

# Finding a place for Gen X workers

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You may have read the latest study focused on workplace demographics and, specifically, Generation X in the financial services industry. The report correctly states that Generation X gets relatively little airtime or analysis compared to Gen Y and Boomers.

I am a part of "Generation X." We are a recessive generation in between two giants. We live in a time when the ongoing Information Revolution is challenging how, why, where and when work gets done.

I was born in 1974 and, according to the latest latest PWC study, my contemporaries and I have lived in the shadow of the Boomers that came before us.

When we started our careers we were the pointy end at the bottom of a diamond, moving up into a layered organization flush with middle managers.

However, as we moved along in our careers, corporate trends led to an elimination of many of those middle management layers.

This worked out, since our generation's relatively smaller size meant there were fewer of us clamouring to fill those spots.

Let's fast forward to today, when we're the sleek, lean middle of an hourglass. We have one foot in how things were done, and one foot in new changes that continue to challenge past assumptions.

It's true that we are smaller than the generations above and below us.

It's true that Boomers are not moving into retirement at the age usually expected, meaning senior roles are not plentiful.

It's true that the new graduates entering the workplace are a more numerous and vocal population pushing for middle management roles.

All these facts, as cited by the most recent study, have led the Toronto Star and others to conclude that Gen X careers are "stalled."

Yet, these facts only tell a portion of the story. Where this type of analysis falls short is in helping all generations within the workforce see where the greatest opportunities lie.

Being a recessive generation is not all bad.

Early on in my career as a corporate manager I realized that the key to my success was not following the traditional career paths of those that came before. My job as a Gen Xer is not to fill the jobs that become available.

It is to find and fill the strategic gaps that exist as power shifts from the Boomers to Gen Y.

Our generation will be passed over by those who are younger than us. I don't mean that Gen X won't hold C-level positions (just look at Facebook). We will. But not everyone can be a CEO and, in our case, many won't make it to the ranks of senior management.

We just don't have the numbers to replace the Boomers as they move onto Legacy Career positions and out of the management ranks of our companies. Gen Y will step into those roles that could/should/would have been ours in a previous era.

However, that group of future leaders will lack our experience, corporate history and networks.

Gen X holds the corporate memory companies are concerned about losing. We have the experience to be great mentors and models, leading edge thinkers and leaders.

If we recognize our role as the shape of the workforce continues to shift, we'll dominate the boardrooms and backrooms, providing sound, rational and forward thinking advice to those rising through the ranks.

Just as Boomers are credited with transforming structures as they age, Gen X too will give rise to new employment, talent and career innovations. The need for corporate mentors and non-traditional leadership is on the rise. Our generation's greatest workplace challenge is to facilitate, translate, mediate, influence and innovate.

We must lead from the middle.

Let's not lament that we are not getting the positions left behind by Boomers. We are smart, talented, entrepreneurial, technically savvy, educated and experienced.

We are entrepreneurs, intrapreneurs and corporate crusaders. We'll create the positions that are right for our time, our companies and our careers.

*Lisa Taylor is the President of Toronto-based Challenge Factory, the only company in Canada where you can test-drive your next career. Challenge Factory provides individuals and companies with innovative talent and career programs targeting new graduates, mid-career professionals and Boomers seeking Legacy Careers.*

*Website: [www.challengefactory.ca](http://www.challengefactory.ca)*

*Twitter: @changepaths*

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