

# COMMUNITYMANAGER

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## Generational Style Guide

Through awareness and flexibility, people of all ages can blend their diverse workstyles into more productive workplaces.

BY JULIE WARREN

**W**ith four distinct generations in today's marketplace and workforce, it's little wonder management company executives are looking for guidance on how to create more compatible and efficient work environments for staff, as well as for association boards.

Author, presenter, and an acclaimed expert on generational differences, Cam Marston provided that guidance in his presentation during the opening general session of CAI's 2018 Annual Conference and Exposition a few weeks ago in Washington, D.C.

Principal of Generational Insights, a research and consulting firm in Mobile, Ala., Marston captivated an audience of

more than 1,000 conference attendees with his advice for creating more successful workplaces and work relationships. He offered several observations—peppered here and there with humor and irony—that can help management company owners, their employees, and association board leaders navigate the myriad communications styles and find common ground among generations.

Those who want to create high-performance workplaces, whether within a management company or an association board, according to Marston, should learn “to recognize their own inherent workstyles as well as those of their colleagues” and then set their own workstyle aside. »

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Doing so demonstrates an understanding of generational differences and motives that can help people connect with each other—an understanding “that means ‘he gets me,’” Marston says.

### DISTINCT CHARACTERISTICS

According to Marston, baby boomers—people born between 1946 and 1964, many of whom are business owners—and their kids, the millennials, are working side by side with those in Generation X—people born between 1965 and 1980—and even some of the stalwart “matures,” who are a bit older than the boomers and eligible for retirement. The mix of characteristics and diverse workstyles has the potential to lead to miscommunication and discord.

Marston also provided 2018 Annual Conference attendees with some hints about the iGen demographic. Born after 1997, this group is as large as the baby boomers—75+ million—and more diverse and tech savvy than any other generation. They’ll begin entering the workforce within the next three to five years.

### RECOGNIZABLE WORKSTYLES

Marston’s research has identified clear workplace behaviors in each demographic. The matures and the baby boomers, for instance, favor collaboration, teamwork, and hierarchy, and they have a strong pro-

fessional ethic that relies on commitment and a bit of self-sacrifice. They tend to arrive early, stay late, and embrace plenty of meetings. They also appreciate recognition through awards.

## More millennials will enter the job market in 2018 than any other year to date.

Gen Xers were the first of the “latch-key” children, thus they are independent and self-sufficient. They are also technologically adept and well-educated; about 60 percent of Gen Xers attended college. And they are now reaching executive levels in all kinds of businesses, including community management.

Because of their independence and resourcefulness, Gen Xers believe the best way to manage people is to get out of

the way and have as little contact as possible so workers “can do their own thing.” While Gen Xers tolerate regular work hours, they expect flexible work schedules for personal commitments and prefer email to conversation.

Millennials, who are the baby boomers’ children, are multitaskers and comfortable with both group and individual interaction. They are generally adept at social media and sometimes prefer to text than call or email, Marston says.

Like their parents, the baby boomers, millennials embrace teamwork and like building relationships; unlike the boomers, they value work-life balance over career. Marston stressed to conference attendees that, early in their careers, this group looks for jobs that “make them happy,” and the resulting job turnover typically averages about every 18 months. Business owners should note that more millennials will enter the job market in 2018 than in any other year to date, according to Marston.

### WORKSTYLE WEAKNESSES

Marston emphasized that not enough older executives—baby boomers, as well as matures—have developed or implemented succession plans for their businesses. Recognizing that most company owners secretly believe their companies will “never be successful without them,” he encourages baby boomer executives to develop

### Cam Marston’s “Work Preferences Guide”

Work Preferences	Mature	Boomer	Gen X	Millennial	iGen*
Communication	Meetings Leader-led	Meetings and Conference Calls Collaborative/efficient	Email One-way	Text Immediate	Emoji Expressive
Schedule	9am–5pm Or set shifts	Arrive early, leave late Lots of (visible) time at work	Regular hours But flex for extracurriculars	No set hours Works only the hours the job needs	Customized work schedule
Relationship with work colleagues	Clear hierarchy	If you need me, I’m there And I expect you’ll do the same for me	Just get the job done Too much interpersonal can get in the way	Seeks equal parts group and individual interaction	Seeks information
Recognition	Acknowledge team Not self	Acknowledgement in front of team Or through promotions	Acknowledged through time off	Acknowledged through frequent rewards	Acknowledged with personalized rewards

\* Lots of conjecture here as the iGen are still quite young.

a solid succession plan. In his more than 20 years researching workplace trends, Marston also has observed that “there’s a strong correlation between a person’s physical decline and his or her tightening grip on the company.”

“The biggest leadership gap is with the Gen Xers,” Marston says. Their “reluctance to get involved” can get in their way of being strong, effective managers. “As a group, the millennials are like a huge boulder barreling downhill, and the Gen Xers need to learn how to engage *now* to be able to guide and lead these workers in the future.”

Millennials are living at home longer and generally taking more time—from five to seven years in some cases—to reach certain life stages, like marriage and parenthood, than previous generations. And unlike their boomer parents, who appreciate when their accomplishments are rewarded, Marston says for millennials, “It’s more about the use of their time. ... To older workers, it appears as though some younger people want to be recognized for just showing up.”

Many of these traits have been demonstrated throughout history, says Marston, who compares the decades following World War II to the early Renaissance: “In times of affluence, the needs of the individual supersede those of the group.”



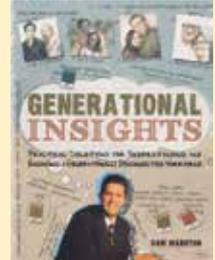
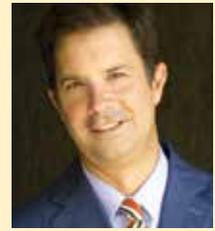
Cam Marston shared the characteristic—and well-researched—workplace preferences of four distinct generations with more than 1,000 attendees during the opening general session of CAI’s 2018 Annual Conference and Exposition.

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## ***Generational Insights: Practical Solutions for Understanding and Engaging a Generationally Disconnected Workforce***

Each of the generations in today’s workforce sees the world through a unique lens, and their fundamental differences result in a disconnected workforce with few areas in common. As management executives look for ways to bring these differing views together to achieve a common business goal, *Generational Insights* gives everyone—management company executives, community managers, and homeowner leaders—a way to bridge the gap and connect generational norms with business demands.

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Member price: \$18.95.



Those in the iGen group have very short attention spans, are always connected, and prefer visuals to text. But they are untested in the workplace, so they’re still something of a wild card.

### **OVERSIMPLIFIED TRAITS**

Marston takes care to distinguish generational preferences—which he’s researched and can support with data—to stereotypes. While many people within a generation reflect certain preferences, others may not. He encourages his audiences to proceed with the preferences in mind but be willing to adjust as necessary in practice.

Marston admits that some people bear the characteristics of more than one demographic, and there are some exceptions in each group’s description. For instance, people who were raised on farms—no matter what birth order or generation—are exceptionally diligent and conscientious.

“There’s a reason alien abductions usually occur out in the country,” he quipped during his presentation. “The aliens know where to find the hardest workers.”

Military veterans, immigrants, youngest children, and groups that have shared a “rigorous rite of passage” also are exceptions to the rules.

Marston predicts that because of their “desire for recognition from their bosses,” millennials’ workstyles eventually will appear more and more like those of their parents, the baby boomers.

### **APPLICATION**

Marston reiterates that managers and employees need to recognize their own personal workstyle preferences and set those preferences aside for others’ approaches.

“Treat colleagues at work or peers on your boards as if they were people from another country or another culture,” Marston says. “Usually, one change (in an office process) creates momentum.”

*Julie Warren is editor of Community Manager and CAI’s news and content manager.*