

Busting Generational Myths

at the Heart of Workplace Engagement



Generations are getting much more attention, especially when it comes to the workplace. For the first time ever, we have **five generations** in the workplace.



Silent



**Baby
Boomers**



Gen Xers



Millennials



Gen Zers

A lot of the work that's gone into understanding generations has focused on the differences.

We understand that.

Managers do need to understand how each individual likes to learn, receive recognition, and their work style.

It's more about an individual's preferences than overall generational preferences, though.





Think about a first date.
You start by figuring out what you
have in common.

*Later on, you'll figure out
some of the differences and
adjust appropriately.*

We think the same should be
true for how we understand the
***relationships between different
generations in the workplace.***

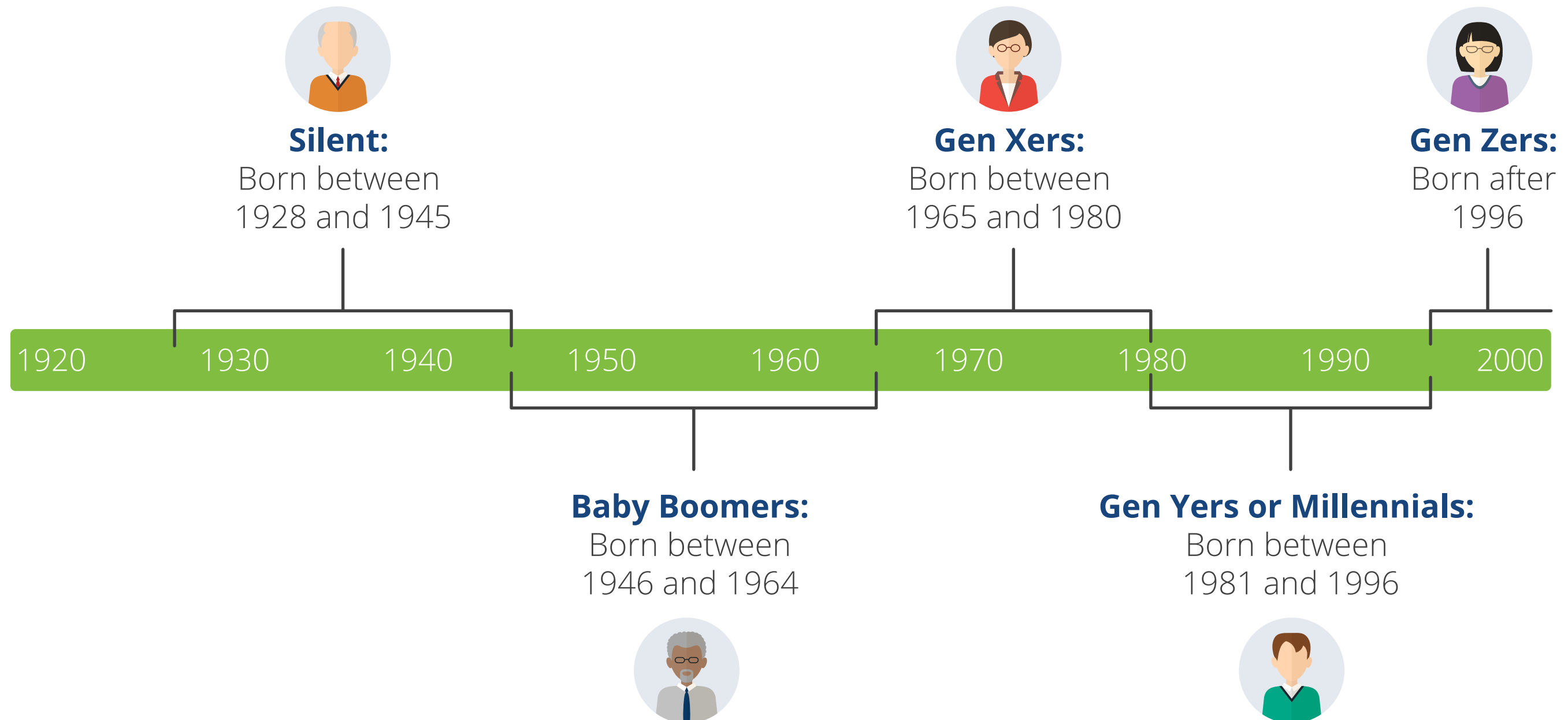
If you start with the differences among the various generations, it seems like engaging all of those different people could be a challenge.

But when we focus on what's important to everyone, we see that the path to employee engagement isn't that complicated.



*Let's look at the
differences and
the commonalities.*

First, let's understand our audience.
Here are some definitions of the generational
breaks from the Pew Research Center:



There are, of course, **legitimate differences** among the different generations. Unfortunately, many of the ideas — especially about Millennials and Gen Zers — are ***simply age and experience-related perceptions.***



Millennials and Gen Zers are more likely to take risks in their careers.



Baby Boomers, who are close to retirement, are generally more conservative in their career choices.



Gen Xers are focused on upward mobility as many of them enter their prime earning years.

Some **legitimate differences** are:

Millennials are more racially diverse:

72% of Baby Boomers
are Caucasian,
—— compared with just ——
57% of Millennials

Gen Xers are better educated:

33% of Gen X men
—— and ——
37% of Gen X women
have a bachelor's degree or better

**Baby Boomers are
more likely to be married:**

66% are currently married
—— only ——
10% have never been married

*Are we really
that different?*



There's quite a bit of research that says our differences aren't as significant as we think:

- A Korn Ferry report showed that no study has supported the existence of differences across the four generations and the ones that did lacked scientific rigor.
- An Australian study found that differences observed in generations could be attributed more to age than specific generation (Wong, Gardiner, Land, and Coulton, 2008).
- Another study concluded that generational stereotypes hurt everyone and limit the contributions of people of all ages (Blauth et al., 2011).

Managing generations differently has clearly driven a wedge that affects collaboration, productivity, workplace relationships and even self-perception!

If the science on generational differences is overstated, then what do we have in common?

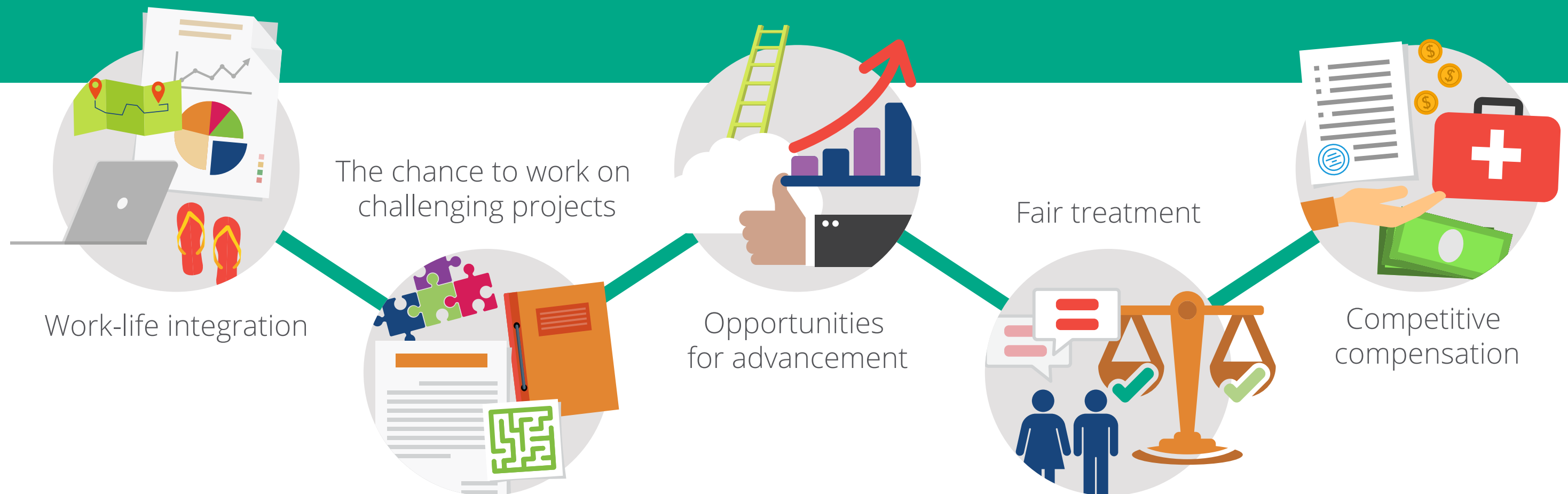
The heart of the matter is:
We're actually quite similar.



Although some of us may have grown up with telephones and TVs instead of smartphones and the Internet, it turns out that, at least as it relates to work, the people who make up a vast majority of the workplace **are actually quite similar.**

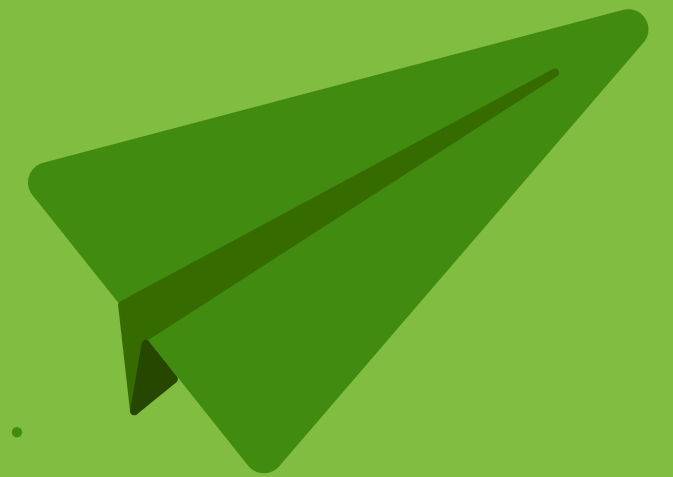
Boomers, Gen Xers and Millennials
make up more than
90%
of the workplace

A study by the University of North Carolina Kenan-Flagler Business School found that Boomers, Gen Xers and Millennials shared the following expectations **from their employers:**



That same study found that all generations shared similar views on an **ideal leader**:

- Leads by example
- Is accessible
- Helps others see how their roles contribute to the organization
- Acts as a coach and mentor
- Challenges and holds others accountable



And researcher Huntley Manhertz Jr., Ph.D.,
also found **four universal needs** among
generations in the workplace:



*Need for
connection*



*Need for
respect*



*Need for
competence*



*Need for
autonomy*

It may sound like Management 101, but instead of focusing on differences, leaders would be better served to focus on what **unites everyone at work.**

Successful leaders need to look through a variety of lenses.



We clearly have a lot of similarities,
***but how does that affect
employee engagement?***

Let's switch gears and talk about what drives engagement.

Leadership expert, Mark C. Crowley, says in his recent *Fast Company* article, that engagement is a matter of the heart, not the mind, for employees.

Based on research from Gallup and The Conference Board, Crowley identifies key areas that employees look for to be engaged:

- Having strong bonds with other people on the team, especially their supervisors
- Routinely feeling valued and appreciated, and having a deep belief that the work they do matters
- Having a supervisor who cares about them, their well-being and their personal growth
- Doing work that they enjoy and have the talents to perform

Now compare those elements with the universal needs across all generations of workers. **It's a perfect match.**



Connection

Having strong bonds
with other people
and feeling that what
you do matters



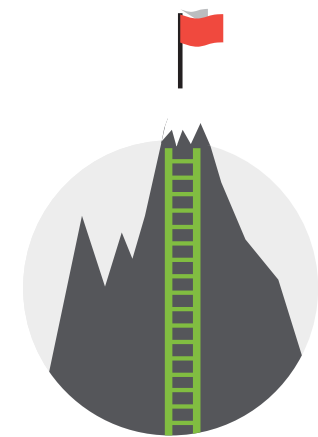
Respect

Feeling valued and
appreciated; having
a supervisor who
cares about you



Competence

Doing work you
have the talents
to perform



Autonomy

Doing work you enjoy



The generationally appropriate **engagement strategy** has been the one right in front of us the entire time.

We just needed to turn our understanding of it upside-down to focus on what ties us together rather than what separates us.

*Where do organizations
go from here?*

There's good news for every
organization unsure of how to
manage multiple generations:

***It's not as difficult
as you think.***

The hype about differences is mostly limited to the predictable age-based changes every employee deals with and the demographic changes in the world.

More often than not, we've created the generational divisions and friction in our workplaces.



For instance, one person may prefer a more **visually driven type of learning** and another may prefer to **listen to a presentation** over their lunch hour.

Offering different interaction options doesn't just meet the needs of multiple generations but **meets the individual preferences** employees want.

Getting to the heart of engagement
doesn't have to be complicated.

*If we work on fostering better **respect** for and from supervisors, better **connections** across the workplace, **autonomy** to do the work we're good at, and the **competence** to feel valued and appreciated, we'll do good by every generation.*



Want to learn more about how Inspirus
can help bring joy to your workplace?

Contact us today.

