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AUXILIARY ORGANIZATIONS ASSOCIATION

THE NEXT ERA OF AUXILIARIES
SHAPING TOMORROW

Generations in the Workplace

How generational differences implicate CA employment law



PRESENTED BY
David A. Crane
Aaron M. Rutschman
Maynard Nexsen LLP

AGENDA

- Who's in the workforce (and why it matters)
- Generational differences as evidence of bias
- Shifting values trigger legal obligations
- Modern work practices create modern liability
- How to stay complaint *and* sane

HOW MANY GENERATIONS ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

- Up to five generations in one workplace
- Different communication styles, tech comfort, and expectations
- Legal reminder: Generations aren't protected—age is
- HR translation: stereotypes = Exhibit A

FIVE GENERATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

- For maybe the first time, we have up to five generations in one workplace
- Traditionalist/Silent Generation: 1928 to 1945
- Baby Boomers: 1946 to 1964
- Generation X: 1965 to 1980
- Millennials: 1981 to 1997
- Generation Z: 1998 to 2020



GENERATIONAL COMPOSITION OF WORKFORCE

- Millennials: 36%
- Generation X: 31%
- Generation Z: 18%
- Baby Boomers: 15%
- Traditionalist/Silent Generation: 1%

WHY GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES MATTER

- Generational differences shape expectations and behavior
- Cultural conflicts often morph into legal claims
- California law heightens employer exposure
- Proactive management reduces risk

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES CAN EVIDENCE BIAS

- Cultural differences often become evidence in litigation
- Stereotypes are not legal defenses
- Age (40+) is protected under both federal and California law
- California law = broader coverage, bigger verdicts

CODED LANGUAGE AND STEREOTYPES

- “Old school”
- “Not adaptable”
- “Culture fit”
- “Energy”
- Even stray remarks are circumstantial evidence

WHEN “JOKES” BECOME LAWSUITS



- “OK Boomer” – a joke online, risky at work
- Emojis and memes are discoverable
- Risks of Teams, Slack, and instant messaging
- Strict liability for supervisor comments

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PITFALLS

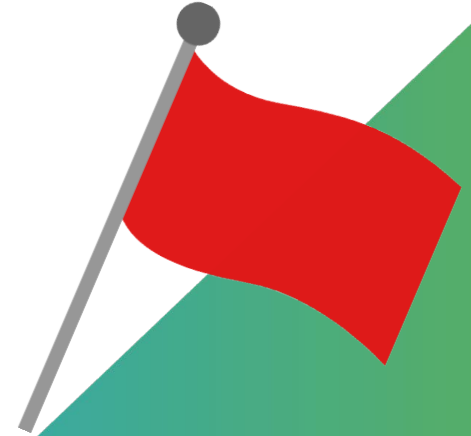
- Coaching younger workers, disciplining older ones
- Vague feedback creates bad exhibits
- Inconsistent documentation
- If it isn't written down, it didn't happen





HIRING & RECRUITING RED FLAGS

- “Digital native” or “recent grad”
- Overuse of “culture fit”
- Social media screening can give knowledge of protected categories
- Use caution when drafting job postings



LAYOFFS & RIFS

- Salary-based selections skew older
- Disparate impact analysis matters
- Documentation is your seatbelt
- “Last in, first out” is not a legal shield

WHEN SHIFTING VALUES TRIGGER LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

- Younger generations have different values
- Mental health openness
- Flexibility and leave
- DEI advocacy and retaliation

MENTAL HEALTH AS A WORKPLACE PRIORITY



- Younger workers more open about mental health
- Gen Z least likely to report good mental health
- Increased requests for flexibility and leave
- Cultural shift intersects with compliance

MENTAL HEALTH & DISABILITY LAW



- FEHA and ADA cover mental health conditions
- Anxiety, depression, PTSD can qualify
- No visible symptoms required
- Applies across all generations
- Employer intent is largely irrelevant

ACCOMMODATION & INTERACTIVE PROCESS



- Employers must engage promptly and in good faith
- Requests need not use legal terminology
- Informal requests can still trigger legal obligations
- Delays create liability

FLEXIBILITY, LEAVE, AND RETALIATION



- Overlapping federal and CA leave laws—coordinate with LOA departments early and often
- Protected activity broadly defined
- Retaliation claims more common
- Juries care about the “human” component

DIFFERENCES IN VALUES & PURPOSE

- Younger generations seek purpose-driven work
- Expect alignment with employer values
- Speaking up may be protected activity
- Retaliation claims can follow

DEI EXPECTATIONS

- Younger workers more vocal on DEI issues
- Complaints may be protected activity
- Retaliation risk is high
- Manager response matters

MODERN WORK PRACTICES CREATE MODERN LIABILITY

- Remote work
- Work-life balance
- Digital communication
- Younger generations expect different communication style

REMOTE WORK & FLEXIBILITY

- Different generational expectations
- Inconsistent approvals create discrimination risk
- CA expense reimbursement still applies
- Slack & Teams after hours = wage/hour fun
- Neutral productivity standards key



COMMUNICATION STYLES & LEGAL RISK



- Informal communication preferred by younger workers
- Slack, Teams, texts, emojis become evidence
- Tone misunderstandings escalate disputes
- All forms of written communications are discoverable

WORK-LIFE BOUNDARIES



- Clear boundaries valued by younger generations
- Resistance to after-hours contact
- Wage-and-hour implications for nonexempt staff
- Remote tools increase off-the-clock risk



FEEDBACK & MANAGEMENT STYLE



- Younger workers expect frequent feedback
- Annual reviews may feel insufficient
- Misalignment fuels performance disputes
- Consistent documentation is critical



SOCIAL MEDIA & ACTIVISM



- Younger employees more active online
- Social media is the modern “water cooler”
- Off-duty conduct protections apply
- NLRA and CA Labor Code considerations
- Discipline decisions require care



RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE STANDARDS



- Informality can cross professional lines
- FEHA harassment standards are broad
- Impact matters more than intent
- Early intervention reduces exposure



MANAGING DIFFERENCES LAWFULLY



- Focus on conduct and performance
- Apply policies consistently
- Train managers on mental health issues
- Escalate concerns early



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Cultural differences trigger legal duties
- Stereotypes are legally radioactive
- Mental health is a compliance issue
- Communication creates evidence
- California law favors proactive employers



BEST PRACTICES THAT ACTUALLY HELP

- Focus on behavior, not birth year
- Apply policies consistently
- Train managers on what not to say
- When in doubt, escalate
- Document like you expect discovery



LITIGATION TRENDS

- Age claims paired with retaliation claims
- Internal emails are prime evidence
- Teams & Slack as evidence
- Juries dislike unfairness
- California juries identify with employees, not employers



David A. Crane
dcrane@maynardnexsen.com
323.987.3413

**THANK
YOU!**





QUESTIONS?

