
White Paper

Born In One Generation, Thinking Like Another

By **Tammy L. Hughes**

with statistical analysis of data from The Values & Influence Assessment™



Claire Raines Associates • helping people work together despite their differences

I was born into Generation X, but I'm a Baby Boomer at heart. Just by looking at me, you could be misled about how to influence, motivate, or just plain team up with me. This was certainly the case with one manager at Xerox where I began my career some twenty years ago. He must have assumed I was a typical Gen Xer: self-reliant, direct, and results-focused. In fact, I'm collaborative, competitive, and driven—more like a Baby Boomer. At our infrequent meetings in his office, my boss consistently gave me just the bare bones of what he needed me to accomplish. It felt like he was handing me a set scribbled of notes written in code and then dismissing me to go to my office, decipher the code, and then puzzle out a plan on my own. This general approach can work well with most Generation Xers. They want to know the desired result. Then they want the freedom to work independently to get there in their own sometimes unorthodox way. But I wanted time to connect and build rapport. And what I really needed was to sit down together and work through with my boss the best way for me to achieve the goals he'd just given me. I worried that I would invest my time poorly because the target wasn't clear. I needed consensus. I needed to make sure our plans were aligned so that, together, we'd get the best possible results. He thought he was doing the right thing, but it was all wrong for me.

Birth Generation vs. Values Group

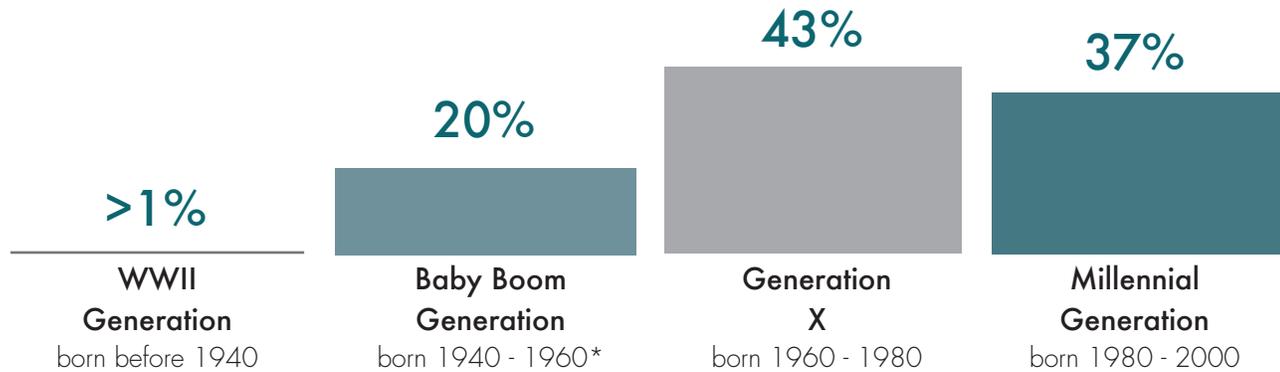
At Claire Raines Associates, we've been leading sessions on the generations for more than 25 years. In the past, we assigned participants to generations based solely on when they were born. Recently, though, we've begun to delineate between generation and values group. As a result, in recent workshops, we've had 60-year-olds in the Millennial camp and 30-year-olds identifying with the Boomers. **When people don't fit the profile for their generation, it means that other factors affected their values even more than the era they grew up in.** It could be the part of the world where they were raised...their race, ethnicity, religion...or even the influence of their own children.

The Study

We recently analyzed data from our Values & Influence Assessment™, an instrument that helps people determine whether they fit the profile for their birth generation or if their values are more like those associated with another generation. We collected data from the assessments of 462 people in sixteen organizations. Two-thirds of them took the assessment on paper in live sessions; the other third took it online on our website. Fifty-two percent were men; 48 percent were women. Nearly 80 percent were born in the US; the other 20 percent were born outside the US. Sixty percent classified themselves as managers or supervisors; 36 percent as associates or individual contributors; and 4 percent as executives. By birth, 43 percent were Generation Xers; 37 percent were Millennials; and 20 percent were Baby Boomers. Two respondents—less than 1 percent—were members of the WWII generation.

Table 1.
Respondents by Generation

Which generations were respondents born into?



*Birth years are approximate, overlapping, and somewhat arbitrary. The post-World War II baby boom in the US began in 1946 and ended in 1964. Other countries had increased birth rates at varying times after World War II.

Key Findings

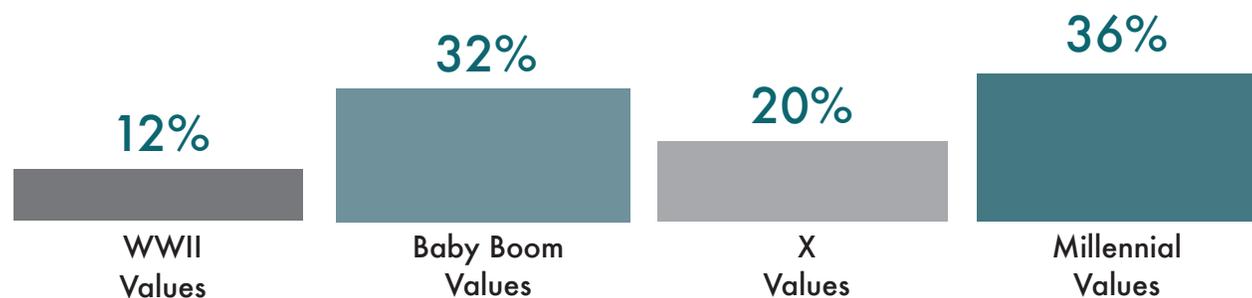
We made some interesting discoveries about the way people think and what drives them—information that is invaluable when you’re seeking to lead, manage, influence, motivate, or work more effectively with others.

Key Finding #1

More people identify with Millennial values than with any other generational mindset.

Table 2.
Values Groups

Which values groups did respondents test into?



Millennials are the newest generation in the workplace and the fastest growing cohort around the world. Two-thirds of them used computers before the age of five. They are connected 24/7 to friends, parents, information, and entertainment. They have high expectations and clear goals—and they are also the most maligned and complained-about group in the workplace. Millennials are accused of being rude and entitled, of asking too many questions, and of expecting constant feedback from their managers and organizations. So we find it ironic that 36 percent of respondents—who represented all the birth generations—identified with the Millennial values of collective action, social networking, and goal- and achievement-orientation. To our surprise, it's the most popular of the four values groups.

Implications: Since it's the most popular values group and the fastest-growing generation in the workplace, everyone needs to understand the Millennial values set. We work more efficiently and effectively with people who have Millennial values when we:

- leave time and space for questions
- monitor our cynicism and look for the positive in people and situations
- maintain an open flow of information
- give feedback regularly; with this group, once a year performance reviews don't cut it.

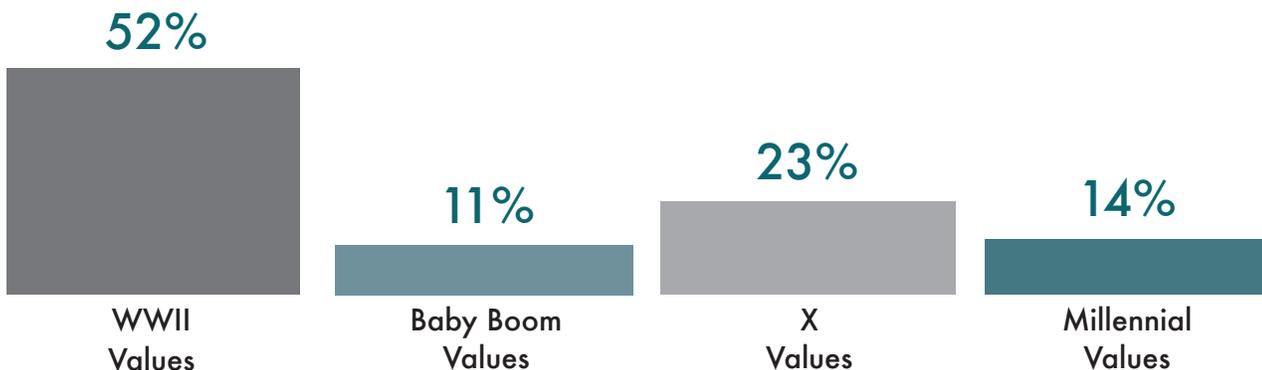
A transportation industry manager was recently assigned three college interns for a summer project. She began to worry on the first day that she wouldn't be able to get her own work done. All day, they brought her questions, shared information they'd found on the Internet, and laughed with her about a speed dating show they liked. She asked herself how she might tap into their savvy and energy while still meeting her daily goals. A week in, she sat them down and said, "I'd like to try working together using a speed dating model. You each have two minutes of every hour to get what you need from me. I'll be totally available to you for the 6 minutes at the top of every hour. The next 54 minutes are mine to accomplish my tasks and for you to accomplish yours. Her strategy worked. She met her goals. And, based on their excellent results, the company hired all three interns.

Key Finding #2

An overwhelming majority of respondents said that the perspective least like their own was the WWII Values Group.

Table 3.
Least Popular Values Group

Which values group did respondents say was least like their own?



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Fifty-two percent of respondents said the perspective least like their own was the WWII values set—which places high priority on law and order, respect for authority, and a clear chain of command. While it's true that people actually born into the WWII generation comprise less than 1 percent of the global workforce, this influential group built the foundation for the way we do business today, and there are still people of all ages who have their values.

Implications: Since this values set is so unpopular, it's common for us to denigrate those who hold them. They're perceived as out-of-touch, unwilling to change, unimaginative, and rigid. And yet 12% of respondents—mostly Gen Xers and Millennials by birth—tested into this values group (see Table 2). There's much to appreciate about the loyalty and work ethic of people who hold WWII values. Working effectively with them requires that:

- when we introduce change, we communicate the rationale
- we show respect for history and tradition
- we present our ideas logically.

I was working recently inside a big engineering firm where a man in his early twenties attended both a broad general session and a leadership seminar. After the second meeting, he came to the front of the room to talk. All his life, he said, he had felt like a misfit. At work, it seemed to him that his peers were all about fun, camaraderie and collaboration. Raised by his grandparents, he preferred doing things more traditionally. He tested into the World War II values group on the assessment, confirming that his values differ from most people in his birth generation. Our sessions include an activity where those with similar values get together to work on a project and then exchange results with the other groups. While working with the WWII values group, he found himself thinking, "Yup. This is where I belong." As a result of the cross-talk discussion that followed, his colleagues know now not to think of him as a typical Millennial—and they have new strategies for working more effectively with him.

Key Finding #3

Demographers have been right about the generations.

Claire Raines, Morris Massey, Neil Howe, Bill Strauss and many others have said that people are shaped by the era they grow up in—and demographers have ascribed a typical set of values to each generation. When Claire Raines developed the Values & Influence Assessment™ she distilled dozens of generational descriptions into 44 specific attitudinal distinctions. A Chi-square Test of data from 462 assessments showed a statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.00001$) between birth generation and values group. We expected to see a correlation, but didn't have a clear idea of how strong it would be. We didn't expect a perfect correlation; we knew that 100 percent of respondents in a given birth generation would not turn out to have the values associated with that generation—**because values are determined by many factors in addition to the era you grew up in.** But we expected to see a stronger correlation than would be expected by chance. In our study, more Baby Boomers tested into the Baby Boomer values group than any other; more Gen Xers tested into the Gen X values group than any other; and more Millennials tested into the Millennial values group than any other.

Implications: The generations model can be tremendously useful for forging productive work relationships. People who use the model successfully follow the Titanium Rule: "Do unto others keeping their preferences in mind." When they're working with a customer or colleague from another generation, they fine-tune their approach. They think from the *other* perspective, crafting messages that will resonate with *the other person's* values.

Key Finding #4

Yet we'll be wrong more often than we're right if we make assumptions about people based solely on their generation.

Humans are complex. None of us is simply our generation. While 41% of respondents tested into the values group associated with their birth generation, a hefty 59% tested into one of three other values groups. If you're trying to influence, lead, manage, motivate, or retain someone at work, a solid first step is to know what generation they were born into. But that's just the first step.

Implications: Understanding people requires going deeper. People don't come with labels that tell us what their values are, but we can become masterful at detecting values systems by being observant and noticing clues:

- Watch and listen. How are they dressed? Do they wear lapel pins? Are they dressed conservatively?
- Watch their body language.
- Notice work patterns and preferences. Do they seem to prefer to be on their own or do they gravitate to groups?
- What's their decision-making style?

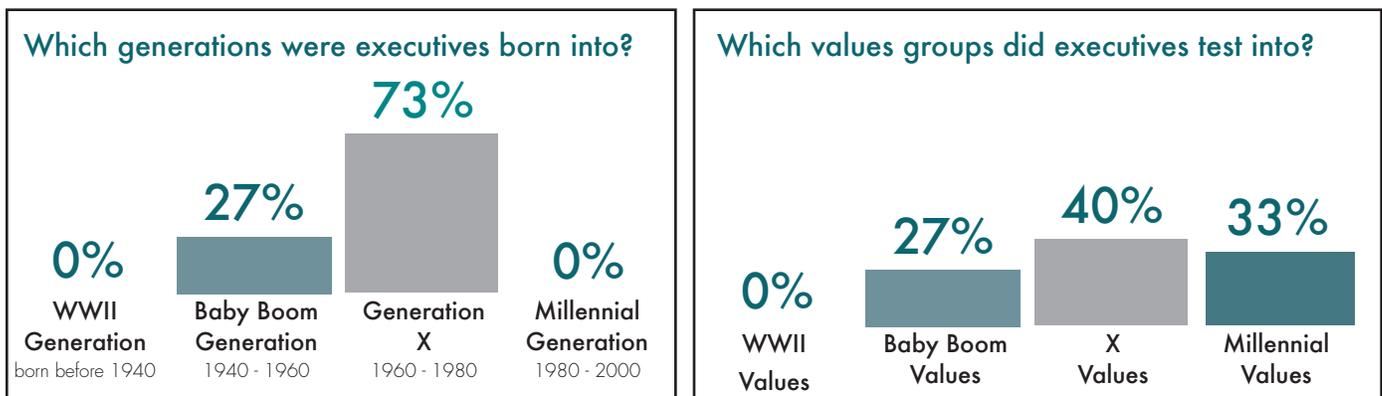
A young hospital administrator told me her manager assumed—apparently based on her generation—that she was proficient in Excel and could put together a spreadsheet. “Just because I’m 25,” she said “that doesn’t mean I’m technologically brilliant. While I can find my way around a computer, I can’t necessarily fix a problem if the system crashes!”

Key Finding #5

Executives are Generation Xers—by birth year and by values group.

Seventy-three percent of the respondents who identified themselves as executives were Generation Xers, born between 1960 and 1980, and more of them tested into the Generation X Values Group than any other.

Table 4.
Executives



Since Generation Xers tend to be self-reliant, efficient, and results-focused—traits usually associated with executives—it seems logical they would test into that group. There is, however, a mismatch between the values of executives and the values of those who work for them. Only 18 percent of non-executive respondents tested into the X Values Group.

Implications: Training on generational and values differences is needed throughout organizations.

- Offer leadership training for executives about how to get the most from everyone. Executives need to know that Generation X is sometimes perceived as aloof, abrupt, cynical, and disinterested—and they need to develop strategies for overcoming these perceptions.
- From the bottom up, help employees to understand how their leadership thinks, works, and behaves. With this understanding, employees use their time wisely and accomplish goals more efficiently and effectively.

Building Productive Work Relationships

We're working side-by-side today with a diverse mix of people in ways we never have before. To be successful, we must engage with people from different generations...with differing values...of other cultures...from different technological backgrounds. Connecting across differences affects everything from customer service to turnover, from workplace morale to profitability. The better we understand the people we're working with—what they value and what matters most to them—the more masterful we can become at adjusting our style to the individual and the situation so we can sell our ideas and build strong partnerships.

Some years ago, Claire Raines and Lara Ewing analyzed a set of practitioners who were masterful at connecting with people who have different values. They reported their findings in *The Art of Connecting* (American Management Association, 2006):

- 1. There is always a bridge.** No matter how different we are, we always have something in common. Although we see our work project as if we're from different planets, we may both listen to the same music or share a hobby. Finding that bridge helps to forge a stronger connection.
- 2. Expect the best.** When we approach each interaction believing the other person has valuable contributions to make and important things to share, we're much more likely to be effective.
- 3. Be curious.** Learn about the other. Find out what makes them tick, what's important to them, what their goals are, what worries them. If you're not sure, ask. You will get valuable information, and they will feel valued.
- 4. Show you understand.** Be an active listener. It doesn't mean you agree. It simply shows respect.
- 5. Don't expect reciprocity.** Don't get invested in the other person returning your interest. No strings attached.

People often assume that everybody's values are the same—that we all share the same drivers. My manager at Xerox operated like a Gen Xer: results-oriented, no fluff, focused on the bottom line. But we were different. If we treat everyone the same, we may very well be treating some of them in ways that don't work for them. Masterful communicators recognize that people have different values and preferences, and they change their approach as they move from

person to person. It's a matter of understanding people's values and preferences...of giving up on turning them into carbon copies of ourselves...of listening without judgment...of fine-tuning our messages. In so doing, we build more productive relationships that ultimately lead to better results.

About the Values & Influence Assessment™

The Values & Influence Assessment™ goes beyond birth year to assess personal values. Participants complete a brief, one-page questionnaire online before the session or on paper during the session. Their personalized score sheet graphs their four scores and displays their primary values group as well as their challenge group. By identifying our values, we can better understand how we relate and communicate with others.

Purpose

The instrument is intended to promote discussion and understanding. It is not intended to predict workplace behavior or success. No values group is presented as preferable or better than another. In our sessions, we talk about the assets and liabilities, challenges and blind sides of each values group.

Face Validity

The VIA has shown to have high face validity. In a sample group, respondents reported that the instrument assessed their values accurately and offered them valuable insights about themselves and others. Overwhelmingly, respondents reported they learned a lot about themselves from the instrument and wanted to get the results for their colleagues in order to be more successful at working with people whose values differed from theirs.

Reliability

The VIA has proven to be reliable. Twenty-seven respondents were tested and then retested one to sixty days later. One hundred percent classified themselves in the same values group on the second test.



About Tammy L. Hughes

Tammy Hughes is a business leader with over two decades experience in a broad spectrum of organizations and industries around the globe. She launched her career at Xerox Corporation in their Corporate Education and Training Division. She began as a salesperson at Claire Raines Associates in 1998 and served as company president from 2006 to 2012, when she became CEO. She studied communication arts at Cedarville College in Ohio and holds a BAAS degree from Midwestern State University in Texas. With Pat Heim, Tammy is co-author of the third edition of *Hardball for Women* (Plume, 2015).

About Claire Raines Associates

Claire Raines is recognized as the leading expert on generations in the workplace. Over the past 30 years, she has produced books, videos, workshops, a game, and an assessment tool to help people connect more effectively across generational and values differences. Her best selling books include *Generations at Work*, *Connecting Generations*, *Beyond Generation X*, *Twentysomething*, *The Xers & The Boomers*, *Millennials@Work*, and *The Art of Connecting*. At Claire Raines Associates, our purpose is to help people work together despite their differences. Our highly interactive sessions focus on generations and the values associated with each of them. Participants walk away with strategies and skills they can use immediately to connect more effectively with anyone who isn't just like them. The Values and Influence Assessment™ is the backbone of all our sessions.

To Learn More

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Values & Influence Assessment

A Tool for Building Productive Relationships

Target your messages to build your effectiveness and increase results.

Assessments are available for purchase at www.generationsatwork.com.