From Generation to Generation: Changing Behavioral Perceptions and Expectations in Jewish Nonprofits

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The emergence of the Millennial generation—those born between 1981 and 1996[1]—in the field of Jewish communal service is already changing the workplace. Millennials are bringing a fresh perspective filled with innovative ideas and ways to reach young unaffiliated Jews who otherwise may not become involved in Jewish life. However, as they enter the workforce, beginning with their graduate field placement internships, Millennials' expectations of workplace behavior tend to differ from those of the more established professionals who are supervising them in internships and new positions after graduation. These differing expectations sometimes create intergenerational tensions.

Interviews conducted with Jewish professionals who have recently supervised Millennials, feedback from field instructors and students at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, School of Jewish Communal Service (SJCS), and findings from a survey distributed to Millennials demonstrate that addressing generational differences in the Jewish communal workplace is a pressing concern. We bring to this issue the perspectives of a recently graduated SJCS Millennial student and of a Gen Xer who has been working in the field for 18 years.

Based on our interviews and observations, we have determined that, although both the Millennial cohort and more seasoned professionals recognize that the other group has quite a bit to offer toward workplace productivity and efficiency, each group views appropriate workplace behavior in different ways. Veteran professionals sometimes perceive Millennials' workplace behavior as disrespectful, resent the Millennial tendency to multitask, and believe Millennials act with a sense of entitlement or are lazy. Millennials often defend their admittedly informal behavior, believing that it enhances collegiality and productivity. Millennials further attest that informality helps them achieve a desirable work-life balance, which research has shown is a primary value of this generation (Robert Half International, 2008).

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[1] There is some disagreement among researchers as to what constitutes membership in the Millennial generation. For the purposes of this article, we use the definition of those born between 1981 and 1996.

Both Millennials and seasoned professionals have legitimate views of appropriate workplace behavior; the divergence is a matter of differences in style and temperament. Thus, to maintain an effective workplace, both parties need to acknowledge the stylistic differences and understand the expectations of the other. If members of each cohort are clear about their own expectations of themselves and of those with whom they are working, and if they each understand how their behaviors are being perceived, the cohorts should be able to collaborate to reach their common goals and not feel threatened or stifled by others with differing expectations and approaches. Workplace harmony creates a more congenial workforce and enables the harnessing of the synergy that comes from mixing people of different backgrounds and perspectives who are working toward common goals.

In this article we first describe the characteristics of the four generations currently working together in Jewish communal settings. Then, using actual examples of conflicts arising when Millennials work with more seasoned professionals, we explore the different generational perspectives on, and expectations of, workplace behaviors. Finally, we suggest ways to bridge the generational gap and foster more effective working relationships.

In particular, we suggest open and honest communication, new approaches to organizational structure and work rules, mutual respect for and recognition of each others' attributes, and a willingness to learn from one another. These strategies should create a more efficient and effective Jewish communal work environment.

FOUR GENERATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

For the first time in history, four generations are working together in the workplace: Veterans/Traditionalists (born 1922–1943); Baby Boomers (born 1944–1960); Gen Xers (born 1961–1980); and Nexters/Millennials (born 1981–1996; Beard, Schwieger, & Surendran, 2008; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000). As the newest generation of Millennials enters the workforce, Jewish communal professionals face the challenge of integrating them into an existing culture that includes supervisors and managers with different expectations and behavioral perceptions. Although the generation to which one belongs is only one factor influencing workplace behavior, it is important to acknowledge that generational differences may cause decreased efficiency, lower morale, a decreased ability for collaboration, ineffective communication, and increased turnover among employees (Abrams, 2009).

The Veterans/Traditionalists

The Veterans/Traditionalists (born 1922–1943), the most senior professionals in the community, tend to believe that hard work, dedication, sacrifice, respect for authority, loyalty, and adherence to rules are what have enabled them to succeed in the workplace (Zemke et al., 2000). These veterans and traditionalists typically occupy the highest points of organizational hierarchies, though they are retiring in increasing numbers.

The Baby Boomers

The Baby Boomers (born 1944–1960), who currently saturate the management positions in the Jewish communal field (Kelner, Rabkin, Saxe, & Sheingold, 2005;

Teegarden, 2004), tend to be service-driven, willing to go the extra mile, wanting to please, and looking for personal satisfaction on the job. Like the Millennials, they are optimistic and team-oriented (Zemke et al., 2000).

The Gen Xers

The Gen Xers (born 1961–1980) are generally pragmatic, self-reliant, informal, creative, interested in balance, and technically literate; they think globally (Zemke et al., 2000). This generation tends to need structure and order in tasks and considers the need to make personal sacrifices in exchange for professional success inevitable (Raines, 1999).

Millennials

Millennial core values are based on a strong sense of civic duty, a desire to make a difference in the world, optimism, achievement, stability, morality, sociability, and confidence. They tend to be team-oriented and interested in working with others. Millennials are interested in making a difference in the workplace and the world, and they have a general disdain for hierarchy and bureaucracy, demanding organizational transparency and integrity in their leadership. They are technologically savvy, multitaskers, tenacious, and capable. Despite their inexperience and recognition of their need for structure and supervision, Millennials are confident in their abilities (Cornelius, Corvington, & Ruesga, 2008; Galagan, 2006; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Liff-Grieff, 2009; Phillips, 2008; Robert Half International, 2008; Walker, 2008; Yuva, 2007; Zemke et al., 2000).

The Clash of Generations

Based on the general core values that each of these cohorts holds, it is inevitable that when professionals from different generations come together in the workplace, there is potential for conflict or, at the very least, widely varying expectations of appropriate workplace behavior. The messages that each of these cohorts received in their formative years affect their roles in the workplace and influence their work ethics (Abrams, 2009). Table 1 outlines the different perspectives and identifies potential conflicts that may arise in the workplace.

As a result of their divergent backgrounds, upbringing, and subsequent workplace perspectives and expectations, the four generations may not relate easily to each other nor instantly bond as a team. For example, a Baby Boomer may perceive a Millennial as a slacker without a work ethic or as not dedicated enough if she announces that she will not attend meetings after 5:00 P.M. in order to maintain a work-life balance. Conversely, a Baby Boomer who is unaccustomed to multitasking may be perceived by Millennials as slow and unable to keep up with the demands of the job.

According to Ron Zemke, Claire Raines, and Bob Filipczak (2000), each of the other generations view Millennials in particular ways. The Veterans/Traditionalists see the Millennials as well mannered and smart, but needing to toughen up. The Baby Boomers think the Millennials need too much attention and need more discipline from their parents. The Gen Xers believe that Millennials are a self-absorbed generation. In turn, the Millennials view the Veterans as trustworthy, brave, and good leaders. They think the Baby Boomers are cool, but they work too much. They think the Gen Xers need to cheer up.

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Given these preconceived notions of one another, coupled with different expectations, it is understandable that these generations are clashing in the workplace. Though we must keep in mind that generation is only one lens through which we view workplace interactions, all generations in the workforce have a shared responsibility to work together to minimize intergenerational workplace conflict (Abrams, 2009).

DIFFERING EXPECTATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

When Millennials enter the world of Jewish communal service, either as graduate student interns or new professionals, they want to be on a level playing field with their co-workers. They want not only to be privy to but also to be involved in decision-making processes. In addition, they want to have access to all levels of both professional and lay leadership, and they want to play an integral role in the organization from the time they begin working (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Galagan, 2006; Liff-Grieff, 2009).

However, interviews with graduate student interns and their supervisors at SJCS revealed that the more established generations believe that graduate interns and new professionals need to spend some time learning about the organization and its culture, understanding the role it plays in the larger Jewish communal context, and paying their dues first as the veteran professionals once did, before they can attain full access to leadership and full participation in decision-making processes. In addition, they believe that Millennials need to respect the policies and procedures that are in place and develop an appreciation for historical deci-

Table 1.
Generational Characteristics

Delineators	Veterans	Baby Boomers	Gen Xers	Millennials
Work ethic/values	Hard work, sacrifice, duty before fun	Workaholics, driven, efficient, personal fulfillment, desire quality	Self-reliance, eliminate the task, need structure, direction, balanced	Multitasking, entrepreneurial, goal oriented, tenacity, "what's next?"
Perspective on work	Obligation	Career, exciting adventure	Job, difficult challenge, contract	Many careers, means to an end, personal fulfillment
Leadership style	Directive, command and control	Consensual, collegial	Egalitarian, challenge others, ask why	Has yet to be determined
Interactive style	Individual	Team player, love meetings	Entrepreneur, independent	Participatory
Communication	Formal, memo	Diplomatic, in person	Direct, blunt, immediate	Easy and open without hurting feelings, e-mail, text, voice mail, Facebook
Feedback/rewards	Satisfaction in a job well done, no news is good news	Don't appreciate feedback; money, title, recognition	"Sorry to interrupt, but how am I doing?," freedom is the best reward	Whenever I want it; at the push of a button, meaningful work
Need for approval	Appreciate	Seek validation	Indifferent	Need it a lot
Motivators	Your experience is respected	You are valued, you are needed	Do it your way, forget the rules	You will work with other bright, young, creative people
Work and family life	Never the twain shall meet	No balance, work to live	Balance	Balance
View of authority	Respect	Impressed but question	Unfazed	Want it
Response to policies and procedures	Adhere to rules	Protective	Mistrustful	Need help with protocols
Relationship to technology	Varies from resistant to acquired	Acquired	Assimilated	Part of them
Entitlement	Pay dues	Experience	Merit	Assumed

Adapted from Hammill, 2005 and Raines, 1999.

sions. This is not to say that Millennials should avoid questioning and challenging the system, but challenges should be mounted respectfully, recognizing the established procedures for making change and acknowledging that they cannot implement changes immediately.

Language plays a very important role in behavioral perception. Profanity, slang, emotional language, and poor grammar tend to be turnoffs to Veterans/ Traditionalists, whereas a Millennial may not think twice about using such language. In turn, Millennials are often offended by cynical and sarcastic language that older cohorts do not hesitate to use. Workplace participants need to find a common communication ground and use language that resonates with all generations in the workforce. Language promoting respect, community, equality, and fairness should speak to all generations in Jewish communal life (Abrams, 2009).

UNDERSTANDING WORKPLACE BEHAVIOR: SOME REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES

No two people interpret a particular situation exactly the same, and when looking through the generational lens, differences in perceptions may be exacerbated, leading to misunderstandings and possible strife. Table 2 presents real case scenarios that occurred during SJCS graduate field placement internships between 2007 and 2009 in Jewish nonprofit settings in Los Angeles and New York. The students were all first- or second-year master's degree students. The table describes the situations that occurred and the reactions from both the students and their supervisors.

Note that in each of these disputes, there is no disagreement over what occurred. Rather the disagreements are over the perceptions of appropriate workplace behavior. In each of these scenarios the student intern believes his or her behavior is appropriate, and the supervisor believes the student intern's behavior is inappropriate.

Changing Expectations

When we expect others to act and behave exactly as we do, we are bound to be disappointed. Every worker brings unique attributes and characteristics to the workplace. Recognition of this fact across generations will do more than produce a more congenial workplace; it will increase workforce productivity and efficiency. As the Millennial generation enters the Jewish nonprofit sector, both the Millennials and the generations preceding them must be aware of their differing perspectives. If all cohorts hold realistic expectations, then there is a greater chance of coming together to be successful in reaching workplace goals. It is often synergy—the convergence of many creative ideas through collaboration—that creates a useful end product. But such synergy is possible only if all workers adjust their perceptions and expectations.

Of course, it is easier to say that everyone should keep an open mind and recognize other perspectives than to actually implement such a goal. The key to resolving intergenerational tensions is to create open lines of communication. The supervisor needs to be very direct with the new professional and not assume any understanding of workplace culture or norms. Not only is it perfectly acceptable to inform the new employee of workplace expectations but it is also the supervisor's

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duty to mentor the new professional. The Millennial also has a responsibility to understand his or her workplace behavior in the larger context of the organizational structure and find a way to adapt to these norms without compromising core values. Millennials should embrace mentorship opportunities.

Effective communication can nip potential problems in the bud, rather than allowing them to fester into workplace resentment and inefficiencies. For example, a supervisor may have an exchange with a Millennial that she perceives as disrespectful. If the supervisor understands the generational context of the Millennial's behavior, the supervisor may be more forgiving and willing to mentor the student about appropriate workplace behavior. In turn, if the Millennial understands that the supervisor perceives the behavior as disrespectful, the Millennial may choose his words more carefully the next time. Each person in the mentor-mentee relationship must acknowledge what the other person brings to the table and must recognize that both can benefit the organization. It is not that one behavior is correct and the other is incorrect, but rather that they are different from one another. The supervisor has a responsibility to educate the Millennial about the workplace environment. New professionals need to learn the culture and adapt it or adapt to it accordingly.

Seasoned professional supervisors should stress in their communications the breadth of experience they have that informs their behavior in the workplace, and they should strive to teach the newer professionals the value of being more reserved. Because Millennials tend to look for the reasons and rationale behind workplace behavior, providing that contextual rationale will most effectively communicate the values of certain behaviors to them. The established professionals

Table 2.
Real-World Scenarios of Generational Clashes in the Workplace

Action	Supervisor's Reaction/Perception	Student's Reaction/Perception
A student walks into a board meeting a few minutes late and starts conversing with people as she walks in.	The student should have taken her seat quietly. It was bad enough that she was late, but she shouldn't have drawn attention to it, nor should she have disrupted the meeting.	The meeting had not really started yet, and the student thought she should be polite and acknowledge the lay people and her colleagues.
A supervisor calls a student on the phone requesting that she bring a document to her immediately. The student said, "I'm just finishing something up, but I will be there in one minute."	A student should not put any task before fulfilling a supervisor's request and should have recognized the importance and immediacy of this request. The supervisor also felt it was disrespectful to speak to her in that manner and to ask for her to wait.	The supervisor was going to get what she needed, only a couple of minutes later, which really should not have made a big difference. The student felt that she spoke to the supervisor respectfully, as she would to any colleague, and couldn't believe the supervisor would have gotten upset over something so minimal.
A supervisor asks a student to complete a task ten minutes before the student is scheduled to leave the office. Although the student has no specific plans after leaving work, he tells the supervisor he will do it the following day when he returns.	The student shouldn't be worried about punching a clock and should spend the time now, when the supervisor has made the request, to complete the task. If the student has no specific place to be, leaving work 20 or 30 minutes later is not a big deal; after all, the other professionals stay until the job is done.	The student would like to create boundaries and set limits so as not to create a precedent of staying late to complete a task that can easily wait until the next day.
A student spends time surfing the internet and shopping online during fieldwork hours.	If the student does not have enough work to do, he should take more initiative—either ask for more to do or take it upon himself to learn more about the organization, meet with other staff, read relevant material, etc.	There isn't enough work in the agency, and the supervisor doesn't have time to find things for the student to do. It's the supervisor's responsibility to keep the student busy.
A student came to work in a very low-cut shirt, and the other staff made comments to the supervisor.	The student looked inappropriate and unprofessional, embarrassing the supervisor at a staff meeting.	The supervisor is uptight and conservative. The student feels she looked professional and the supervisor was overreacting.

may need to put a different spin on cultural norms, so that they are perceived as being useful and purposeful as opposed to hierarchical and bureaucratic. In addition, if a professional discovers a lack of effective rationale for a given system or norm, then it would be wise to consider changing or eliminating that practice.

Unfortunately, even clear communication will not always solve intergenerational workplace conflicts, particularly where supervisors require significant adaptation by a Millennial. Adaptation is a difficult concept for some Millennials. Millennials are looking for a certain degree of job satisfaction, based on a number of factors, including quality relationships with supervisors (constructive feedback, opportunities for project involvement, and collegiality) and the ability to be involved in organizational change (Liff-Grieff, 2009). They may not be open to adapting to a new culture, as they feel they can have their needs met elsewhere without compromising or sacrificing their values and beliefs. Given the degree to which Millennials switch jobs (Abrams, 2009), they may leave an organization rather than adjust to the demands of the current work environment (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Zelenka, 2007). Supervisors therefore should consider changes in work rules beyond fostering increased communication.

Creating a Professional Environment That Works for Everyone

In addition to communicating expectations and needs, experienced supervisors will need to be flexible, facilitate the development of respectful relationships, and be open to creating changing work environments as they welcome Millennials into the workplace. It is crucial that supervisors strive to understand the perspectives of these new professionals and try to meet their needs, including instituting

Table 2. continued

A student sent an e-mail directly to the organization's executive director (the supervisor's boss) suggesting a new idea for a program.	The student should go through the supervisor first, as there is a chain of command. The student has no right (and a lot of nerve) to go directly to the executive director.	The student felt the idea was good, so why not go straight to the person who can implement it? There is no need for bureaucratic layers. The student felt it was ridiculous to be told with whom he can and cannot speak.
A student interviewed for a field placement and was not interested in working at the agency. The student never made a follow-up phone call to the interviewer to decline the position.	The student should have called to say he was not interested in the position. The supervisor spent time meeting with the student and felt it was common courtesy to call her and let her know he was not interested.	The student felt if he wanted the job, then he would have called and said so. He figured the field liaison would handle the placements and notify the supervisors.
A supervisor heard from his colleagues that the student was complaining to co-workers that she is in graduate school and is not at the field placement to do administrative work that could be done by a college student.	Nothing is above anyone working in the office, and administrative tasks are part of the job. The student will learn from these experiences too. If the student feels that the work can be done by a college student, then she is not processing the experience to its full extent. The student must really try to understand the organization on a deeper level, take the context of the tasks into consideration, and question how and why decisions are made. Each task, no matter how simple, should be viewed as a learning opportunity.	The student doesn't mind doing some administrative work, but that's not what graduate school should be about. The student would like to be challenged and given more responsibility.
The supervisor travels a lot and likes to meet with the student over the phone and at unconventional times.	As a professional, one doesn't work standard office hours, and the student should get used to this and make herself available to the supervisor. The supervisor feels that if he is willing to give up his personal time for the student, then not only should the student do the same but she should also appreciate the fact that the supervisor is willing to do so.	The student is seeking a work-life balance and is trying to set boundaries. The student feels the supervisor should make time for her in person during business hours. Although the supervisor is willing to talk after work hours, that is the supervisor's choice. If the student was a priority, the supervisor would find a way to provide supervision when the student is in the office.

scheduling accommodations to help them establish a work-life balance. Supervisors can create this type of environment by communicating clearly and frequently about expectations of work performance and behavior; stating and explaining norms and expectations so there is less room for misunderstandings; articulating explicit goals and a conceptual vision while emphasizing the meaningful effect that employees are having on the world as a result of the work in which they are engaged; explaining the big picture of the work in which the organization is involved; eliminating bureaucracy whenever possible; providing honest and constructive feedback; treating everyone with respect and acknowledging that all the professionals have valuable contributions to make; and providing learning opportunities for continual professional growth so that they will remain committed to the organization and the field of Jewish communal service. In such a work environment young professionals will be both better equipped to handle the tasks at hand and more invested in the outcome (Zemke et al., 2000).

As with generations past, but even more so today, supervisors cannot expect new employees to come into the workplace instinctively knowing appropriate workplace standards for dress, technological boundaries, and appropriate use of time. Millennials may not know the acceptable limits for tardiness, including duration and frequency of lateness. They have grown up in a technological age that has encouraged transparency, immediate access to resources, and comfort with a public display of their personal lives, largely through the use of social networking sites such as Facebook. As a result, they have a different sense of boundaries than do other generations and will need guidance in this area of the professional domain. As seasoned professionals provide this guidance, they in turn may become more comfortable with the use of technology, creating a win-win situation and an appropriate balance for all (Abrams, 2009).

CONCLUSION: WHAT DOES ALL OF THIS MEAN FOR JEWISH COMMUNAL WORK LIFE?

Jewish communal professionals are facing a new challenge with the emergence of a new cohort of professionals: the Millennials. Given that the generations possess varying skill sets, experiences, backgrounds, expectations, and perceptions, professionals are going to have to find new ways to collaborate with one another. Each cohort has much to offer and can learn from one another. All workplace participants must have clear expectations and constantly communicate them to each other. They must put aside their preconceived notions, not judge one another, and try and find common ground from which to work. In doing so, they can continue to provide creative opportunities for Jewish engagement and foster leadership in young adults who are passionate about contributing to the Jewish community.

In addition to encouraging these relationships among professionals in the field, employees in the Jewish nonprofit sector also must adapt these approaches to their work with lay leaders. Many Jewish communal professionals have been trained to protect their lay leaders and treat them with a level of respect that may be foreign to or even uncomfortable for Millennials. Millennials tend to want equal access to lay leaders and see no reason for a barrier between themselves and their volunteers. In addition, they have the confidence to approach these individuals in a way that more seasoned professionals would never think of doing and would

consider inappropriate. Again, this can be a compromise and a learning experience for both. Eventually Millennials will be lay leaders as well, and their expectations will more closely match the expectations of the young professionals.

The Millennials bring creativity, passion, an entrepreneurial spirit, and technological savvy to the workplace. The Jewish nonprofit world will move ahead only with their participation. Because job satisfaction is a high priority for them in the workplace (Liff-Grieff, 2009), supervisors must be willing to meet their needs. Through communication, understanding, and a willingness to work together and compromise, both will be able to create a mutually beneficial workplace relationship that will ultimately enhance the Jewish community.

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