TO MILLENNIALS: ANALYZING HOW THE CONCEPTS OF CONSUMER AND EMPLOYEE LOYALTY HAVE TRANSFORMED IN EACH GENERATION

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Baby Boomers. Generation X. Millennials. Each of these generations impact the world differently. To remain competitive, businesses must continuously earn and maintain the loyalty of its consumers and employees. This requires that companies understand, anticipate, and cater to the differing needs and behavioral habits of each generation. By identifying and explaining why each generation chooses to remain loyal to specific brands, companies, and employers, this interactive webinar will address tactical ways for companies to attract and retain consumer and employee loyalty, across the generations.

I.   Introduction

The Pew Research Center conducted a study on the generations and found that, as of July 1, 2019, there are 71.6 million Baby Boomers, 62.2 million Generation X-ers, and 72.1 million Millennials. Generation X, however, is projected to pass the Boomers in population by 2028. With this shift in population, Millennials have begun to flood the work force and will soon outnumber Baby Boomers, and it has become imperative for companies to understand why each generation chooses to give their loyalty to a business, product, and/or employer.

II.   The Baby Boomers

Baby Boomers consist of those born between 1946 and 1964 during the post-World War II baby boom. They are goal oriented, self-assured, and independent. This generation grew up in an era of reform, raised on the idea of the American Dream and the belief that hard work will reap

great rewards. They were shaped through their involvement in events such as the civil rights movement, Woodstock, and the Vietnam War. As such, Baby Boomers are categorized as workaholics who prefer structure, discipline, and competition. But these characteristics are often misconstrued and lead to the following stereotypes.

Common Stereotypes About Baby Boomers in the Workplace:
1. Boomers are close minded and set in their ways.
2. Boomers are the selfish "me" generation.
3. Boomers look down on the other generations.
4. Booms are terrible with technology.

But what do these really mean? Boomers have been in the work force longer than Gen X-ers and Millennials and have a system already in place through their years of experience. Boomers don't understand how to communicate with other generations who do not share their same work ethic and work understandings. This often leads to the other generations thinking that Boomers look down upon them and refuse to acknowledge their ideas. This stems from a Boomers start into the workforce—where they had a strong belief that they needed to start at the bottom and work their way up the ladder.

These characteristics are actually what make Boomers one of the most loyal generations in the work force—they value hard work and sticking with a company once they have made a commitment to said company. Most employers will find that their problem is not obtaining or keeping Boomer loyalty in the workplace, but making sure that Boomers adapt to emerging technologies and the ever changing corporate market.

Common Stereotypes About Baby Boomers as Consumers:
1. Boomers are driven by print advertising.
2. Boomers prioritize discounts over any other factor in choosing a brand.

Historically, loyalty programs for Boomers mean punch cards, coupons, and vouchers for free or discounted items. What is surprising is that even with the influx of technology, studies show that 74% of Boomers are still highly interested in obtaining paper coupons. But while paper coupons make up a large portion of Boomer interest, they are not the only thing they look at when deciding on a brand. One of the largest factors is actually customer service, as one study found that 54% of Boomers are unlikely to return to a store if they feel they have received poor customer service from a sales associate. If a company can master both print coupons and fantastic customer service, they have essentially won the loyalty of a Boomer consumer. And when a company has won this loyalty, they win it for the long haul, because Boomers are, in fact one of the most loyal generations.

How to Obtain and Keep Boomer Loyalty

Most companies are probably not having to work too hard to get Boomers into the work force because, after all, most Boomers have already worked their way to the top. However, Boomers typically struggle to keep up with their Gen-X and Millennial colleagues in facets such as emerging technologies. By teaching them these skills, companies can increase Boomer productivity and maximize company performance.

Boomers have been in the workforce for decades, which has given them years to cultivate a routine, pattern and habits into their daily work performance and any changes to this routine could be perceived as threatening, difficult or unnecessary (in their eyes). But, in order for companies to remain competitive, Boomers need to be taught new strategies and technologies to use daily. This is where things get tricky. Boomers are not always the most adaptable students nor do they like to take direction from those 30 years their junior. This can make them feel undermined and the

Boomer will ultimately push back against learning new technology and continue with their long-established habits.

Conversely, one study showed that when teaching Boomers how to perform a computer task, the trainers had rather low expectations of the Boomer, which in turn led to worse training than when the trainer was teaching a younger generation. Thus, inferior training may lead to a reduced learning experience and potentially interfere with the Boomer's job performance.

In order to combat both potential outcomes, employers need to foster an open environment that allows Boomers to freely learn without the pressures of a younger generation forcing this new information upon them. This could come in the form of interactive presentations that understand Boomers are hard pressed for change and do not understand major jumps in technology; presentations by a member of the older generation as to feel inclusive; and/or breaking down the steps into more manageable pieces.

As for companies looking to maintain their Boomer consumer base, companies should rely on already established communication channels such as direct mail and media spend to build those relationships. As long as Baby Boomers are presented with clear value and good customer service, brands can expect this generation's loyalty to remain strong.

III. Generation X

Gen-Xers consist of those born between 1965 and 1980. They grew up in the post-civil rights area and a period of increasing divorce rates and mothers entering the work force. While they were the most emerging educated generation of their time compared to their Boomer predecessors, they entered the job market after college at a time when the economy was volatile, which eventually caused them to earn a reputation for being more cynical and disaffection ate than other generations.

Common Stereotypes about Gen-Xers in the Workplace:

1. Gen-Xers are loners and poor collaborators.
2. Gen-Xers are slackers and do not take their work seriously.

Gen-X, also known as the "lost generation", get a reputation for being aloof, slackers and for not being team players. However, this generation is highly misunderstood. Gen X-ers are not poor collaborators, but workers who enjoy their independence and the ability to be responsible for their own projects. This extends to their need to have a work-life balance. This generation is not full of slackers, but those who will hang their work up at the end of the day in order to spend time with family and friends.

Common Stereotypes about Gen-Xers as Consumers:

1. Gen-Xers are purely technology driven.
2. Gen-Xers just don't care about anything.
3. Gen-Xers show around for different products until they find the right one.

Gen-Xers tend to get lumped in with Millennials. While they are also adept at technology, Gen-Xers have a few distinct differences when it comes to the generation as consumers, and actually prefer to receive paper marketing materials, such as coupons and bills. They also prefer to consume media that reflects their values and prefer brands who are more authentic. Expressing your company's true values and motives behind creating a product will really help solidify the Gen-X loyalty.

How to Obtain and Keep Gen-X Loyalty:

Gen-X does not like being told what to do and tend to prefer working on their own instead of in a collaborative group setting. They want to be challenged by their work, but the most important factor to them is a job with a perfect work-life balance. Give them choices, let them use their resourcefulness. Give them goals and let them figure out how to reach them. Avoid micromanaging, but also provide them a strong mentorship in order to consistently guide and

challenge them within their projects. If you can do this, the Gen-Xers will maximize their productivity while also believing they are in the best company in order to reach their biggest goals.

As for consumers, Gen X-ers are less susceptible to trends and are more likely to buy a service or product that has a direct benefit to the society or the environment. Targeting these types of marketing efforts towards the Gen-Xers will help you gain their loyalty and keep it.

Gen X-ers also tend to research businesses on the internet even after seeing a TV commercial or newspaper ad. You'll want to make sure your company information and messaging are consistent across all directories, social platforms and, most importantly, your website.

IV. Millennials

Millennials consist of those who were born between the years of 1981 and 1996. This generation's childhood consisted of events such as the 9/11 terrorist attack, the financial crisis of 2008 and the adaption of the internet as a household staple. As a result, they have developed a greater concern for money, largely due to the fact that they face the most hardships such as student loans, debt, the housing market, etc.

Millennials are the emerging generation as the are flooding the work force at high rates and will soon outnumber the Baby Boomers. It will be imperative for businesses and employers to understand the characteristics of millennials and how they can use the Millennial generation to further their company.

Common Stereotypes of Millennials in the Workplace:

1. Millennials are lazy.
2. Millennials are not loyal to their employers, making it harder for companies to attract and retain millennial talent.
3. Millennials only look for jobs that offer the most money.

4. Millennials have a greater sense of entitlement.

Millennials have a strong work ethic, but they do not always follow the mold of their predecessors for things such as a strict 8-5 work schedule, working only in the office and not remotely, or "paying their dues" at a company for the long term. This may sound like a foreign concept to their Boomer superiors who came from a world where they were expected to pay their dues and work their way up the company ladder in order to be rewarded in the long run. Millennials will work hard when they are given the opportunities to help advance their goals and careers. Millennial workers understand many businesses today see them as replaceable cogs in the machine, so they are more likely to always keep an eye out for new opportunities if they may arise. Boomers usually think that these Millennials only want to progress up the ladder too fast and are not adequately paying their dues, causing Millennials to come off as lazy and trying to avoid commitment. What Boomers do not realize is that the idea of climbing up the corporate ladder, paying your dues and having those dues turn into a lucrative career is no longer a reality.

Another major misconception is that Millennials are entitled. However, Millennials were raised in an environment where they were allowed to voice their opinions. This translates to their natural tendency to want to do the same in the workplace—to be heard by their peers and superiors.

Common Stereotypes of Millennials as Consumers:

1. Millennials float from brand to brand, never having any loyalty to a specific brand.
2. Millennials are most influenced by advertisements on social media.
3. Millennials are obsessed with "things" and are constantly buying goods.
4. Millennials are cheap and like to cut corners with products.

Millennials get a reputation for being flighty and never developing their loyalty to any specific brand. However, this is untrue—Millennials are simply just pickier about which brands they choose to align their loyalty with. They seek personalized shopping experiences that are tailored

to their specific wants and needs. While Millennials are usually know for being tech-savy and being attached to their cell phones, Millennials actually prefer to rely on reviews from their peers or word of mouth reviews when forming opinions on a business. This is because they are strategic and value seekers with regard to products that have long term values. Lastly, while they love to try new products, Millennials prefer to send their money on experiences, especially when they can do said experiences with their friends and post it to social media.

How to Obtain and Keep Millennial Loyalty:

Millennials will work hard for a company when they feel they are getting something out of it that benefitted them. They work hardest when they are given responsibilities, achieve their goals, and are given the opportunities to build their resumes towards their long-term goals. In order to help them feel invested, employers should offer strong mentorship programs and regular conversation with their employees about what each side wants from the role going forward and how to help each other. For instance, superiors could ask the following questions:

- What do you want from us?

- What are we providing you in exchange?

- What do you want in the long term? The short-term?

- What do you want from your career?

- What kinds of goals do you have outside of work?

- What motivates you?

Millennials work will benefit a business/company/employer the most when they are given tasks that make them feel like they are building and working toward an ultimate goal. By bridging the gap between Boomers and Millennials, the two generations can work together to achieve the greatest possible outcome.

On the consumer end, to engage more with Millennials, brands should offer them opportunities to interact and share socially, such as hosting pop-up events or meetups in certain cities. For retailers this means focusing on ways to engage these consumers so they can try out your products and services. Making offers like free shipping on new products, making trial-sized products available, and providing access to products in showrooms can encourage this group to test your offerings for themselves, making the sale much more likely.

In conclusion, companies that understand the qualities of Boomers vs. Gen-Xers vs. Millennials in the workplace and as consumers can adapt those qualities to their recruiting, managing, motivating and retaining of employees/consumers. Learning how to anticipate and respond to each generations expectations as they continue to transform will give companies a greater edge and ultimately allow them to develop greater loyalties in the long run.