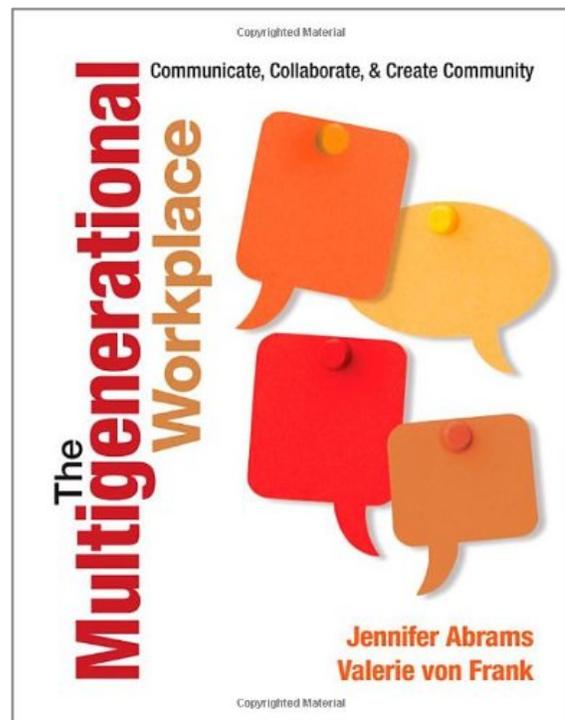Abrams, J., & von Frank, V.A. (2014). *The multigenerational workplace: Communicate, collaborate, & create community.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, Sage Publications Ltd.

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The workplace is becoming increasingly diverse. Today's labor force spans several generations and members of these generations share experiences of world events that have helped to shape their worldview. These shared experiences allow today's employees to identify with a certain generation and to find community in their place of employment with fellow members of this generation. This identity, however, can also lead to a lack of understanding of different generations with a different worldview. In *The Multigenerational Workplace*, Abrams and von Frank (2014) discuss how to navigate these differences and how to work with the characteristics of each generational member to make the workplace a positive space. Though their writing addresses the multigenerational environment within school-work settings, the practical advice and activities they present are applicable to many work environments. Jennifer Abrams, an education and communication consultant for schools and hospitals, and Valerie von Frank, an author, editor, and education reporter, have compiled a practical guide for opening lines of

communication in the workplace among workers of different generations. They complement discussions of timely generational topics with practical activities for leaders to conduct to further explore these topics with employees. With this book they set out to describe the four generations currently in the labor force and then demonstrate how to use the understanding of these labels to help develop positive and effective work environments, blending understanding with action.

The Multigenerational Workplace is divided into two sections. The first section includes four chapters designed to explore and deepen a reader's understanding of the multigenerational workplace. The second section includes three chapters that address actions that can be taken by leaders in the workplace. Each chapter is followed by suggested group activities that leaders can use in the workplace to deepen understanding of the generations, to encourage examining new perspectives, and to take action to improve the work environment.

Section one begins with an overview of four generations currently in the labor force. The authors label members of these generations as Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials. Abrams and von Frank (2014) define Traditionalists as those born between 1922 and 1943. Traditionalists have experienced world wars, economic depression, and a boom in technological changes. These experiences often reflect in loyalty, respect for authority, a strong work ethic, and a conservative approach to handling conflict. Born between 1944 and 1964, Baby Boomers are a large generation and they are described as optimistic, team and service oriented, and ones who value process and relationship. Generation Xers, born between 1965 and 1981, were born during the era of women's rights and tend to be cynical, informal, direct, and self-reliant. Generation Xers want a life/work balance and want their workplace to have a sense of family and community. Finally, Millennials are the youngest members of the work force, born between 1982 and 2000. This generation grew up in a technological age. They had federally mandated education

programs and are accustomed to those supports and structures. Millennials are confident, assertive, global minded and open to diverse viewpoints. They multitask and seek praise for the work they perform.

Within these generations key differences in beliefs and practices exist. By recognizing these differences one can begin to understand how and why workers approach a situation in a certain way and why those approaches vary depending upon the year of birth. Chapter one provides further developed definitions of these generations and presents common events that each generation shares that shapes members' worldview. Chapter two moves on to discuss negative and false stereotypes of each generation. These two chapters include reference charts that summarize and help to illustrate key events and belief systems that define each generation.

Chapter three discusses the differences in the generations in relation to the understanding of etiquette in the school-work environment. Abrams and von Frank (2014) outline some basic rules for the school workplace that can serve as a foundation for all generations and then they outline some key differences in perspectives related to etiquette and acceptable behaviors. In this chapter they address the very real and timely issue of social media use by employees. They again offer general guidelines and then talk specifically about the dangers of a teacher texting with his or her students and teachers posting to social media sites. They discuss the importance of appropriate email addresses and user names. They remind all readers that technology is an interesting space between public and private and all must use caution in the way they portray themselves as professionals.

In chapter three Abrams and von Frank (2014) also provide examples of differences in the generations in terms of balancing home with work. One powerful illustration of this is their discussion about Millennials bringing children, and even pets, to work. While a Traditionalist would most likely not consider bringing their dog with them to work in their classroom on a Saturday, a Millennial would most likely not see a problem with bringing the family pet to school on a Saturday afternoon.

Millennials and Generation Xers are often balancing work with caring for small children in two career homes. This means they may bring their children with them to meetings and/or after school activities. This behavior can be difficult for a Baby Boomer or Traditionalist to understand. The authors follow this illustration with a list of things for all workers to consider including district policy and being proactive with childcare providers, reminding members of every generation of the need for agreed upon standards in workplace behavior.

Chapter four addresses communication differences among the generations. Millennials may have a very different idea of topics that are appropriate to share in the workplace than Traditionalists. Slang varies greatly across the generations. Comfort with and use of modes of communication also varies greatly. Millennials tend to be very comfortable texting important information while Traditionalists may prefer to communicate by phone or face to face. The activities included at the end of chapter four address the importance of clear and effective communication and ask participants to consider various communication styles in different workplace scenarios.

Baby Boomers used to make up a majority of the teaching force. Today the school workplace looks very different. There is a nearly equal mix of generations represented. In addition, Generation Xers and Millennials tend to be more mobile and will change jobs and/or leave the profession within a year to five years. Because of this, the authors present a plan for recruiting teachers through a generational lens. They provide tips for leaders on the best ways to develop an applicant pool and to support and mentor new teachers as they enter the profession. By understanding the views of Millennials, leaders can take steps to retain teachers in their school setting and in the larger profession. Just as recruiting needs to change to meet the needs of incoming young workers, the professional learning and development in the school workplace must adjust as well. Chapter six of the book discusses coaching and feedback methods to meet each generation's needs. The chapter includes

detailed expectations for professional development within each generation with suggestions for carrying out this professional development in an effective manner.

The final chapter of the book discusses the leadership differences among the generations. It includes a chart that references current research geared toward the capacity for each generation to carry out specific tasks related to leadership. This chart is intended to help create a picture of the leadership styles of each generation. Abrams and von Frank (2014) conclude the chapter with activities designed to determine ways to grow leaders within a school workplace setting.

There is a danger in labeling generations according to distinct time frames and with specific characteristics. It can serve to perpetuate stereotypes rather than dispel them. The authors are very careful to caution against this and to clarify that these are only suggested categories based upon key events in history, shared experiences, and approximate dates of birth. They repeatedly remind readers that there are other factors and influences that determine items like our preferred communication styles, our needs for coaching, and our leadership styles. They do not expect every person in the workplace to snugly fit into one of these categories in every aspect. As I read the descriptions of each generation I found myself identifying with aspects in each. However, I did seem to find myself centrally in one of the categories and reading about my identified generation helped me to better understand my own workplace behaviors. In addition, reading about the Millennials and post Millennials that are in the college courses I teach assisted me greatly in understanding their behaviors and needs. I can easily see how this book could facilitate open conversations and deeper understandings between colleagues in the multigenerational workplace.

With *The Multigenerational Workplace*, Abrams and von Frank (2014) have created a guidebook that has the potential to bridge the generational gaps in today's workplace. Leaders can easily incorporate the activities included in the book into faculty meetings and can use them to assist employees in

understanding their colleagues' beliefs and practices. Leaders can also use the book to deepen their own understanding of how to work best with the changing workforce in their buildings and districts to develop the leaders that will follow in their footsteps.

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