

Closing the gap with “Generation Y”

Olivia, a new therapist who just graduated from college, is never far from her mobile device, texting at a pace that makes your fingers feel tired just watching her. While talking with Olivia you learn she has a Facebook page, a blog on healthcare reform, and 2,000 followers for her Twitter feed.

On the other hand Steve, who's been employed for 25 years and just learned that Twitter isn't what you do simply for fun, checks his Facebook page only when his kids remind him they've posted new photos of the grandchildren. He can't imagine texting them instead of picking up a phone and calling.



Olivia and Steve could easily be at odds, leaving you, their coworker, smack in the middle. To avoid conflict—and to help Olivia steer clear of problems caused by online privacy violations—it helps to understand Olivia's generation, Generation Y, and how it differs from other generations.

WHAT'S GENERATION Y?

We've all heard of the Baby Boomer generation and Generation X (a 2008 essay by trendspotter Marian Salzman on cnn.com added the Cuspers, who straddle the divide between Boomers and Gen Xers), but what's Generation Y? Also called the Millennials, Net Generation, and Nexters, this young generation includes those born between 1979 and 2003 and is the fastest growing segment of today's workforce. It's important to avoid stereotyping, but some general traits of Gen Y include a commitment to civic duty, acceptance of diversity, and an ability to be empathetic. Gen Y is the most optimistic of all generations that came before them.

Each generation has its own view of history and cultural touchstones. Members of Gen Y grew up in the digital age, don't remember when there was an East and West Germany, and may not have even been born when the Twin Towers came under terrorist attack. They've been exposed to random violence, so it's not surprising that they value safety and security.

CHALLENGES OF GEN Y

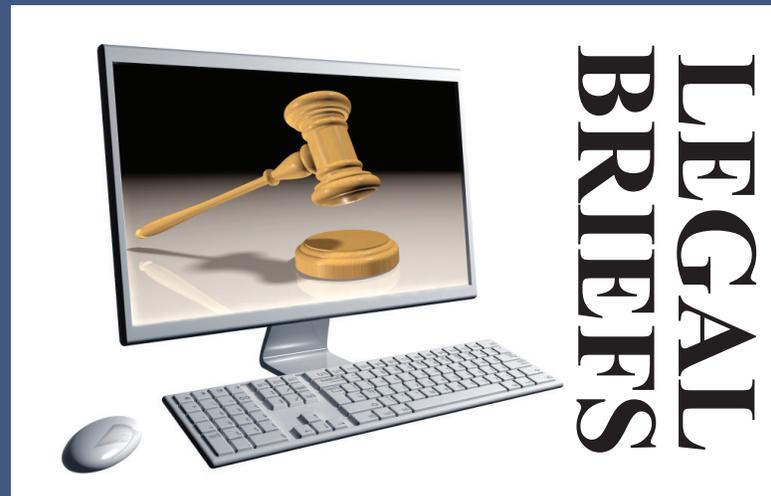
Gen Y grew up exchanging information all the time in all locations. They're used to texting their friends almost constantly to share the latest details of their lives. They're less conscious of privacy as some may post somewhat embarrassing photos of their latest party on their Facebook page.

This freeform sharing can cause problems in the work setting, where professional ethics on confidentiality and privacy regulations such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) require strict adherence. It's important to help your Gen Y coworkers understand that sharing confidential information about a client violates legal, regulatory, and ethical principles. That way, you help them—and your organization—avoid potential liability issues. The costs of such events can be high. Fines for violating HIPAA regulations can run as high as \$250,000, and offenses can be punishable with jail time.

Some organizations block Internet access at work. Talk with your supervisors to encourage open access. Closed access turns off Gen Y members like Olivia and may make them look for a job at an organization with a more liberal policy, leaving you short staffed. According to an Australian study, nearly half of employees who use MySpace and Facebook during work hours would turn down a job offer from an employer that banned the sites. Of course, it's still important not to spend too much time online, in the same way you wouldn't talk excessively with others while on the job.

WORKING WITH GEN Y

You can be an effective coworker and help colleagues like Olivia understand the importance of confidentiality and other liability issues by understanding how her generation prefers to



work. Gen Y likes group work and doesn't like hierarchy. To help your coworkers, you might start a discussion group of Gen Y staff to talk about case examples related to privacy issues. For example, in February 2009 two Wisconsin nurses were fired for posting a patient's X-rays on a Facebook page, even though the patient wasn't identified. Because members of Gen Y aren't in awe of authority figures, consider coleading the discussion with a Gen Y representative.

Gen Y prefers communication to be electronic, timely, and positive. Seek out interactive videos to teach this generation about privacy issues. When your Gen Y coworker does something great, consider texting a positive note right after an event instead of sending an email later. Remember that Gen Y also craves feedback from those around them. You can build a solid collaborative relationship by providing frequent, sincere positive feedback as appropriate.

FINDING COMMON THREADS— AND DIFFERENCES

If you become frustrated with a member of Gen Y, take time to consider generational similarities. After all, humans share 99.99% of the genetic

GENERATIONS

NAME	BIRTH YEARS	WORK VALUES
Veterans	1928-1945	Loyal, respect authority, value stability, hard working
Baby Boomers	1946-1953	Skeptical of authority, idealistic, competitive, like teamwork
Cuspers	1954-1965	Value traditional notions of family but see men and women as equals in parenting, embrace digital technology
Generation X	1966-1978	Value self-reliance, rely more on friends than institutions, irreverent humor, more pessimistic, not loyal to company
Generation Y	1978-2003	Like to figure things out, confident, want challenge but not responsibility, like group work, not in awe of authority figures, don't want to pay dues, like the idea of being with one or two companies

code—that's a lot in common. Family is the top priority for all generations. You can use that to facilitate discussions of integrity in the workplace. For example, you can ask, "How do you think your mother would feel if information about her illness was posted on a Facebook page?"

At the same time, leverage generational differences. For example, Gen Y is very technology oriented. Members of this generation can help you learn how to set privacy tools on their social media pages to improve confidentiality.

Above all, remember what it was like when

you started working with others from different generations. Respect each person's individuality while helping him or her understand the need to keep client information confidential.

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