
Using Brain Science to Engage Across Age and Generational Differences

by  **HAPPY BRAIN
SCIENCE** for



Age Differences + Generational Gap = Conflict?

To succeed today, we must work with members of multiple generations. But when challenges arise, are they truly generational, or more about the age differences between us? How can we work through these challenges to create effective, diverse teams?

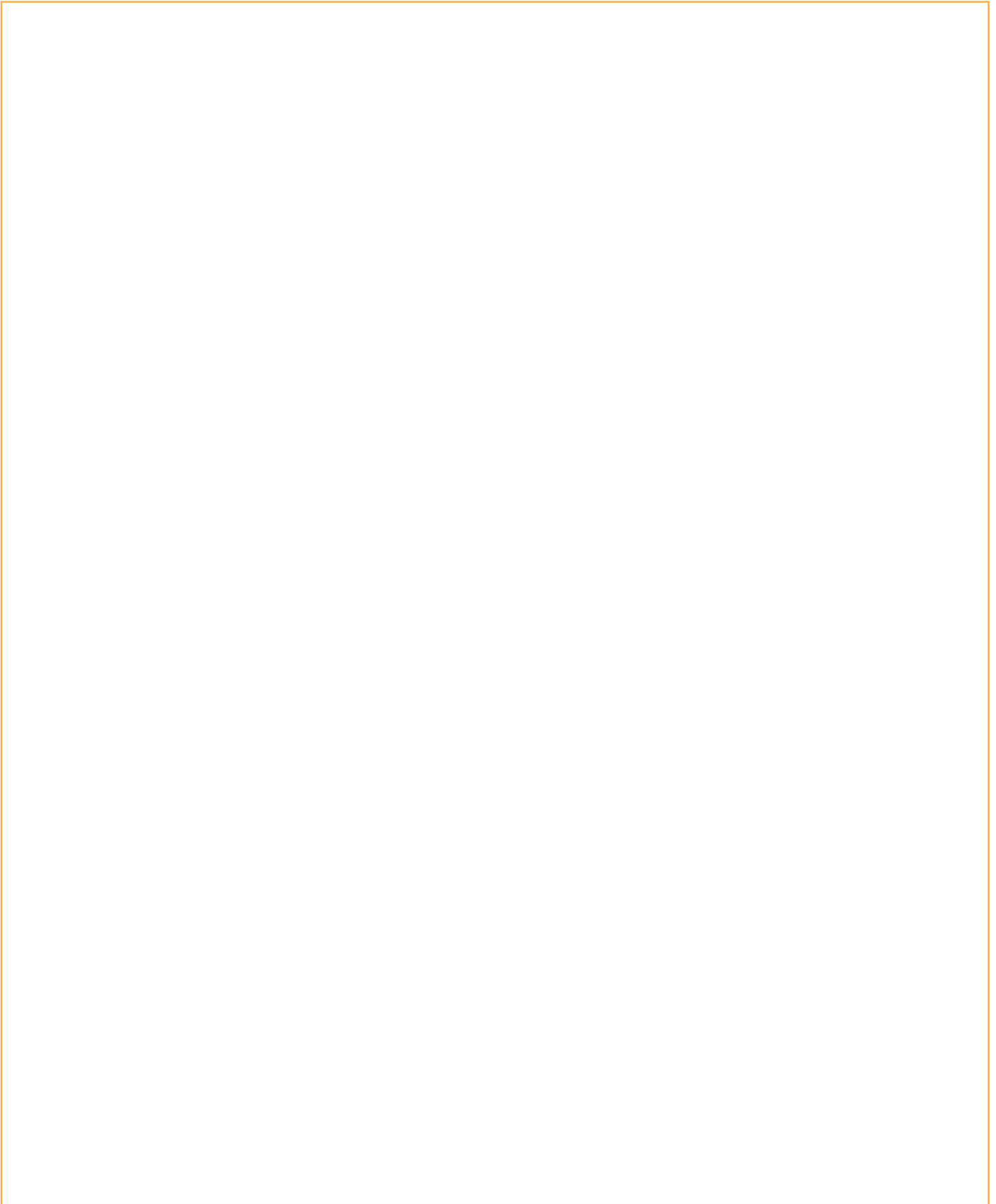
This presentation will explore how brains function at various ages, as well as generational and age-related similarities and differences. You'll gain specific insight into how working through these differences is important in creating a thriving organization. You'll also discover steps to move toward intergenerational engagement, excellence, and more!

Page 2 – Notes & Doodles ----- Some learn best with the opportunity to take notes or doodle while hearing new information. This space is for you.

Page 3 – Summary & Activities ----- Some brains are distracted by taking notes but want notes to refer to later. These notes are for you. The activities and exercises are for everyone!

Page 8 – Action Plan ----- At the end of this workshop, complete an Intergenerational Engagement Action Plan to identify where, when and how you will continue to improve.

NOTES & DOODLES



TALK SUMMARY

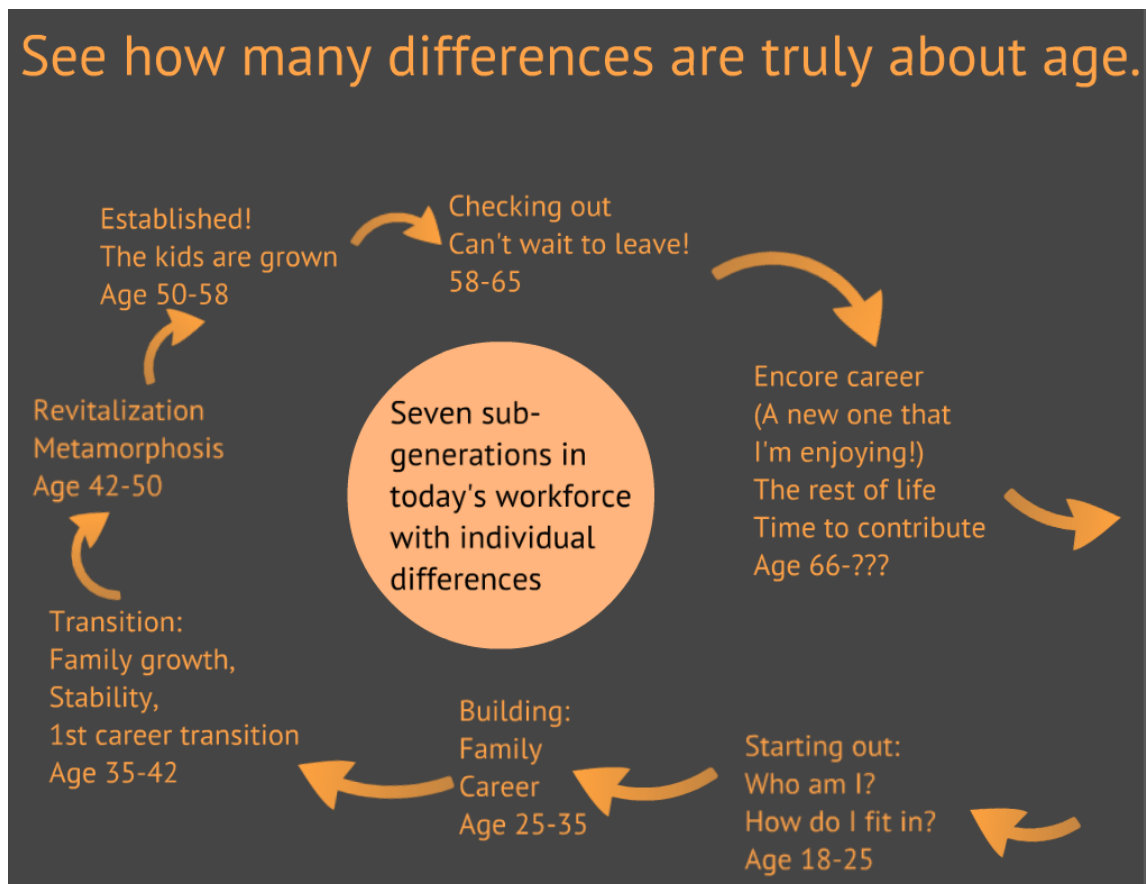
Age and generational differences can result in conflict at work. But do people of different generations behave significantly differently at work, or is that idea based on stereotypes? How can we clear up misconceptions and thrive as a team together?

Science, data, and experience tell us it is possible to communicate and engage across generational and age differences. To do so, we need to consider three main approaches:

- **Consider age differences as well as generational differences.**
- **Communicate to work across generations as well as roles.**
- **Adapt to win, in a win-win way.**

We'll explore each of these in detail below.

Consider age differences as well as generational differences.



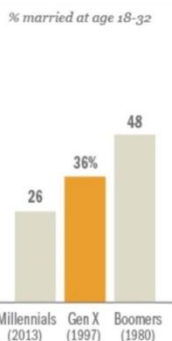
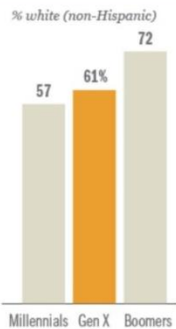
As the image above shows, employees are often at very different stages of their lives and careers. Many of the differences we assume are generational are in fact due to these different life stages.

Every generation truly is different from its predecessor; It's not all about age differences

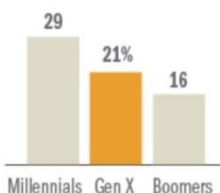
Generations do have real differences. In general, generations are getting more diverse, educated, and liberal through the years.

Generation X: Stuck In the Middle

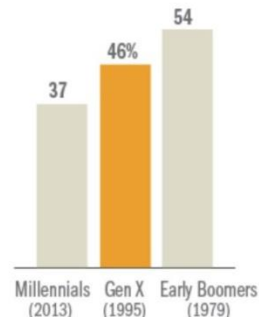
Gen Xers are the demographic bridge between the predominantly white Baby Boomers and more diverse Millennials. They also fall in the middle on other demographic measures.



% who are religiously unaffiliated



% with high school diploma or less at age 25-32



Gen Xers' attitudes on political and social issues often fit between those of the more conservative Baby Boomers and more liberal Millennials.

Image and research from Pew Research Center, 2012. USA data.

REACH to rewire your brain!

Until recent years, the story of your brain was pretty discouraging. When I was getting my degree in Cognitive Science in the 1980s, I was told what you may have heard: you are born with billions of brain cells. Your brain sets like concrete as you become an adult. Neurons die throughout your lifetime, and then you die.

Neuroscience is rewriting the story of your brain to be much more encouraging. Neuroplasticity is your brain's ability to rewire and restructure itself due to learning and experience. Few scientists believed in neuroplasticity until recent years. Now the consensus is clear: under the right circumstances, your brain physically changes--sometimes significantly--throughout your life.

REACH to rewire your brain and achieve your goals, whatever they are.

Practice...

Repetition

Effort

Attention

Complexity

Health



Exercise: Get the best from every age brain!

Of the 11 skills below, one reaches its peak when we reach the age of 43. Younger brains are better at 5 of the below, and older brains are better at 5 of the below. Do you know who to turn to when you need the below?

Thinking happy thoughts

Fluid intelligence

Short-term recall

Multi-tasking

Vocabulary

Processing speed

Crystallized intelligence

Understanding new info

Spatial orientation

Emotional intelligence

Ability to concentrate

Younger Brains Have an Advantage	Peak ability at 43 years old	Older Brains Have an Advantage

Communicate to work across generations as well as roles.

Give ‘SCARF’ to all generations!

The SCARF model—introduced by David Rock in his highly recommended book *Your Brain at Work*—summarizes a large body of psychology research that suggests we all need **Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness (SCARF)** in order to feel safe. If you feel OK about your status, have some degree of certainty, have the ability to make choices, relate to others, and feel that a discussion partner is being fair, you will likely feel safe and relatively comfortable in a discussion. If any of those needs are being threatened, it’s easy to get triggered into a “fight or flight” reaction. All of this is true for everyone involved in a difficult conversation. Give and get SCARF—Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness—to help everyone stay calmer and better able to work toward a win/win resolution to the conflict.



Exercise: What can you do to boost SCARF for yourself? For your colleagues?

Need	Actions to take for myself	Actions to take for colleagues
<u>S</u> tatus		
<u>C</u> ertainty		
<u>A</u> utonomy		
<u>R</u> elatedness		
<u>F</u> airness		

Start with WHY

To get your point and message across to your peers and colleagues, let them understand your WHY; the answers to WHAT, WHEN, and HOW can then follow.

Discuss: Start with why. In small groups, discuss: what do you do at work? More importantly, why do you do the work? Why this work and not a different industry? Why does this work mean something to you? What do you believe?

Communicate with individuals, not with stereotypes

As leaders, we can eliminate age- or generation-associated stereotypes by setting the example for our employees. Emphasize that employees need to treat each other as individuals--not as representatives of one generation or another. Instead of letting preconceptions or generalizations guide interactions, reinforce (and model!) the importance of keeping an open mind.

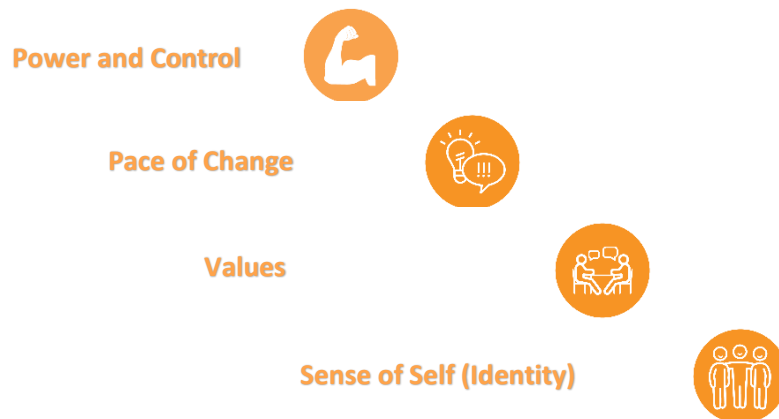
Adapt to win, in a win-win way.

Listen. Consider more options, make better decisions

Each generation and age group brings a unique perspective to consider. When we listen to each other's input without bias, we can identify better solutions to shared issues. Research summarized by Professors Chip and Dan Heath in their book *Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work* shows that we make better decisions when we consider more options. And when everyone's viewpoint is included, we maximize the chances of considering all the available possibilities and achieve buy-in in whatever decision is made.

Focus here to resolve generational issues

When colleagues of different ages and/or generations end up in conflict, typically one of these four issues is at the heart of the matter. Consider whether one of these might be the issue(s) that people are really concerned with:



Be conscious, set your intention, and act

To achieve better working relationships with colleagues of various ages and generations, *you* need to be aware of your beliefs and attitudes. You need to set an intention to make a real effort to better communicate with and engage others who are different from you. We encourage you to make a specific action plan below and follow through on it. It's even better if you're able to identify an accountability partner! For bonus points, ask someone from a different generation to set up a mutual check-in to track your progress.

ACTIVITY: INTERGENERATIONAL ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

Name:	Partner:
To work across the age and generational divide, I will focus on doing these things:	When and where I will act on this:

*Please consider sharing your plan with others, in person or online.
When you share a plan publicly, research shows you are more likely to follow through.*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books:

12: The Elements of Great Managing, by Rodd Wagner and James Harter

The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy, by William Strauss and Neil Howe

Your Brain at Work, by David Rock

Not Everyone Gets a Trophy: How to Manage the Millennials, by Bruce Tulgan

Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High, by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler

Employee Engagement 2.0, by Kevin Kruse

Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work, by Chip and Dan Heath

Scientific Study:

[Understanding and Managing Intergenerational Conflict: An Examination of Influences and Strategies](#), by Michael J. Urick, Elaine C. Hollensbe, Suzanne S. Masterson, Sean T. Lyons

Generational Data Source:

Pew Research Center: <https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/generations-age/generations/>

We'd love to hear your thoughts about applying these insights, any questions you have, and anything else related to bringing your best brain to work. Please contact us at happysupport@happybrainscience.com or one of the methods below--and if you know of someone who might want to schedule a workshop or coaching, please let us know!

Free Newsletter: You can sign up for Happy Brain Science's occasional newsletter for more happiness activities and brain science news at www.HappyBrainScience.com. It always contains thoughts on how to apply the latest science. We never share your email with anyone for any reason.

Stay in Touch: You can find Scott on LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com/in/sccrabtree/.

Thank you!

Please note that this workshop was co-developed with Dr. Alan Cabelly, Ph.D., SHRM-SCP, SPHR, Professor Emeritus from Portland State University and Portland Leadership Institute (www.PortlandLeadershipInstitute.com). He can be reached through his email, alanc@pdx.edu, or follow him on Twitter: @AlanLeads.