

From Boomers to Alphas

Key Points of This Chapter

- Four distinct generations are now in our teaching staffs.
- Generation gaps are more pronounced than ever because the rapid growth of technology has resulted in very different growth experiences.
- Millennial teachers are leaving the profession in record numbers, and fewer Gen Zers are choosing to become teachers.
- School leaders need to adjust their recruiting and leadership tactics to successfully recruit and retain young teachers.

“OK, boomer . . .”

In November of 2019, this phrase became a generational battle cry when 25-year-old Chloe Swarbrick, a member of the New Zealand Parliament, addressed her fellow parliament members about the dangers of climate change—or more precisely, about their lack of action in preventing it. “In the year 2050, I will be 56 years old. Yet right now, the average age of this 52nd Parliament is 49 years old,” she said, hoping to spur her colleagues into action (Thebault, 2019). As Swarbrick spoke, an older parliament member sitting in the audience began to heckle her. Without pausing, Swarbrick deftly, calmly interjected, “OK, boomer,” into the middle of a sentence and continued her speech, silencing the heckler—and becoming a viral sensation (Thebault, 2019). Within hours, her response was being shown on news stations around the world. Today, it has been viewed millions of times (New Zealand Parliament, 2019).

While Swarbrick didn’t invent the catchphrase “OK, boomer,” she became its heroic face for millennials and Gen Zers everywhere who have grown increasingly frustrated with the societal and political structures put into place by baby boomers. What was accepted in the past will not be readily accepted by today’s younger

Photo courtesy of Tim Onnes



■ Chloe Swarbrick addressing the New Zealand Parliament.

generations, and Swarbrick’s “OK, boomer” moment sums up the angst of young people around the world as they interact with older family members, business executives, and politicians.

And by of some our younger teachers who deal with structure imposed upon them by older generations of educators.

I am a baby boomer, and in November of 2019, as Swarbrick sparred with her colleague in the New Zealand Parliament, I had my own “OK, boomer” moment—one not nearly as dramatic as Swarbrick’s, but one that was deeply prophetic.

I was a consultant, leading a professional development (PD) session for 40 elementary teachers. One of the goals was to understand how today’s students have evolved

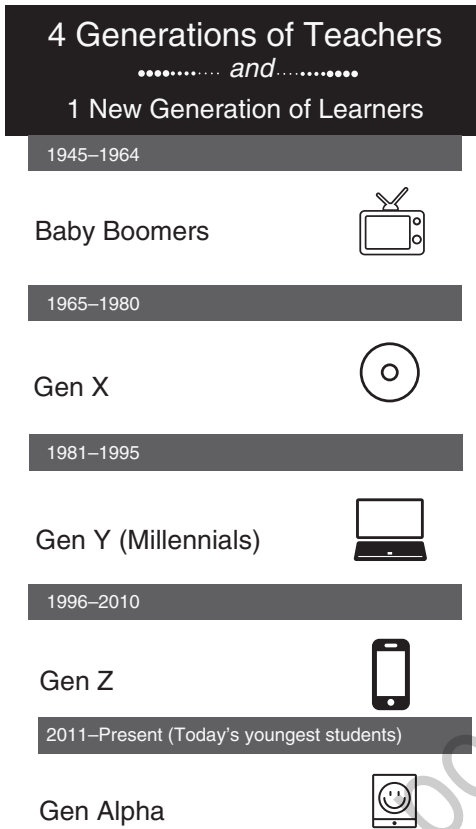
into a new type of learner that is different from previous generations. To help make this point, I wanted the teachers to briefly explore the characteristics of the four generations in their teaching staff: the baby boomers (also known as boomers), Gen Xers, Gen Yers (also known as millennials), and Gen Zers.

Yes, take a deep breath—the Gen Z kids are now old enough to join our teaching staffs. And they’re here. That first-year teacher who is 22 or 23 years old? He or she is a Gen Zer.

Three Gen Z teachers were in the group I was training, and at the end of the exercise, I asked them a question: “If you could change PD, what would you change?” The question put them on the spot. They were surrounded by their older, more experienced peers. They were all in their first, second, or third year of teaching, and they didn’t want to be seen as experts or rebels when answering. They smiled, and they blushed, and then one teacher bravely said, “Sometimes, I just wish they [the presenters] would just leave us alone. Tell us what they want done and let us go figure it out.”

This brought a lot of laughter from the group. I laughed, too, but that young teacher had plunged a Gen Z dagger into my boomer heart. I’ll never forget the

FIGURE 1.1 Generations of Teachers



feeling. I had trained teachers all over America, and I had felt a shift taking place in the younger teachers. I had spent over three decades leading teachers, but I had sensed they needed a new type of PD and a new type of leadership. Her words clarified it for me: For better or worse, Gen Z teachers have grown up as independent learners, finding their way through new smartphones, apps, video games, and websites. While Gen Z teachers still need our guidance, they and their older millennial siblings want more room than any previous generation to “figure it out” in their PD sessions and in other things they do in school. They are the “figure-it-out” generations.

As I stood in front of that group, a jumble of thoughts raced through my head about the four generations in our staffs. Boomers and Xers, millennials and Zers, are all

mixed together in a school staff stew. Most of today’s school leaders are Gen Xers and baby boomers, who grew up in eras that were more conformist. They don’t “figure it out” like the younger generations. They do what they’re told and tend to expect the same of their peers. How does this mindset work when leading millennials and Gen Zers? And to make school leadership even more challenging, our youngest students, the ones born since 2010? They’re our newest generation of student: Gen Alpha. New generations are now rolling in every 15 years, which means in 2025 Gen Beta will begin and be in our schools by the end of the decade.

It has always been hard to lead schools, but this generational disparity just laid a new layer of complexity into everything we do. Because of the steady and accelerating advance of personal technology, the four generations all grew up with different life experiences. They all tend to see the world through the lens of their age group, and they are all constantly adjusting to each other (Jenkins, 2019).

Two new terms have emerged for business leaders managing these four generations: “generational leadership” and “4-Gen leadership.” These terms can be applied to school leaders, but when we consider that school leaders are also leading their Gen Alpha students (discussed in Chapter 2), it can be said that today’s school

administrators are some of the first 5-Gen leaders in the history of the world. So, from this point forward I'll use the term "5-Gen leaders" to describe 21st century school leadership.

Understanding the Four Generations in Staffs Today

Exactly who are these four generations of teachers we are leading in schools today, and how are they similar and different? Before I dive into the perilous process of generational stereotyping, I want to make a few quick points about teachers in all of the generations.

- They are all individuals, and it's possible some of them don't fit many of the stereotypes.
- Some people might feel the generational characteristics don't fit them at all, and they could be right.
- Some people see themselves as a mixture of all the generations.

We should *never* make a blanket assumption that all people of a certain age have certain characteristics, but I've done enough research, spoken to enough teachers, and looked at how people in my training sessions respond to certain tactics and how teachers in the classrooms teach to propose that school leaders should at least consider generational characteristics to understand their staffs. In other words, birth years often matter (see Figure 1.1). When we recognize each teacher's formative decades, then we are more likely to help them bridge the generation gaps and understand each other.

BOOMERS

My fellow baby boomers (birth years 1945–1964) were shaped by the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and the Watergate scandal. They had Silent Generation parents who had survived the Great Depression and World War II, so they were raised to be loyal, committed, and to have a sense of duty. Their parents also taught them that you need to pay your dues to get ahead; success comes to those who work hard and play the game right. They grew up in an age when households had one phone that hung on a wall; they still believe in the power of phone calls and face-to-face communication (Purdue Global, 2021). Boomers grew up using paper and had to make late transitions to digital products. However, 90 percent of boomers have Facebook pages, and they have adapted to other technology, mainly to stay in touch with younger family members and friends (Kasasa, 2019).

In schools today, boomers have become the senior citizens of our teaching staffs. Sometimes, they see themselves as the sages, the wise ones, the teachers who remember teaching before it became a series of tests and labels. Over the last three decades, they've seen education become busier and more complex. I've noticed the boomers who are still teaching often fall into one of two categories: those who have adapted to the current best practices in education—and those who spend their days pining for a forgone era and are dragged reluctantly through each iteration of change.

While some boomers are working long into their senior years, many boomers have reached retirement age and are rapidly fading out of our staffs. As their fellow boomers leave the profession, they are replaced by Gen Zers with whom they have less in common than previous generations.

GEN X

Then we have Gen Xers (birth years 1965–1980), the latchkey, MTV generation who first began to reap the benefits of cable and digital devices like the Sony Walkman that made entertainment personal and mobile. They came of age during the AIDS epidemic and the dot-com boom. They like to balance work with their personal life; they are just as concerned about their personal interests as they are about the company's interests. They can resist change if it affects their personal lives (Purdue Global, 2021). They are thought of as the forgotten generation, wedged between the boomers and the millennials.

In our teaching staffs, Gen Xers are in their 40s and 50s. Like the boomers, they, too, have become the formal and informal leaders of our schools. The reforms of the last two decades have been perhaps the toughest on this generation. When I speak with Xers, I hear the frustration in their voices about the state of education today. Boomers are close to retirement, but Gen Xers feel trapped between standardized testing and the years they still have to work to reach their pensions. “How long do you have before you can retire?” I ask, and I inevitably hear a deep sigh before they answer. It might be eight years, 10 years, 15 years.

By 2028, Gen Xers will outnumber the baby boomers (Purdue Global, 2021). Some of them have become principals and superintendents, and more of them will move into senior leadership positions in the next few years.

They are the last pre-internet generation of leaders in our schools. After the Gen Xers, all of the leaders will have grown up with the internet.

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MILLENNIALS

The millennials (birth years 1981–1995), also known as Gen Y), have been shaped by Columbine, 9/11, and the internet. They grew up as the internet entered society on a broad scale, and it gave them an outlook and expectations noticeably different

than their predecessors. They are the first set of digital natives. They like to use new types of devices. They use social media and are connected. Because of their financial insecurities, they've been less likely to buy houses, and they have waited longer to get married. Millennials embrace Uber and other services they can share with society; for them, it's not about ownership, but instead, it's about access. They believe in wellness. They exercise more, eat smarter, and drink less than previous generations—and they like to keep track of their progress on apps (*The Washington Post*, 2015).

Millennials are viewed as the sheltered kids who always got trophies whether they won or lost their soccer game. and they became the helicopter parents of Gen Z. They like to communicate via texts, personal messaging, and email (Purdue Global, 2021). Some have referred to them as the new “Lost Generation” because they started entering the workforce during the recession that began in 2008 with record amounts of debt and fewer opportunities for high-paying jobs. Outside of teaching, they make up the majority of America's bartenders, half the restaurant workers, and a large share of its retail workers. Millennials were especially harmed financially during the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020: A staggering 52 percent of people under the age of 45 were laid off, put on leave, or had their hours reduced, compared with 26 percent of people over the age of 45 (Lowrey, 2020).

Millennials in our school staffs have several distinctions. They are the first generation to grow up in high-stakes testing. They entered the teaching force from preparation programs that gave them “best practices” and “here's-how-to-understand-your-data” methods. They are the first group of teachers to have grown up with the internet. Today, millennials are the largest group in the American workforce, and they are the largest group in the American teaching force.

GEN Z

The Gen Zers (birth years 1996–2010) are entering our teaching force. They can be characterized as the most technologically savvy, socially challenged, and distracted group we've ever led. Think of them as millennials on steroids. Their mindset has been formed since birth by the internet, social media, Starbucks, and artificial intelligence in a post-9/11 world. They tend to be more independent, and they value their devices more than any previous generation. The Girl Scouts of America recently redesigned their uniforms, and the number-one request from the girls was a pocket for their iPhones (Testa, 2020). They prefer to work with millennial managers because they have more in common with them than with boomers and Gen Xers. They love new technologies (Purdue Global, 2021); most of them got their first smartphone when they were 10.3 years old (Kasasa, 2019). America has been at war during their entire lives. They tend to be more fiscally conservative than millennials because they've seen how millennials are burdened with college debt (Kasasa, 2019).

Gen Z also is shaping up to be our most diversified, highest-educated generation (Fry & Parker, 2020). They want to chase their dreams because they've seen some of their peers achieving great things on the internet. For example, who are some of the most well-known anti-gun leaders today? David Hogg and Emma Gonzalez, survivors of the Parkland High School shootings, who became famous as high school students. And who is perhaps the world's most famous advocate for stopping climate change? Greta Thunberg, a teenager from Sweden. Gen Zers have admired them as they have achieved fame and followers around the world through news outlets and their social media platforms. Gen Zers have seen other young people start their own online companies, become wealthy e-gamers, and create apps, but they are also seeing that 5 percent of today's college graduates can't find a job. One study found that 41 percent of them plan to be entrepreneurs, and half of them believe they can change the world (Entrepreneur Staff, 2019).

In our schools, they are the students in the upper-elementary grades, middle schools, and high schools. They tend to be more deeply engaged when using technology, and they need both guidance from the teacher and the freedom to work with peers and to be creative and unique. As students, they tend to be more driven than millennials, and their drug abuse, smoking, drinking, and teen pregnancies are lower than in previous generations (Preville, 2019).

Two Groups Are Trying to Lead, and Two Groups Are Trying to Fit In. Sort of . . .

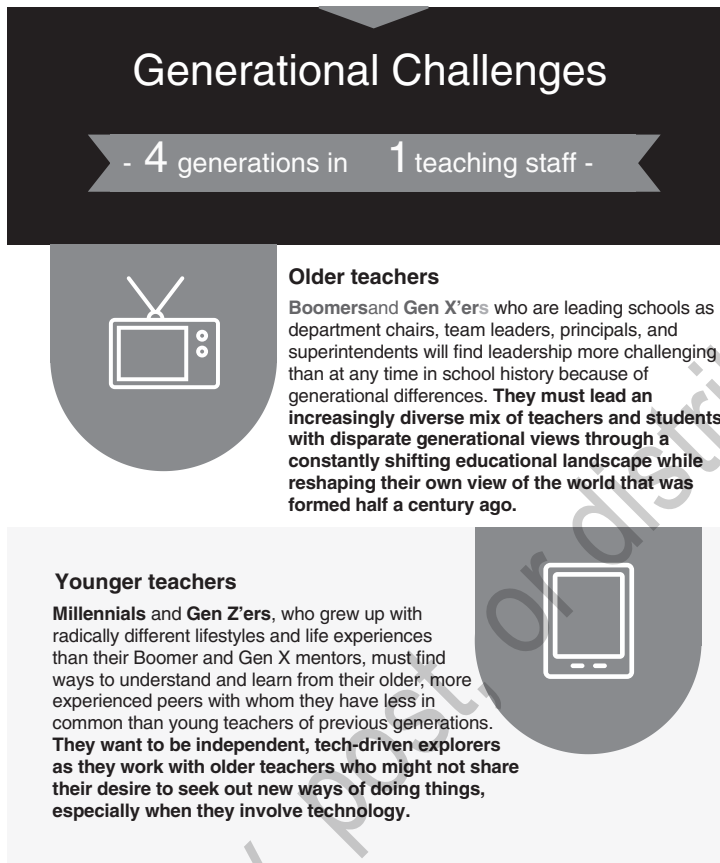
As we begin to look at how all of these groups mesh together, let's start with this realization: The crux of most 5-Gen leadership issues comes down to helping older and younger educators work together. Older educators, especially leaders, want to lead the way, and the young educators, who are often still teachers, want to be led but have a different idea of how that might look (see Figure 1.2).

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Leading schools and teaching used to not be this complicated.

As a teacher beginning his career in the 1980s, I was happy *not* to figure it out. As a baby boomer, I was happy to have someone *please* tell me step by step how to do something. When I started leading teachers as a high school department head a few years later, I didn't have to worry about generational differences because back then we were all pretty much the same. Some of the teachers were baby boomers, and our older peers were members of the Silent Generation—they had lived through the Great Depression and World War II. Most of them would do what they were asked to do without asking too many questions (Purdue Global, 2021).

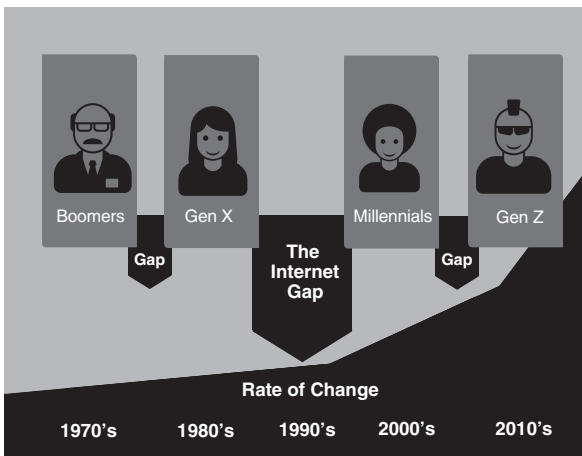
FIGURE 1.2 Generational Challenges



The rate of change was slower. Technology was advancing, but it was a slower acceleration. In the second edition of my previous book, *Leading Schools in Disruptive Times: How to Survive Hyper-Change* (written with Dwight Carter and first published by Corwin Press in 2018), I wrote about how Moore's Law, which explained that processing speeds had doubled every 18 to 24 months for decades, had led to an explosion of knowledge as chronicled in Buckminster Fuller's (1981) book *Critical Path*. All of this helps explain the amazing technology advancements we've seen since the 1970s. Each decade brought incredible advances—and new devices, new mobility, new individualism, and new, broader views of the world for young people growing up in those decades. This means boomers, Xers, millennials and Gen Zers all grew up with different life experiences and with increasingly different views. These experiences shaped who they are today (Jenkins, 2019).

We've always had generation gaps throughout history when the younger generation doesn't buy in to the beliefs and actions of the older generations. But the rise of the internet society has deepened these gaps and accelerated their numbers. We now have digital generation gaps between all four generations, as shown in Figure 1.3.

FIGURE 1.3 The Internet Gap



Think of the gaps between the boomers and Gen X as one crack in the ground, and think of the gap between the millennials and Gen Z as another crack. But the gap between the boomers/Gen X and the millennials/Gen Z is deeper because it's the internet gap; actually, it's more of a valley. The internet lifestyle that emerged in the 1990s drove a wedge between the older and younger generations: The boomers and Gen Xers are

emailing each other and wondering why the young teachers aren't responding to their emails, and the millennials and Gen Zers are direct messaging each other via social media and wondering why the older teachers aren't answering their messages.

And the technology did more than create digital generation gaps: It reshaped brains (Horvath, 2015). Each successive generation has a brain that has developed differently than its predecessors. This means our younger teachers, our Gen Zers and millennials who grew up with the internet, have brains and views that are more similar to their students than to the brains and views of their boomer and Gen X colleagues (Zachos, 2019). The biggest generation gap in school history is now occurring in elementary schools between boomer teachers and their Gen Alpha students.

There are multiple challenges for 5-Gen leaders to solve today, but two of the challenges are existential threats that are endangering the teaching profession: Too many teachers are leaving the profession, and too few people are choosing to become teachers.

Both threats have their roots in the digital generation gaps.

Millennial Teachers Are Walking Away

We know the teaching profession has been in trouble. We've heard the political attacks, watched teacher pay stagnate, felt the budget cuts, and observed (or participated in) the walkouts in recent years that rocked Oklahoma, Arizona, Colorado, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Los Angeles. If it were a patient, we would have been panicked by its declining health in the past two decades. Today, the teaching profession as a patient would be in intensive care.

The result? Teachers are leaving the profession in record numbers. Overall, it's estimated that 8 percent of teachers leave the profession each year and another 8 percent leave the classroom to take another job in education. The situation has gotten worse in past 20 years; in the 1990s, only 5 percent of teachers left the workforce (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The numbers are higher in "poor districts and among teachers of color, who are more likely to have students of color" (Varathan, 2018). A record number of teachers quit in 2018 (Fulwood, 2018). In that year, there was a national teacher shortage of 110,000 teachers. That number is expected to grow to 200,000 by 2025 (Boyce, 2019).

Millennials are leading the way out of the school parking lot. While teachers of all generations continue to leave the classroom, most of the teachers who now leave are millennials, and they're leaving in record numbers. The majority of them depart when they are between the ages of 25 and 34 (Varathan, 2018). Think of where these teachers are in their development at these ages. They have completed their first years in the classroom and have a clear understanding of what is expected of them—and they decide they don't want to be teachers. They experience the long hours, lack of respect, and diminished funding and choose other ways to spend their lives (Akhtar, 2019).

One study found that 44 percent of American teachers leave the profession in the first five years (Will, 2018), which means Gen Z teachers have joined the group of millennial teachers who can't find the door fast enough. And who do districts often hire as their replacements? Young, inexperienced Gen Z and millennial teachers who often get thrown into tough environments and are quickly overwhelmed and leave the profession. And the cycle continues.

This is an American problem. Two countries that are considered to have highly effective education systems, Finland and Singapore, usually have attrition rates of 3 percent or 4 percent (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), half of that found in the United States. Our teachers are leaving because of problems in the American education system. According to one study from 2017,

The most frequently cited reasons in 2012–13 were dissatisfactions with testing and accountability pressures (listed by 25% of those who left the profession); lack of administrative support; dissatisfactions with the teaching career, including lack of opportunities for advancement; and dissatisfaction with working conditions. These kinds of dissatisfactions were noted by 55% of those who left the profession and 66% of those who left their school to go to another school. (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. v)

To expand on these ideas, the centralization of American education, especially with its increasingly lockstep curricula and heavy accountability measures, means a lot of the choice and individualization have been removed from teaching. Teachers of all generations inherently don't buy into scripted programs. This is especially

true and problematic when it comes to Gen Z and millennial teachers, who more than previous generations were raised to value individual freedom and to walk independent paths. Put another way, we have raised the most independent young people in history and put them into a teaching box and told them what to do and how to think. Another difference as they were raised is that they had more input into family decisions; in schools, they are troubled by the constant administrative turnover and a lack of input into organizational operations, including selecting textbooks and other classroom materials (Boyce, 2019).

And of course there's the pay issue—or more precisely, the diminished pay. The average weekly pay for teachers has dropped over the past 20 years; when compared with similarly educated adults, it had dropped by 21.4 percent in 2018 (Gould, 2019). Almost half of American teachers work a second job to supplement their income (Wade, 2019). Throw in the fear of being killed in a school shooting, and we can see why young teachers (and teachers of older generations) are dissatisfied with their jobs. One recent poll shows half of all teachers are actively searching for other jobs (Mulvahill, 2019).

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The vacancies created by teachers who choose to leave make up 90 percent of all teacher vacancies (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). In other words, nine out of ten teachers hired each year are replacements for teachers who left the classroom. If America could cut its attrition rate by half, it would almost eliminate the nation's teacher shortages (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Think of all the time and energy that could be saved in screening and interviewing teacher candidates each year. And think of the money saved. Those trips to job fairs, mentor stipends, inservice days, and other services for new teachers? Their costs add up to over \$20,000 per year per teacher in urban districts (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017) and a total of \$7.3 billion per year across the United States (Mulvahill, 2019). Just think if we could cut that cost by half. That would pump another \$3.6 billion back into districts.

Where do a lot of these teachers go? Many of them take jobs in health care and social work. On average, these jobs pay less, but they offer more security and better benefits (Varathan, 2018). These are people who became teachers because they wanted to help people. They wanted to make a difference in the world. But the teaching profession couldn't offer them enough to stay in it, so they jumped into other fields where they can use their skills and assist individuals and families.

In an attempt to produce more teaching candidates, states have implemented alternative certification programs that offer less content preparation and fewer student teaching opportunities. The retention data for these teachers is even more

abysmal: Teachers who come from these programs are 25 percent more likely to leave the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Making Generational Adjustments

As we look at ways to retain young teachers, let's remember one of the frustrating conditions of school leadership: There's only so much we can do to improve our profession. Some factors are beyond the control of school administrators, like teacher pay, class sizes, violence in schools, state testing, and some of the other national, state, and societal pressures that stress school leaders and teachers today.

However, there's lots of room for improvement. A 2020 Gallup poll shows only 6 percent of superintendents think their districts understand what millennials need in the workplace (Hodges, 2020). Again, in which age groups are most superintendents today? Boomers and Gen Xers. And if they don't understand millennials, then they certainly don't understand Gen Z. Many school leaders might not even understand that Gen Z teachers are in their teaching staffs. This is not meant to criticize the administrators; they are working harder than ever, and these generation gaps are new leadership issues. But it shows these generation gaps are real.

It's time to start making personnel adjustments built around generational knowledge. As they transition in to 5-Gen leadership, boomer and Gen X school leaders need to acknowledge that young teachers respond differently and are looking for different sorts of experiences than the leaders were seeking when they joined the profession—which means they are looking for different things in the workplace.

According to Staffbase (Lockley, 2017), a company that helps corporations merge multiple generations of employees who work remotely, there are five characteristics that Gen Z and millennials are seeking in their work environment—and *these things are often missing in our schools today*.

1. **High wages and career advancement.** While we know there's a problem with teacher salaries, let's look at this issue from a generational viewpoint. Gen Z and millennials are entering the workforce with more college debt than previous generations. *They need more money.* Collectively, they have over \$500 billion in outstanding loans (Friedman, 2020). They could spend decades crawling out of debt; thus, salaries are critically important for them, even more important than they were to previous generations. When Gen Z and millennials choose their majors, they know they will be in debt when they leave college, and they are looking ahead to the types of salaries they will draw. The low teacher salaries make the positions less attractive than in the past. And it's hard to advance through the hierarchy. When advancing in a school system to serve on committees or move into

administrative or other positions, they often are expected to wait their turn behind older, more experienced teachers, regardless of ability.

2. **The latest technology.** Young people live with technology in their personal lives; they want to be in environments that embrace it. While schools have made progress in implementing more devices and digital tools, they are not on the cutting edge of digital change. They are still well behind the curve. Schools are not seen as cool places where workers can have access to the latest apps, devices, and digital practices.
3. **Leadership training.** Millennials are now old enough and experienced enough to begin moving into leadership positions in their organizations, yet they feel they lack the “soft skills” to lead older generations of workers (Lockley, 2017). They feel they need more help than aspiring leaders of the past and want hands-on, mentor-guided programs to help them become leaders. And Gen Z leaders are not far behind. Instead, how do school leaders traditionally acquire leadership skills? Mainly through a bruising period of trial and error and by studying leadership skills in university graduate courses that hopefully translate into authentic leadership practices.
4. **Feedback and engagement.** Gen Z workers and millennials want more conversations with their leaders, more feedback, and more engagement than previous generations, yet only 55 percent of employees worldwide think there are enough collaboration and communication with leaders and across departments (Lockley, 2017). Many school leaders are Gen Xers and baby boomers. They are less likely to value this concept, and the demands placed on school leaders today mean they are working at faster paces than previous leaders, which makes it harder to find time to communicate and converse with young teachers. Young people today know school environments are not seen as collaborative, creative spaces where teachers have constant interaction with administrators and play active roles in decision-making.
5. **Help in managing stress.** In one study, workers were asked to rate their stress level on a scale of 1 to 10. The average score was 4.9, but the average score for Gen Z and millennial workers was 5.4, meaning they are feeling more stressed than other generations (Lockley, 2017). When we combine this number with the idea that teachers continually cite stress levels as one of the contributing factors of burnout, we can see younger teachers are especially likely to feel stressed. High school students see what their teachers endure on a daily basis; they hear the complaints from their teachers and hear the reports in the news about low morale levels among educators. Thus, they view a life as a teacher as a life filled with high stress and little reward (Lockley, 2017).

Notice a commonality of these five characteristics: They all have their roots in 21st century societal changes. Young people are more in debt than previous generations, they value technology more than previous generations, they are less confident than previous generations, they need more encouragement and feedback than previous generations, and they are more stressed than previous generations.

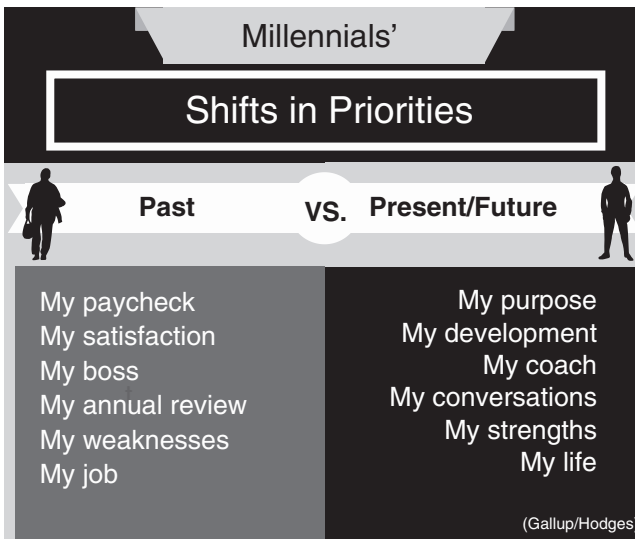
School leaders can be better in these five areas. When forming a strategy to retain millennial and Gen Z teachers, boomer and Gen X leaders can begin by breaking down how to help young teachers advance in different ways through the school culture and hierarchy, use abundant education technology, learn to lead, receive feedback and be engaged, and manage their stress.

Let's compare the traditional leadership model with the 5-Gen leadership model in how they would address these areas (see Figure 1.4).

FIGURE 1.4 Retaining Millennial Teachers

Traditional Leadership	Versus	5-Gen Leadership
Teachers have to "pay their dues" before they are placed on committees or are considered for prominent committees or positions. There is little chance for early advancement.	Wages and advancement	Young teachers are purposely placed on school or district committees to get their input and to keep them engaged. They are given chances to apply for positions that might increase salary.
Teachers might have interactive whiteboards and students might have Chromebooks. Training is haphazard, and young teachers might be able to offer their opinions. All teachers tend to use the same digital tools.	Technology	Technology training is systemized, and young teachers are encouraged to be innovative in using new digital tools. The school constantly updates its devices and gives young teachers chances to model their tactics for their peers.
There is little or no leadership training for teachers. They are expected to learn as they go if they happen to be placed in a position where they formally or informally influence others.	Leadership training	Teachers are paired with leader mentors (either with teachers or administrators) who take a systemized, proactive approach to helping the teacher learn how to lead in a school.
Administrators meet with teachers periodically. It might be part of the evaluation process or as issues arise. Administrators often want to engage more with teachers but their busy schedules prevent it.	Feedback and engagement	Administrators seek new ways to give feedback. They connect via social media. Teacher leaders are asked to engage more with young teachers. Systems are in place for teachers to give each other feedback.
Some school leaders recognize the importance of stress management and have begun to put programs in place. Others don't have the resources or have not prioritized it.	Managing stress	School leaders give stress management a high priority and partner with outside parties, fund initiatives, provide space, and promote it as a necessary part of leading schools today.

FIGURE 1.5 Millennials' Shifts in Priorities



The Gallup organization summed up changes in job perspectives for millennials (see Figure 1.5). For this generation, developing the company is no longer the priority. Instead, the priority is developing the individual.

For school leaders, this also means millennials still care about school and being professionals, but the leaders should approach them with the concept of coaching

them (not just supervising them), focusing on their strengths as teachers (not just their weaknesses), and understanding that millennials will place a priority on living a high-quality life (and will not place the highest priority on a career). These ideas can also be applied to most Gen Z teachers.

This sums up the challenge of 5-Gen leadership: understanding what motivates each generation, respecting the desires of each generation, understanding how each generation learns, and using tactics to help all generations understand and assist each other (which will be explored in Chapter 2 when we look at what happens when the four generations are working together in one group).

Trouble in the Gen Z Teaching Pipeline

We know a cohesive staff is a challenged, happy staff, but what happens when we can't find enough young teachers to join our staffs?

To compound the problems in the generational teaching ranks, we're seeing fewer Gen Zers who want to even want to become teachers. Millennials are leaving in record numbers, and Gen Zers don't even want to start.

According to one study, since 2010 national enrollment in teacher preparation programs has dropped by one-third. In 2016 to 2017, almost 350,000 fewer students were enrolled in the programs than were enrolled in 2008 to 2009 (Partelow, 2019). In some states, it's even worse. Oklahoma, Illinois, and Michigan have seen enrollment in their teacher preparation programs drop by 50 percent since 2010 (Akhtar, 2019). More teachers are leaving; fewer teachers are coming in. The teacher pipeline is drying up.

Why is this happening? A number of factors are discouraging Gen Z students from entering the profession. Some of the reasons are the same ones that make millennials want to leave. But they've also experienced new generational problems in schools.

They've grown up in the age of No Child Left Behind and the Common Core. They are the "most tested generation." The standardized tests and the bevy of formative assessments preparing them for the tests mean they might have taken extensive formative assessments and tests "as frequently as twice per month and an average of once per month" (Boyce, 2019). Today's high school graduates are less likely to see K–12 public schools as a place of free thinking and intellectual growth than as a place where the goal is to prepare for and take standardized tests.

Also, while millennials and older teachers have had to adjust to the possibility of experiencing a school shooting, Gen Zers are the first generation of students to spend their *entire school lives* fearing school shootings. From their first year of school in early 2000s, they have gone through lockdown drills and have lived with the incessant fear of being murdered in a classroom. Some of them, like their teachers, have written their last will and testaments (DeGuerin, 2019). And some of them have gone online to buy bulletproof backpacks (Reagan, 2019).

They are already heavily stressed. One study found Gen Z high school students are more worried about their grades than they are about unplanned pregnancies and binge drinking (*The Economist*, 2019). When we add worries about testing and safety to what social media is doing to them psychologically in their teenage years, we can see that schools for them are not bastions of intellectual freedom and prosperity. Instead, they are stressful, accountability-driven, potentially deadly places. It's not surprising fewer Gen Z students are choosing *not* to spend their professional lives in this system when they choose their college majors. Become a teacher today? For many of them, the answer is, "No way!"

Recruiting Gen Z Teachers

We, as school leaders, cannot solve all of the societal ills that are keeping Gen Zers from joining our profession, but if we adjust some of our organizational practices (as listed earlier for the millennials) and adjust our Gen Z recruiting tactics, we'll make school environments that will be more likely to attract and retain more young people. Plus, if there are fewer Gen Z teachers from whom to choose to fill teaching vacancies, it makes it *even more imperative* that school leaders understand Gen Z's professional preferences in order to successfully recruit the best candidates into their staffs.

School leaders work with Gen Z students every day, but information is now emerging about how Gen Z is meshing into the workforce. An article on LinkedIn

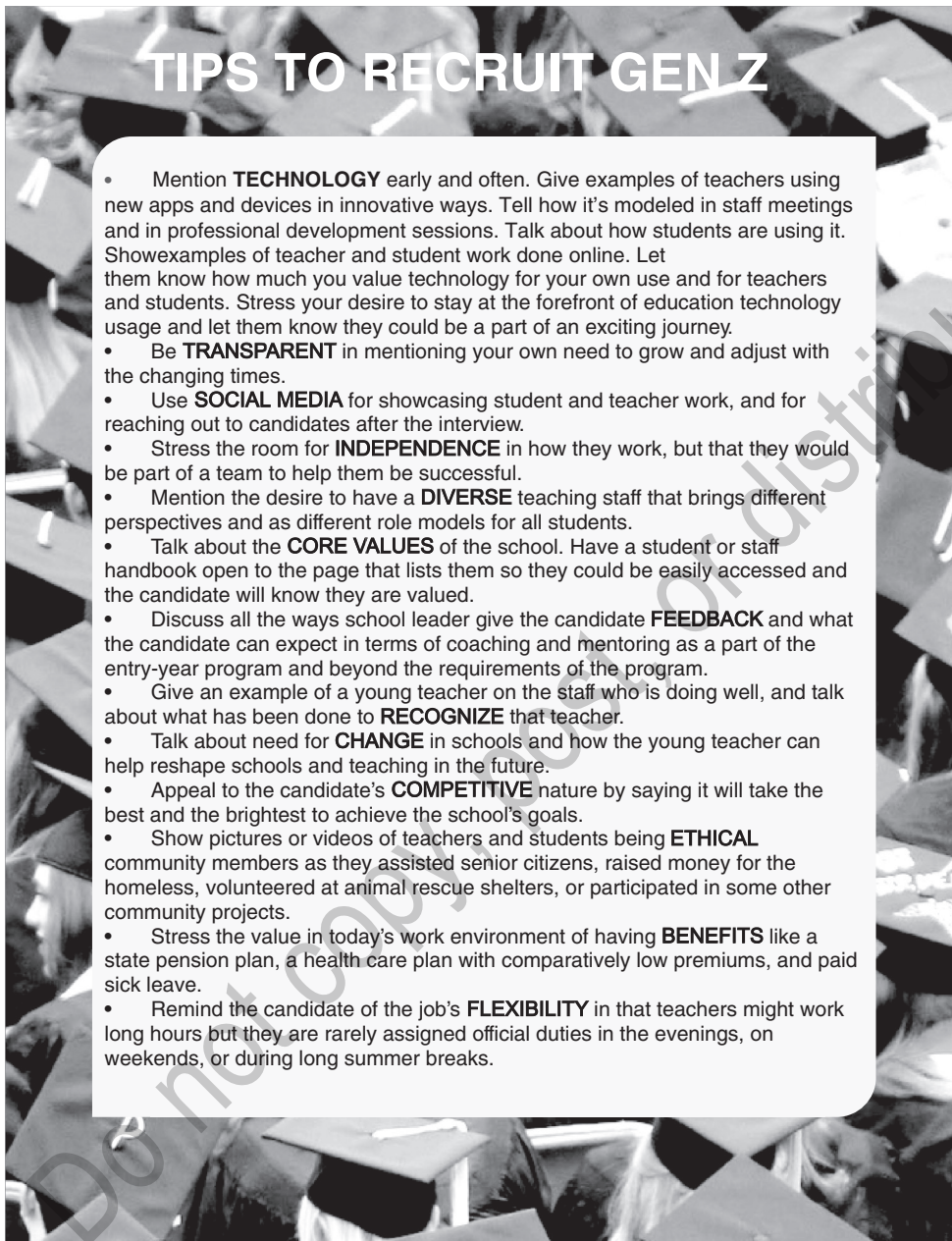
(McLaren, 2019) for corporate recruiters had these nuggets of information to help them understand Gen Z workers:

- Gen Zers make up 24 percent of the overall workforce.
- They are seeking stability: paid time off, good health care, and high wages.
- They'd rather ask Google than ask for advice.
- They are independent, but risk-averse.
- They seek constant interaction with their supervisors.
- They want to be recognized for their efforts.
- They are seeking a diverse workforce, and 75 percent of them say it will affect where they choose to work.
- They want to work for ethical companies, and the top qualities they are seeking in a leader are integrity and transparency.
- They are competitive.
- They want to use the latest social media platforms.
- They want to use technology in their jobs; 91 percent of them say how they get to use technology will affect their job choice.

Now think of what this information means for school administrators recruiting Gen Z teachers. When they speak with Gen Z teaching candidates over the phone, at job fairs, in one-on-one interviews at their schools, or when the candidate is interviewing with teams of teachers, the administrators need to be sure to focus on the things about which Gen Zers are most concerned. Figure 1.6 shows some essential points to work into the conversation.

Here's another tip: Since Gen Zers prefer having millennial managers (but the millennials might not be administrators yet in some schools), administrators should try to include a Gen Z or millennial teacher from the staff in the interview process. Pull the teacher into the office to help out. Take the teacher to job fairs. And let *the teacher* do a lot of the talking. Maybe the teacher could cover the points listed in Figure 1.6. If possible, give them time to talk alone. Let the young teacher give the tour of the building or create some other opportunity in which the recruit can connect with the other young professional.

FIGURE 1.6 Tips to Recruit Gen Z



Many principals today are justifiably driven by test scores, so they often spend a lot of time in interviews recounting percentages, accountability labels, and what the administration and teachers are doing to raise scores. Young candidates need to know this, but it probably won't be exciting for them. Actually, if the candidates think they will be walking into an environment driven by test scores, it could discourage them. The administrators should balance the accountability piece with the motivation of having an exciting job.

It's important to note that boomers and Gen X leaders don't need to change who they are as people in order to work with young teachers; they just need to adjust some of their tactics and leadership philosophies. They don't need to act like Gen Zers to be accepted. As one Gen Zer has written, "Just because you're trying to appeal to us doesn't mean you have to try to be like us. . . . If you're authentic, you will stand apart from your competition because authenticity resonates with Gen Z" (McLaren, 2019).

Of course, some of these points appeal to multiple generations and can be used when interviewing all generations of teachers. While there are some differences between Gen Z and millennial candidates, many of these tactics can be used to recruit millennials as well. For example, they also value mentoring, purpose, social media, and ethical actions. A few of these concepts could be highly valued by Gen X and baby boomer candidates. They often value diversity and advancement; however, they tend to be less interested in mentoring, social media, and having the latest technology. This means today's 5-Gen school leaders need to know the workplace characteristics valued by different generations, and they must be able to pivot between each one as they address different types of candidates.

Take Steps Now to Become a 5-Gen Leader

In my conversations with school leaders, I often hear them say they understand today's young people are different. They know millennial and Gen Z teachers have grown up in a different world and are plugged into technology and social media, and they understand these teachers have a different way of looking at life. They understand how hard it is to hold on to millennials, and they've heard through the professional grapevine that fewer Gen Zers are heading their way as teachers. But when I ask these school leaders *exactly what they are doing to specifically attract and retain young teachers*, they often don't have clear answers. I don't write this to be critical. They have crazy hectic lives, and as I mentioned, this is a new problem that has only recently been identified. Still, they need to do more than say they know the issue is there; they need to commit to action.

Businesses have begun to use formal retention plans to recruit and hold on to younger employees, and schools should do the same. A plan can be done in four steps:

1. Analyze retention data.
2. Choose strategies.
3. Form a plan of action.
4. Create the document. (Perucci, 2020)

School district personnel could analyze their millennial and Gen Z teacher data, brainstorm tactics to use to recruit and retain young teachers, pull the ideas together in a loose format, and then create the written document. They could call it the Teacher Recruiting and Retention Plan (TRRP) and have action steps and dates for implementation. These don't have to be complex, lengthy documents. A good rule would be to write them as if they are being written for millennials and Gen Zers: They should be concise and easily understood. School districts and individual schools have one-year and multiyear strategic plans that outline their goals; they could add the TRRP to these documents. Figure 1.7 shows an example of how one might look.

FIGURE 1.7 Teacher Recruiting and Retention Plan

Teacher Recruiting and Retention Plan

OBJECTIVE: Study and use the recruiting and retention data.
KEY QUESTIONS: Are we successfully hiring the teachers we want? Are we retaining them?

Person in charge of analyzing the data: _____
 How the results will be disseminated: _____
 Date by which it will be done: _____

OBJECTIVE: Retain more young teachers.
KEY QUESTION: Which 5-Gen leadership ideas are we using?

Person in charge of gathering the ideas: _____
 How the leaders will be trained: _____
 Date by which it will be done: _____

OBJECTIVE: Be more successful in hiring young teachers.
KEY QUESTIONS: Which Gen Z recruiting tips are we using? How are we appealing to Millennial teachers as we recruit them?

Person in charge of gathering the information: _____
 How the recruiters will be trained: _____
 Date by which it will be done: _____

And After We Recruit and Retain Them . . .

There are other issues to resolve in 5-Gen leadership. Teachers in different generations respond differently to various types of leadership. They need different tactics in professional development, and they respond differently to societal changes. We need to understand Gen Alpha and prepare for the end of the decade when Gen Beta enters our schools. Millennials are now joining the administrative ranks. How will they mesh with older leaders? And what will be the impact on schools at the end of the decade as Gen Z teachers start to become administrators and link up with their millennial siblings? The world is changing rapidly, and so are our leadership ranks, teaching force, and student populations. Helping to lead education into this environment begins with transitioning to 5-Gen leadership.

OK, boomer?

FIGURE 1.8 Tips for Transitioning to 5-Gen Leadership

Tips for Transitioning to 5-Gen Leadership

1. Know four distinct generations are in our teaching staffs, including Gen Z.
2. Understand the differences in the four teaching generations.
3. Recognize the digital generation gaps between each generation.
4. Realize the biggest digital generation gap is the one between the boomers/Gen Xers and the millennials/Gen Zers.
5. Know millennials are leaving the profession in record numbers and fewer Gen Zers are joining the teaching profession.
6. Study the characteristics millennials and Gen Zers are looking for in a workplace and adjust practices.
7. Adjust recruiting strategies to find the best Gen Z teaching candidates.
8. Study the district's recruiting and retention data, brainstorm solutions, create a loose format, and then create a written Teacher Recruiting and Retention Plan.

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