

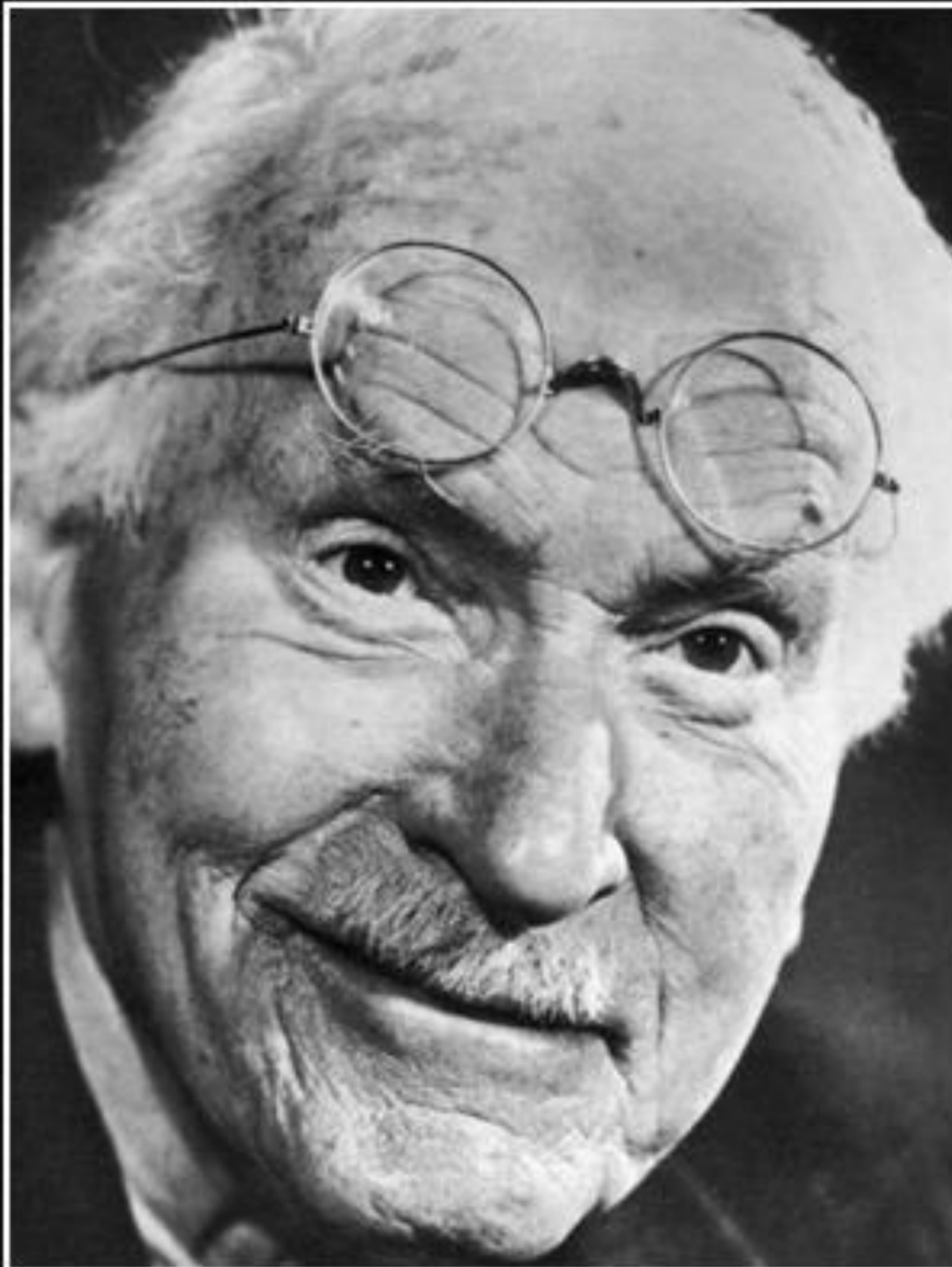
A background image showing a group of business professionals in an office setting. In the foreground, a person's hand is visible holding a white coffee cup. In the center, a woman in a dark blazer is gesturing with her hand while holding a smartphone. To her right, another person is holding a white coffee cup. In the background, a man in a dark suit and tie is partially visible. The overall scene suggests a collaborative work environment.

Managing a Multigenerational Workforce in Times of Change

March 4, 2025

Feinberg Manager Mentor Program

Mindy W. Douthit, PhD
Northwestern School of
Education and Social Policy



Everything that irritates us about others
can lead us to an understanding of
ourselves.

— *Carl Jung* —

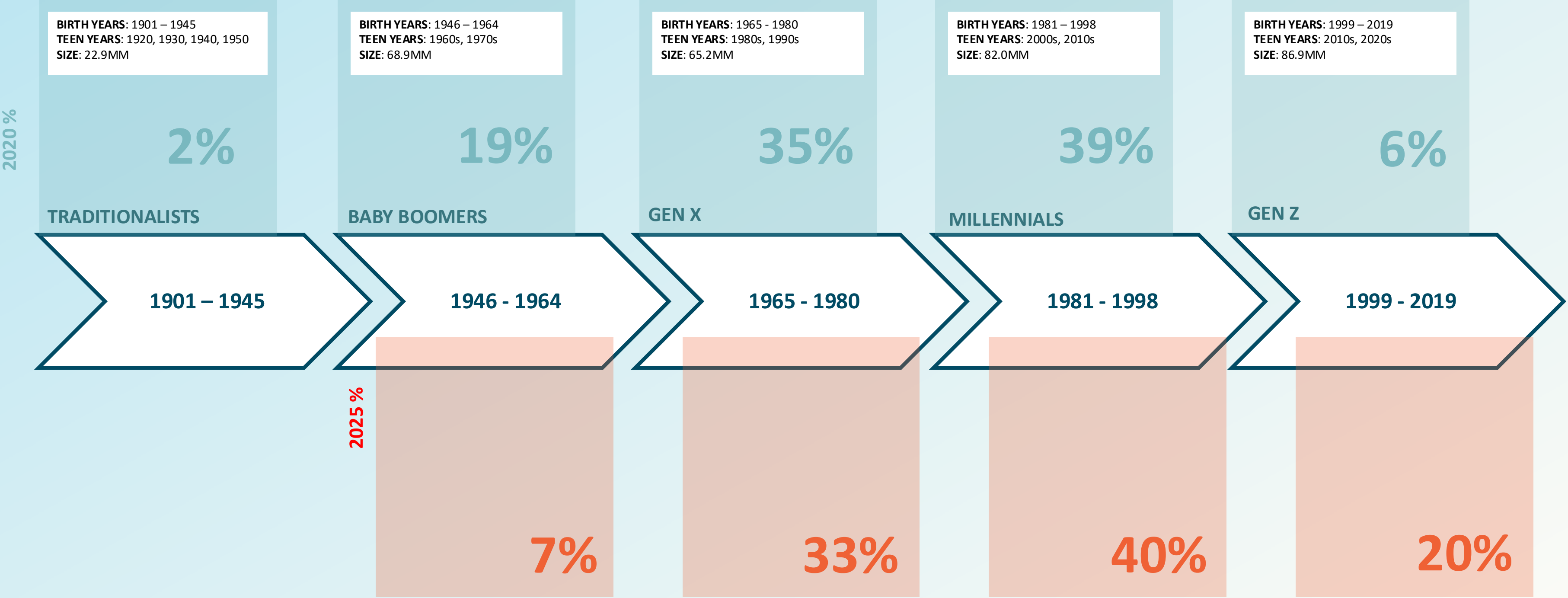
AZ QUOTES



Workshop Objectives

- Understand Generational Differences in the Workplace
- Identify Challenges & Opportunities of a Multi-Generational Workforce
- Learn Strategies for Managing Change Across Different Generations
- Develop an Action Plan for Applying these Strategies in your Work

THE BIG 5



*% Estimates based on Census Bureau Data from 2020

"We have to understand that we are natives to only one generation and immigrants to the others."



Our own generation will always feel like home.

But that doesn't mean we can't visit other cultures and learn to appreciate them and to speak their language."

HAYDN SHAW



TRADITIONALISTS

"Radio generation"

DEFINING MOMENTS



1929 – 39

The Great Depression



1939 – 49

World War II



1901– 70

Migration: Farm → Suburbs

WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE

Saving cooking grease and
Tupperware;
Bank failures, panic

- United nation, power of large government programs, larger than life leaders
- Huddled around radio listening for world updates

"Early bird get the worm."
"Take care of the farm, it will take care of you."

BEHAVIORS & MENTAL MODELS

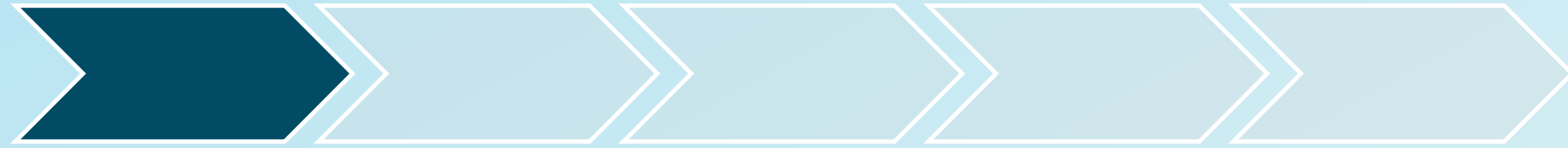
Scrappy, thrifty, focused on savings;
more conservative and cautious
"Waste not, want not."

- Unity as a group
- Everyone do your part

"If this, then this."
No work, no reward

BIRTH YEARS: 1901 – 1945
TEEN YEARS: 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950
SIZE: 22.9MM

SHAPING THE WORKPLACE: TRADITIONALIST EDITION



1 Strong work ethic

2 Emphasis on importance of unity and working together

3 Patience



KEEP
CALM
AND
CARRY
ON

BABY BOOMERS

“Me” generation

DEFINING MOMENTS



1946 – 64

The Boom



1951 – 70

Economic Expansion



1964 / 1972

Vietnam War & Watergate



1960s

Counterculture

WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE

- Nation not equipped for surge
- Generation told they were the “future”
 - Huge gen by comparison

Purchasing things not available during the war

- Protesting against the government;
 - Distrust in large institutions

Introducing: The Teenager; Rejecting American Dream their parents provided them

BEHAVIORS & MENTAL MODELS

- Competitive
 - “Special”
- Big enough to get what they want

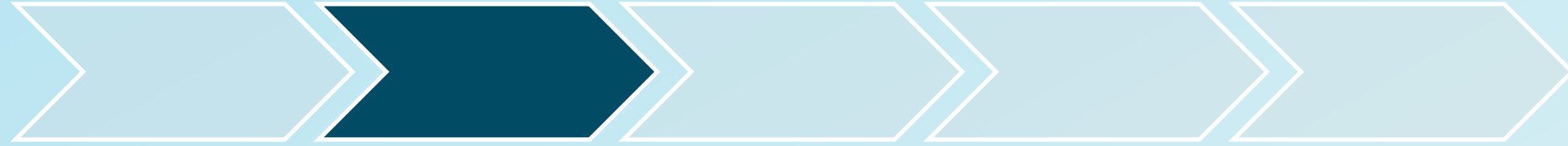
Not worried about survival, moved from **sacrifice to self**

Starting to question things parents never questioned

- Exploration of self-expression
 - Value communication

BIRTH YEARS: 1946 – 1964
TEEN YEARS: 1960s, 1970s
SIZE: 68.9MM

SHAPING THE WORKPLACE: BABY BOOMER EDITION



1

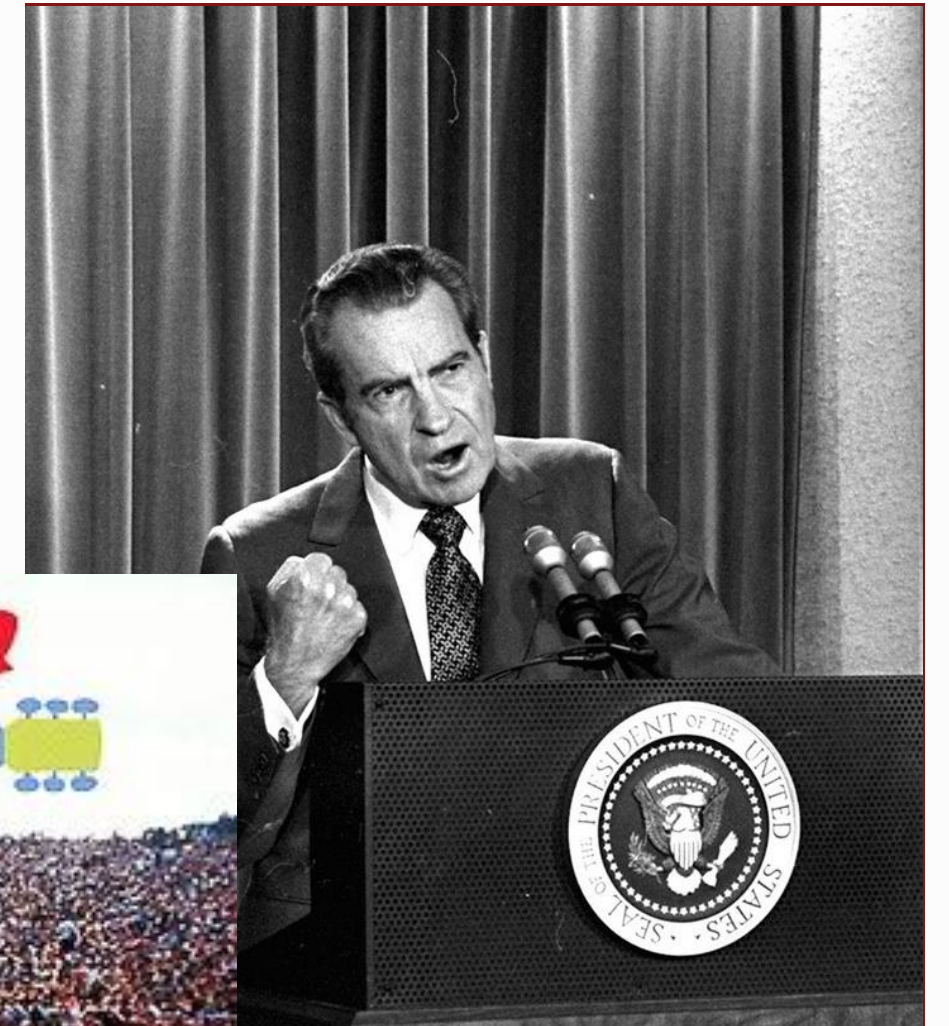
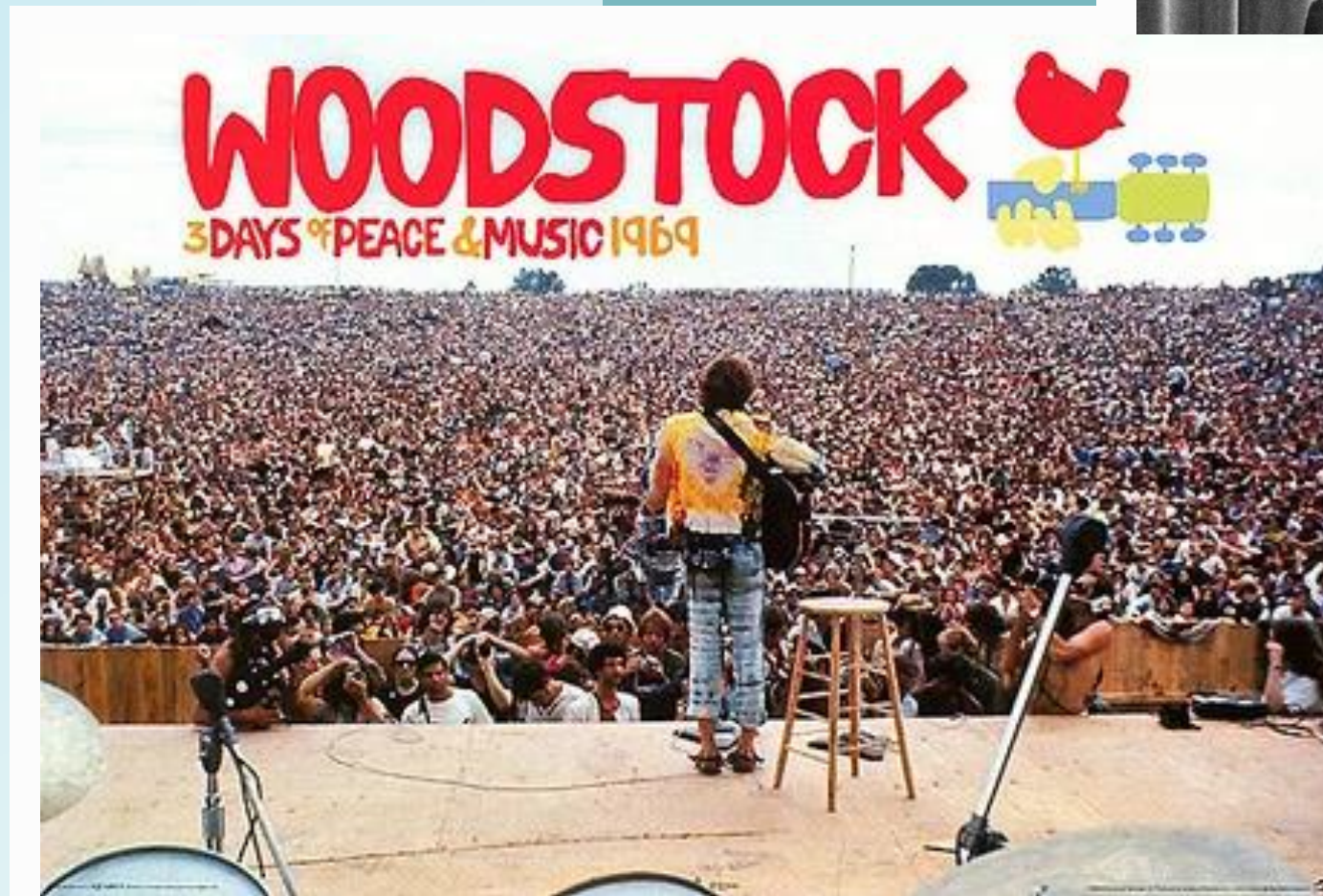
Workaholics

2

Value self-expression
& self-fulfillment

3

Emphasis on
communication



GEN X

"Forgotten" generation

DEFINING MOMENTS



1965 – 80

Bleak Reality



1973

Slowed Economic Growth



1990

Recession (#1)



2008

Recession (#2)

WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE

- Doubling divorce rates from Boomer generations
- Kids to first working gen of parents
 - Missing kids

- Lifetime employment and job security no longer offered
- College expenses increase; grants decrease

More than 40% of 1990 class had no job or one that didn't require a degree

Loss of wealth; biggest generation impacted as they're starting families



BIRTH YEARS: 1965 – 1980
TEEN YEARS: 1980s, 1990s
SIZE: 65.2MM

BEHAVIORS & ATTITUDE

- Friends = family
- More cynical/ realistic
- Less control over life = more control at work (over time)

Life is a game that we can't win; if you can't beat 'em, join 'em

"What's the point of this hamster wheel?"

See a shift from career -> job

Concerns for the future, stability, family

SHAPING THE WORKPLACE: GEN X EDITION



1

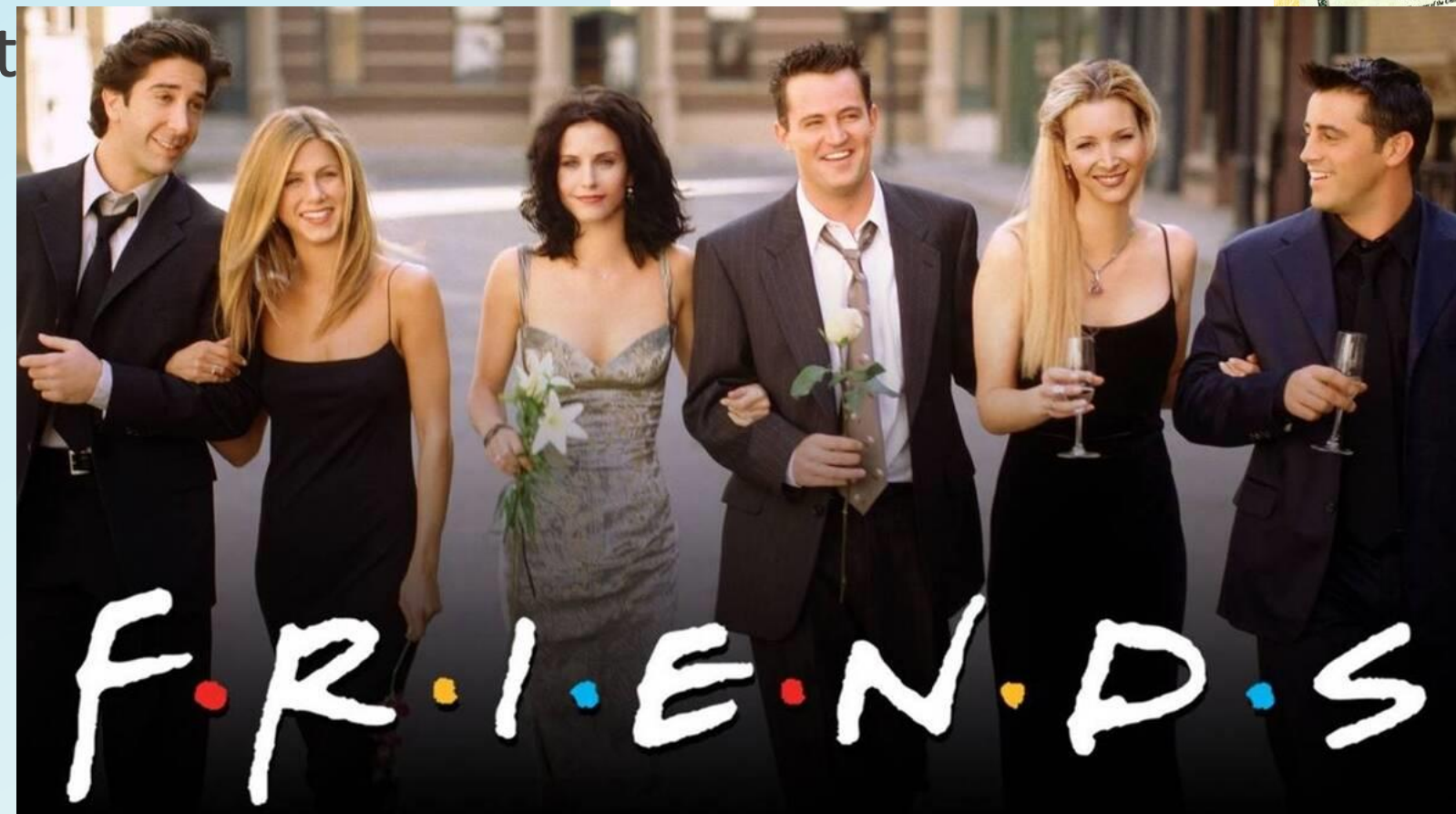
Resourceful & Independent

2

Shift from “career” to
“job” & implement
Balance & boundaries

3

Realistic attitude



MILLENNIALS

"Next Gen"

DEFINING MOMENTS



1981 – 99

"Wanted" Generation



1999 – '00

Technology Boom



2000 - 07

Steady Economic Growth



2007 – 09

Recession

WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE

- "Wanted" generation in a dangerous world; parents entertaining them
- Focus on communication with kids; stronger ties to parents

Endless options of technology –TV, mobile phones, computers

- Wave 1 millennials:
Selecting majors in liberal arts
- Picky & demanding in jobs

- Wave 2 millennials: returned home to live with parents, slowed economy

BEHAVIORS & ATTITUDE

- Constant entertainment
- Encouraged to express feelings
 - Coddled and sensitive

Expanded views of friendships and communication

Optimistic outlook, seeking passion

- Increased debt & stress

BIRTH YEARS: 1981 – 1999
TEEN YEARS: 2000s, 2010s
SIZE: 82.0MM

SHAPING THE WORKPLACE: MILLENNIAL EDITION



1

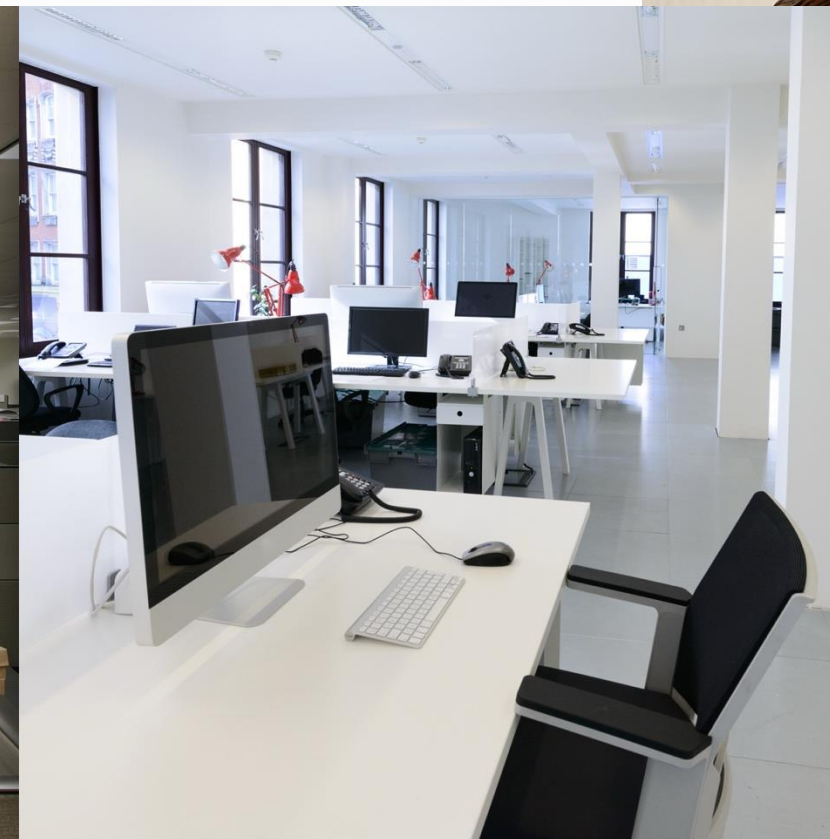
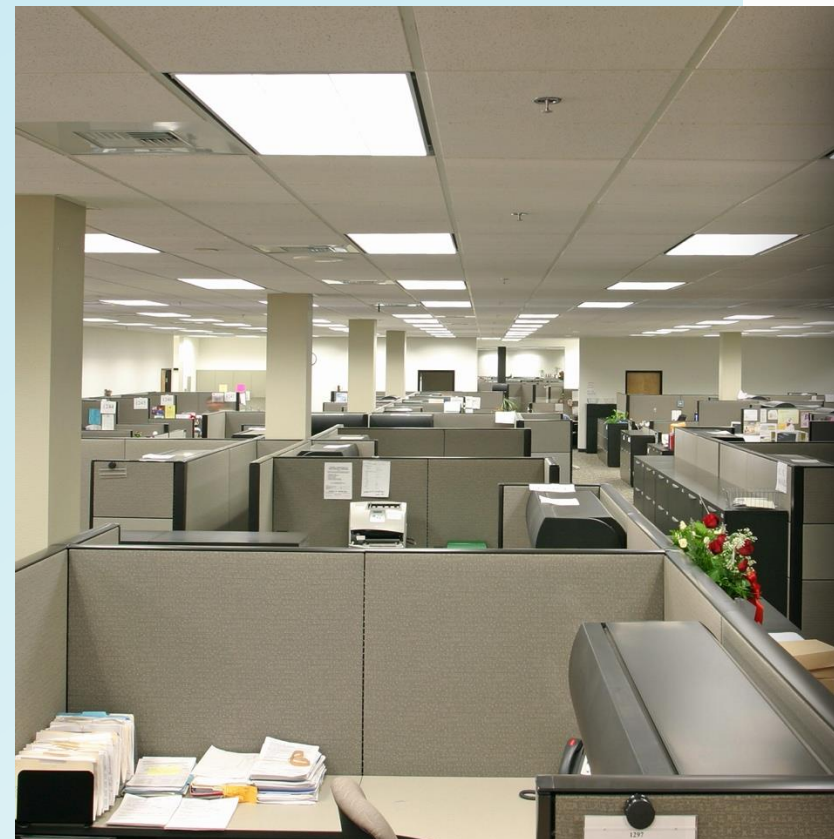
“Job hopping”

2

Sociable & culture
emphasis

3

Sensitivity, burnout,
mental health
conversations



GEN Z

“Zoomers”

DEFINING MOMENTS



2001 – P

Political Turmoil



1981 – 99

Born Online



2007 – 09

Recession



2020

Pandemic

WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE

- Never known a world without war
 - National crises

Never known a world without technology; first smartphone in 2007

- Gen X parents impacted by recession; table talk included financial concerns –
- Aftermath = increase in STEM; emphasis on education

- Move from in-class to online
 - Less work experience
- Friends/ family impacted by the recession

BEHAVIORS & ATTITUDE

- More serious and stressed than previous generations

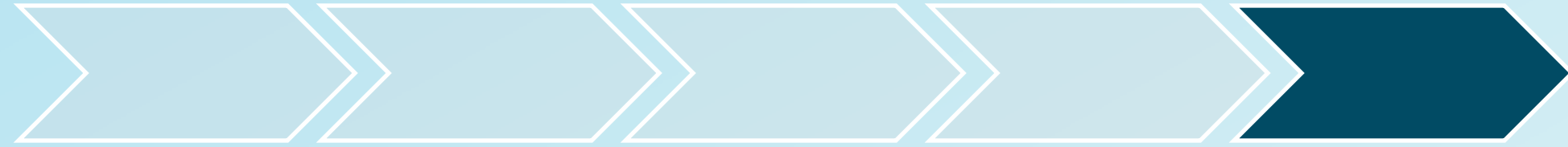
- World at their fingertips, endless information
- More empathetic, more inclusive
 - “No gatekeeping”

- Work is for stability; focus on future of stability and security
- Distrusting of large organizations

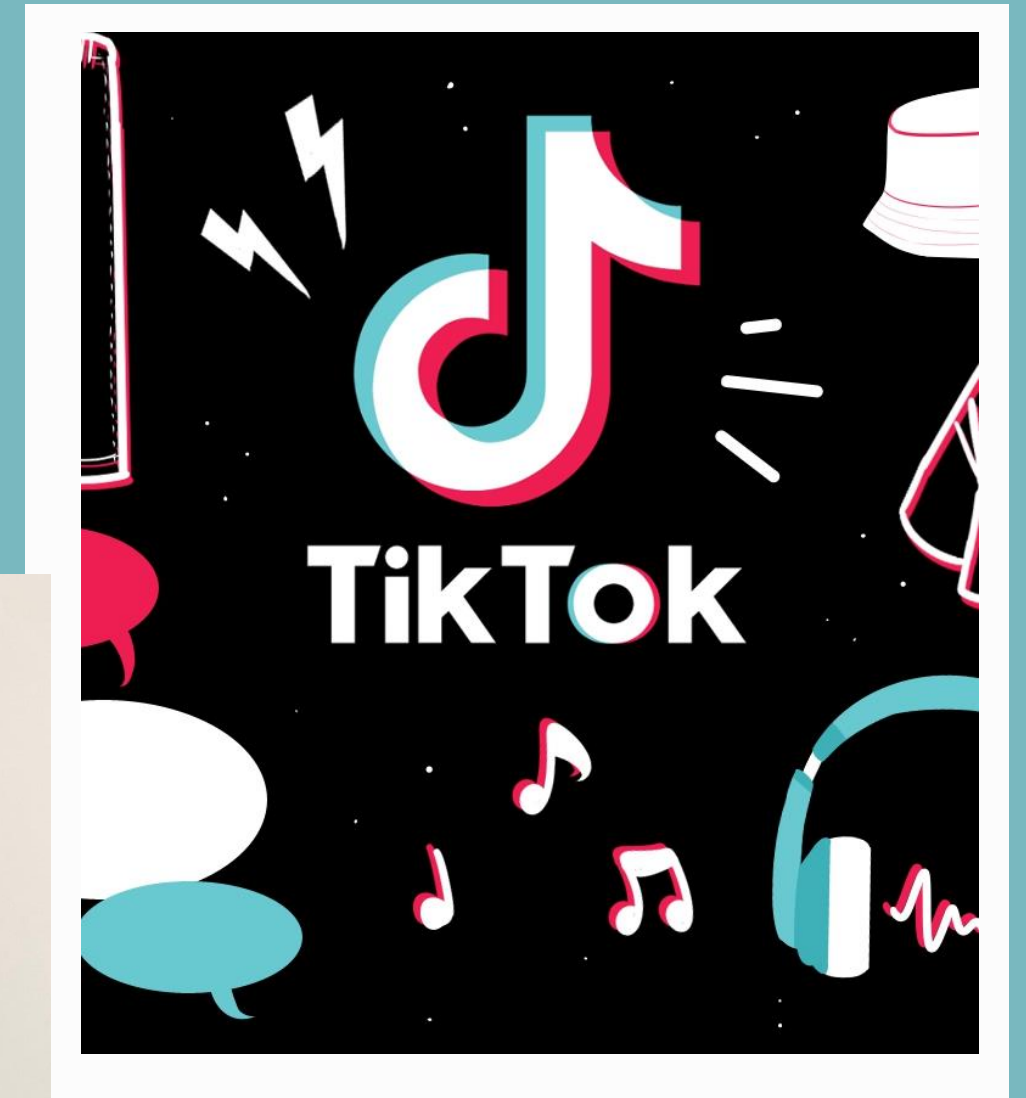
- Increased stress
 - Bleak future of work
- Less prepared for the future of work

BIRTH YEARS: 1999 – 2019
TEEN YEARS: 2010s, 2020s
SIZE: 86.9MM

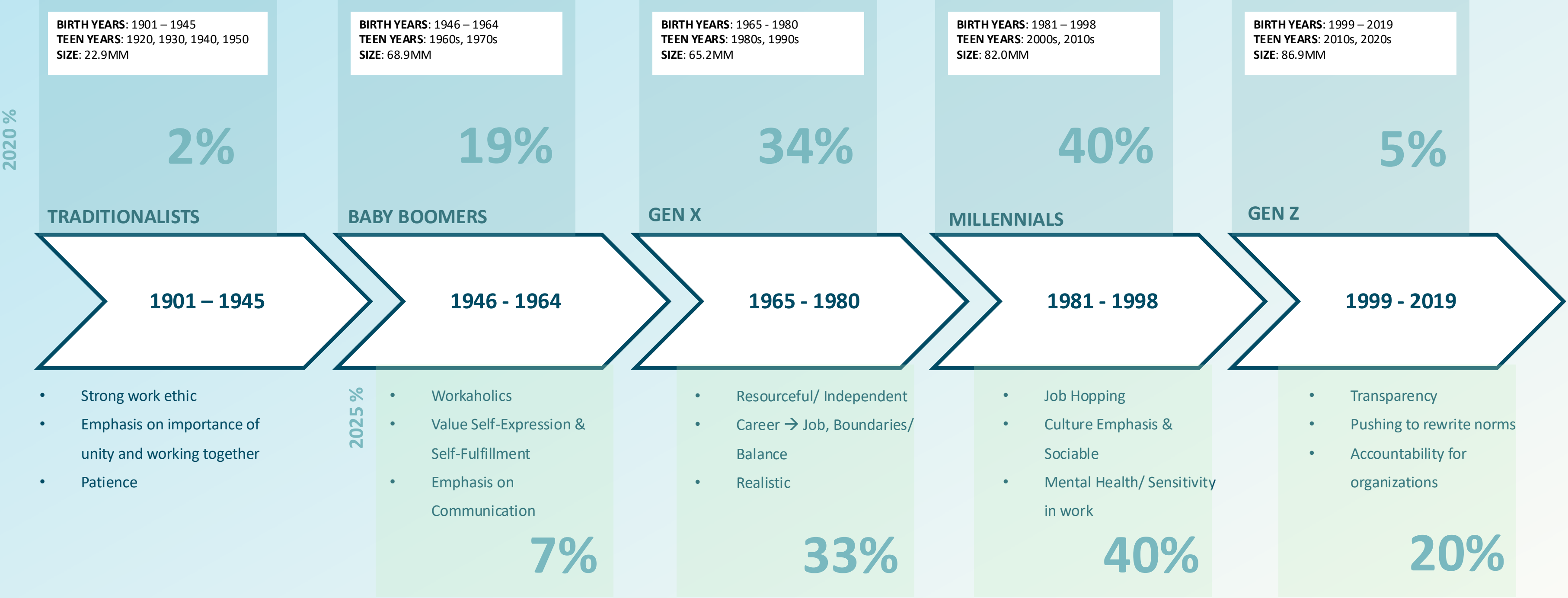
SHAPING THE WORKPLACE: GEN Z EDITION



- 1 Emphasis in transparency
- 2 Expecting more from organizations
- 3 Rewriting norms – flexibility, resume optics



THE BIG 5: ANOTHER LOOK



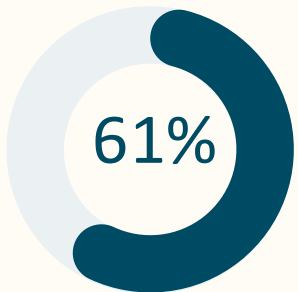
*% Estimates based on Census Bureau Data from 2020

"REVERSE MENTORSHIP" BRAINSTORM

- *What is one skill or perspective you could teach another generation in the workplace?*
- *What is one skill or perspective you would like to learn from another generation in the workplace?*



A BRIEF LOOK AT GEN Z



would stay at the right company for more than 10 years. ²



would rather have security than passion. ³



would leave a company if advancement opportunities don't exist. ⁴

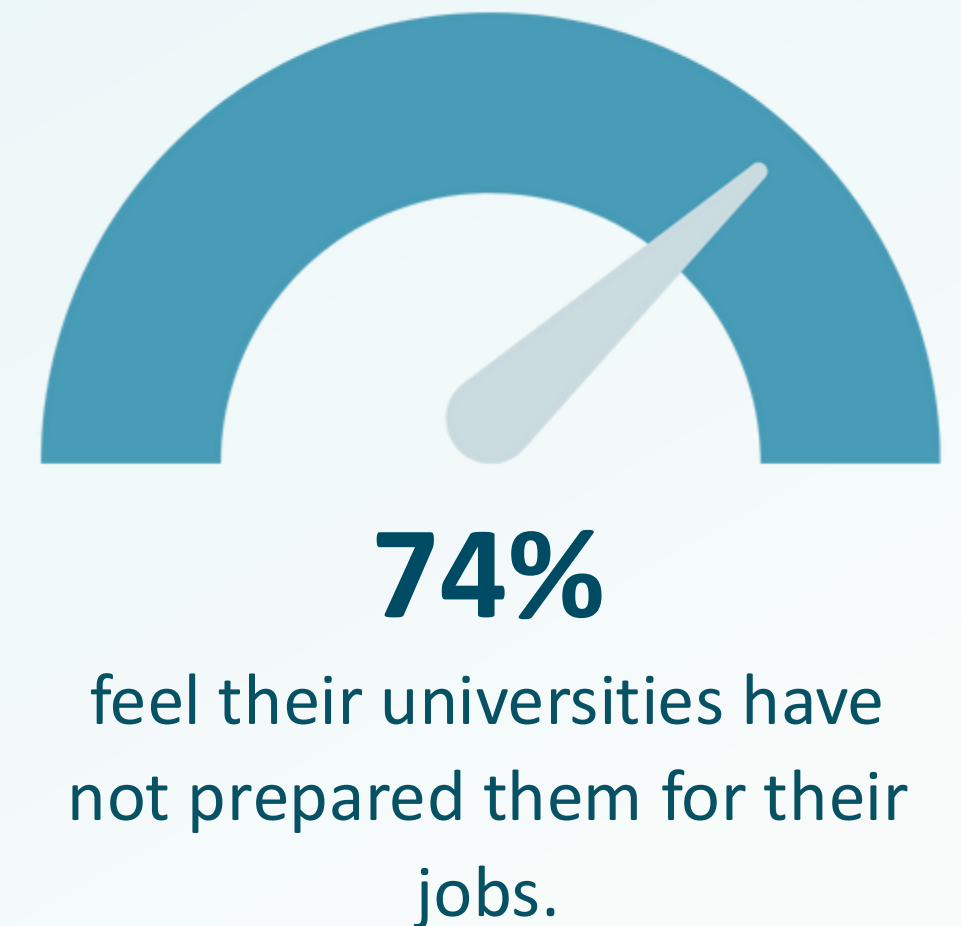


ONLY
held any part-time job in high school. ³



MYTH: THEIR EXPECTATIONS OF EMPLOYERS ARE TOO HIGH

REALITY: they need more than previous generations...
and they know it.



MYTH: THEY'RE FOCUSED ON THE WRONG THINGS... VALUES, SHMALUES...

REALITY: As the most diverse and stressed generation to date, DEI and mental health are personal, not just a nice-to-have.



2 in 3

want a company culture
that prioritizes mental
health and wellness.



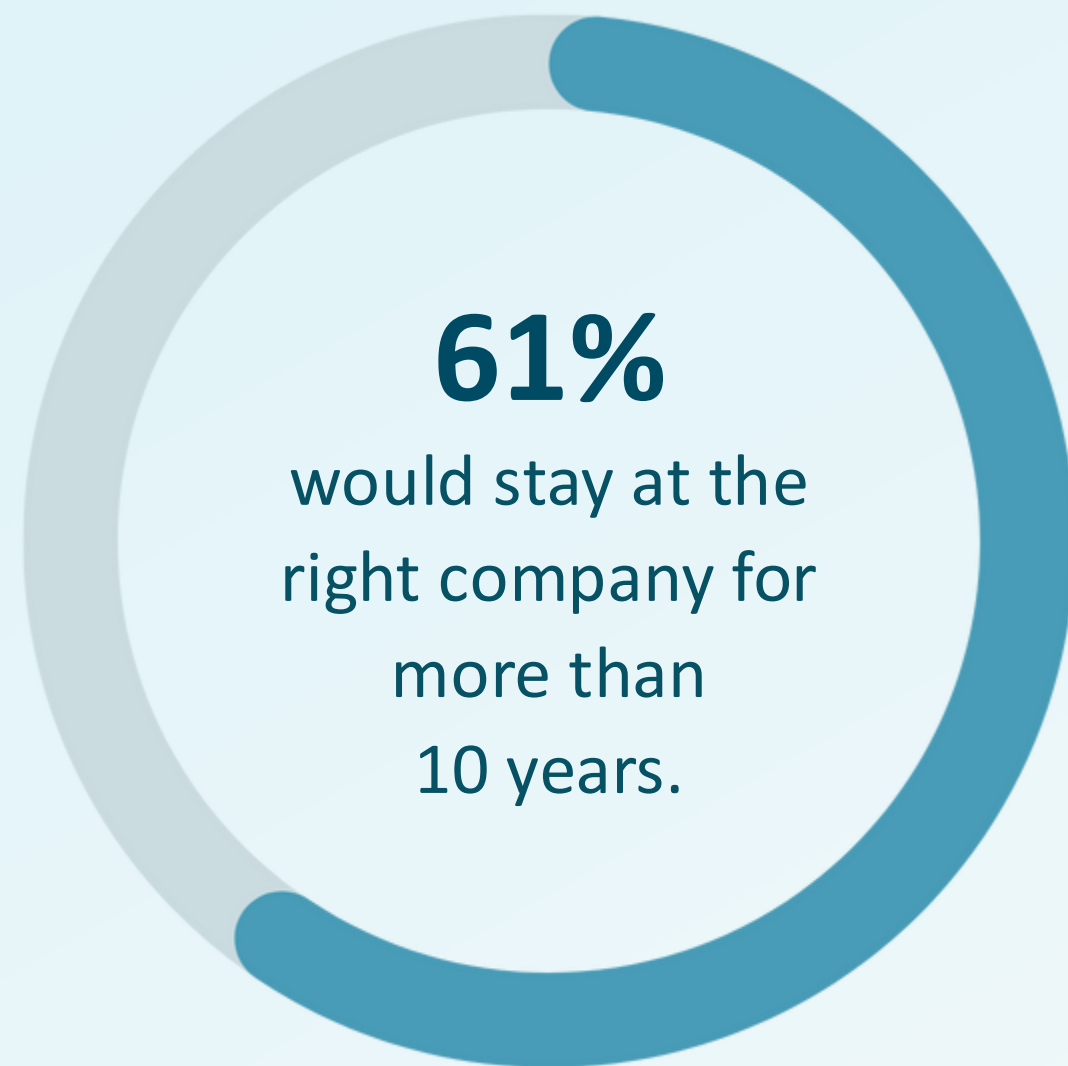
99%

report dealing with
symptoms of burnout.

MYTH: THEY'RE JOB HOPPERS, SEEKING PASSION AND PURPOSE.

REALITY: They'll break the job-hopping trend, offering loyalty for security...

... but doing so ruthlessly.



8 in 10
would leave a company
if advancement
opportunities don't exist.

Workplace Challenge

Scenario: A research team is preparing a major NIH grant proposal under a tight deadline.

TEAM

**Principal Investigator
(Dr. Patel, 63, Baby Boomer)** – Renowned for clinical research expertise, prefers in-person collaboration and structured meetings.

**Research Administrator
(Monica, 48, Gen X)** – Experienced grant manager who prefers detailed email updates and clear project timelines.

**Research Coordinator
(Luis, 35, Millennial)** – Manages day-to-day project tasks, values flexible hybrid work and quick digital check-ins via Slack or Teams.

**Administrative Assistant
(Jordan, 24, Gen Z)** – Tech-savvy, prefers using collaborative tools like Google Docs and shared task boards to streamline communication.

CHALLENGE

As the grant deadline approaches, Dr. Patel prefers frequent in-person meetings, feeling more confident when discussions happen face-to-face.

Luis and Jordan prefer remote collaboration to balance other projects and personal obligations.

Monica wants to align everyone's communication preferences—balancing detailed project timelines with the need for quick updates.

CONFLICT

Tension rises when Dr. Patel requests last-minute in-person meetings, disrupting hybrid work schedules.

Jordan feels their tech-based updates in the shared project board are being overlooked.

Monica gets frustrated when key decisions aren't documented in writing.

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DISCUSS/ROLE PLAY

- What are the different communication and work style preferences represented by each team member?
 - How do generational experiences shape those preferences?
- Which communication methods (ie: slack, email, shared project boards, meetings) could be used to accommodate everyone's needs?
- Create a Communication & Hybrid Work Agreement that includes:
 - Which platforms to use for routine updates, urgent requests & major decisions
 - Frequency & format of meetings (in-person, hybrid, virtual)
 - How action items are documented/tracked

TIP #1: KNOW THY AUDIENCE

DETERMINE WHAT STRATEGIES WILL RESONATE BEST AND MAKE SURE TO HAVE THOSE READILY AVAILABLE.

Generation	Key Characteristics	Workplace Preferences	Best Strategies to Engage
Traditionalists	Loyal, Disciplined, Respect for hierarchy	Face-to-face formal training	Acknowledge experience Structure transitions
Baby Boomers	Hardworking, Value Tenure, Competitive	Meetings, Structured work	Scheduled meetings, Opportunities for Leadership roles
Gen X	Independent, Work-life Balance, Adaptable	Email, Opportunities for Autonomy	Flexible work, Decision-making roles
Millennials	Digital natives, collaborative	Messaging apps, feedback-driven	Career development, teamwork culture
Gen Z	Tech-savvy, value flexibility, entrepreneurial	Video training, instant communication	Digital learning, fast feedback

TIP #2: FLIP THE SCRIPT

FIGURE OUT WHAT THEY'RE REALLY ASKING AND DIRECT THE CONVERSATION WITH TRANSPARENCY AND OPTIMISM



WHEN ASKED:
WHAT'S YOUR
REMOTE WORK
POLICY?

How to address:

- #1** - Consider the question -- *what is it rooted in?*
- #2** - Can you quickly address the concern?
- #3** - Determine how to position the response to be honest and highlight your team's culture?

TIP #3: MENTORSHIP IS KEY

GEN Z IS A “WHY” GENERATION -- THEY NEED THE GAPS FILLED IN FOR THEM.

Consider what else is needed in your onboarding for the whole picture:

How does your unit operate/
make money?

How do they stay apprised of
broader organizational
goals/strategies?

What's the appropriate way to
communicate?

What does it look like/ mean to
lead your career?

Consider what conversations your managers will need to navigate:

What role does their day-to-day
plan in the larger picture?

What do promotions look like
for a specific role?

How do I have conversations
around mental health?

How do I hold teammates
accountable?

IN SUM: STRATEGIES FOR MULTI-GENERATIONAL COLLABORATION

➤ Multi-channel Communication

Mix of in-person meetings, email and digital tools

➤ Cross-generational Mentorship

Pair more experienced team members with newer employees to foster knowledge sharing

➤ Flexible Training Approaches

Mix of hands-on training, self-paced modules, video-based learning

➤ Recognition & Motivation

Customize rewards based on needs

➤ Inclusive Leadership

Diverse approaches to decision making & adaptability



RESOURCES

- Shereen Sater, The Curve Collective
the~curve.co



- Why I Find You Irritating by Chris De Santis

