

## Mentoring Across Generations: The Training of a Millennial Librarian\*

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*Michael Chiorazzi spoke in 2013 about the importance of mentoring in law librarianship. By looking at their experience, the authors (a Boomer and a Millennial) evaluate the problems that come with mentoring across generations. The conclusion: while there are real differences between these two generations, they can be overcome.*

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### Introduction

¶1 Those working in a law library have likely encountered a phenomenon that has been generating a substantial amount of discussion in the last decade or so: the entry of Millennials into a workforce that until recently had been dominated by Boomers.<sup>1</sup> Despite the momentary equal representation of generations in the workforce today caused by the Boomer exodus,<sup>2</sup> big changes are afoot. The Brook-

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1. Generation X, ranging in age from thirty-five to forty-nine, is America’s neglected collective “middle child,” bookended between two much larger generations. Paul Taylor & George Gao, Pew Research Ctr., *Generation X: America’s Neglected “Middle Child,”* FACT TANK: NEWS IN THE NUMBERS (June 5, 2014), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/05/generation-x-americas-neglected-middle-child/>.

2. As of January 2014, Baby Boomers made up thirty-one percent of the U.S. workforce, with Millennials at thirty-three percent and Generation X at thirty-two percent. Jim Harter & Sangeeta Agrawal, *Many Baby Boomers Reluctant to Work Longer*, GALLUP (Jan. 20, 2014), <http://www.gallup.com/poll/166952/baby-boomers-reluctant-retire.aspx>.

ings Institute predicts that by 2025 Millennials will make up a whopping seventy-five percent of the labor pool.<sup>3</sup>

¶2 Given that Millennials will eventually replace Boomers in the law library setting, it is essential that they are ready for the job. Fortunately, we belong to a profession known for its mentoring skills. As Michael Chiorazzi said when he received the 2013 American Association of Law Libraries Distinguished Lecture-ship Award at the AALL Annual Meeting, “If you are in the profession, you are by definition a teacher and a mentor. If you aren’t, you aren’t a librarian.”<sup>4</sup> In his lecture, Chiorazzi recalled the essential role mentors played in his professional development through the years.<sup>5</sup>

¶3 However, to be an effective trainer or mentor, a librarian must first relate to her younger coworkers. Unfortunately, much of the material written about the qualities of Boomers and Millennials indicates that their co-existence in an office setting could create workplace misunderstandings rather than workplace harmony. All people—librarians included—are inclined to pass judgment on a younger generation for lacking the same skills and virtues they imagine they themselves had at a similar age. This trend is not new. Even what we know now as the Greatest Generation was reviled in its youth.<sup>6</sup> While the notion that younger generations are across the board lacking can be dismissed out of hand, it is worth considering that all generations are not exactly alike. As Alexis de Toqueville wrote when speaking of democratic nations, “every fresh generation is a new people.”<sup>7</sup> But for Boomers to successfully complete their mission as trainers and mentors to the incoming generation, it is necessary to strip away impediments to the core relationship.

¶4 Our initial premise for this article was that despite plentiful literature describing the impending workplace clash of these two generations, and despite a rich supply of anecdotal evidence from our peers, we believed research would reveal that most of the perceived differences between Millennials and Boomers were little more than the normal hue and cry that goes on between generations. But a funny thing happened on the way to our conclusion—we began to doubt our premise. We<sup>8</sup> uncovered a deeper truth: there *are* a number of critical differences between Boomers and Millennials, most of which reflect the cultural milieu in which the two came of age. But, we further concluded, with good faith on both sides, that none of these differences should prove insurmountable to a healthy mentor/mentee relationship.

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3. Fred Dews, *75 Percent of 2025 Workforce Will Be Millennials*, BROOKINGS DATA NOW (July 17, 2014), <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/brookings-now/posts/2014/07/millennials-will-be-75-percent-of-2025-workforce-brookings-data-now>.

4. Michael G. Chiorazzi, *Mentoring, Teaching, and Training the Next Generation of Law Librarians: Past and Present as Prologue to the Future*, 106 LAW LIBR. J. 69, 82, 2014 LAW LIBR. J. 4, ¶ 60.

5. *Id.*

6. Although Tom Brokaw’s 1998 bestseller, *The Greatest Generation*, lauds the youth of the 1930s, the truth is that that generation was bitterly criticized as the “lost generation” and accused of being violent, drugged, lazy, promiscuous, and hopeless. Mike Males, *For Adults, “Today’s Youth” Are Always the Worst*, L.A. TIMES, Nov. 21, 1999, at 1.

7. ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE, *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA* 87 (Henry Reeve trans., George Adelard 3d ed. 1839) (1835).

8. A Boomer supervisor and a new Millennial librarian.

¶5 A brief word about our very unscientific protocol: on Millennial's first day on the job, Boomer proposed a plan. Each would document her daily workplace experiences for approximately the next thirty days in a journal. These journals would form the core material for this article. Then Boomer and Millennial would read all the material they could get their hands on about workplace issues involving Boomers and Millennials.<sup>9</sup> Last, they would compare their experiences against that body of work and, as mentioned above, establish that *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. Not.

¶6 While members of different generations may always experience some kind of gap between them, effective trainers and mentors do their best to close that gap or, at the very least, to ensure that it does not become a chasm. This process involves cultivating an honest awareness of shared points as well as divergent ones, and perhaps even an appreciation for these differences.

### Generations Defined

¶7 We begin by defining our terms. Boomers are those born between 1946 and 1964. Until the Millennials came on the scene, Boomers were the largest cohort ever born in the United States and number about eighty million.<sup>10</sup> The generation before the Boomers is most commonly referred to as the Traditionalists, and when you consider the time span ascribed to them, 1900 to 1945, they really could be two generations. Gen X is typically defined as those born between 1965 and 1980, with a total of approximately forty-six million members. Finally, we have the Millennials, a whopping eighty-six million having been born between 1981 and 1999, making them the largest cohort in history.<sup>11</sup>

¶8 When experts reflect on generational differences, they often describe how a generation's shared events and conditions tend to create similarities among members. A zeitgeist goes a long way to defining who we are and, to some extent, why we are like that. Lynne Lancaster and David Stillman call this shared perspective the "generational personality."<sup>12</sup> Before we discuss actual traits of the two groups we are concerned with, we thought it useful for each of us to describe the collective experiences that we believe have shaped our generational personality.

¶9 **The Boomer:** unsupervised play stretching across many city blocks, the Beatles, the threat of nuclear war (everybody under the desks!), JFK's assassination, RFK's assassination, MLK's assassination, moon landing, Vietnam War, psychedelic music, the draft lottery, hippie culture, Eugene McCarthy, working from an early

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9. We want to acknowledge one particular work that we discovered late in the writing process by and about librarians at the McIntyre Library at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. This article is insightful and interesting in that, although written five years earlier, many of the themes and concerns mentioned in our article were already evident. Eric Jennings & Jill Markgraf, *Mind the Generation Gap*, 17 C. & UNDERGRADUATE LIBR. 93 (2010).

10. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 78.8 million people living in the United States born between 1946 and 1964, including immigrants, as of May 2014. SANDRA L. COLBY & JENNIFER M. ORTMAN, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, THE BABY BOOM COHORT IN THE UNITED STATES: 2012 TO 2060, at 2, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2014pubs/p25-1141.pdf>.

11. LYNNE C. LANCASTER & DAVID STILLMAN, WHEN GENERATIONS COLLIDE 13 (2002).

12. *Id.* at 14.

age, protests and demonstrations, *The Pentagon Papers*, Richard Nixon's resignation, Walkmans, and yes, yuppies.

¶10 **The Millennial:** team sports galore (including t-ball where scores weren't kept), apocryphal stories of Satanic ritual abuse and "stranger danger," working mothers, helicopter parents, boy bands, "gifted" programs, O.J. Simpson trial, Monica Lewinsky, first computer in elementary school, Internet in high school, CDs, DVDs, iPods, plenty of extracurricular activities, Columbine shooting, 9/11, war in Iraq, ADHD/Ritalin, reality TV, Facebook, economic fallout, climate change, first African American president, delayed marriage and child rearing, same-sex marriage, and adult-onset 1990s nostalgia.

¶11 The next section reviews the primary characteristics of each group as distilled from the literature. But before that, two points: First, we are evaluating Boomers at a later stage in their lives than Millennials. By 2016, Boomers have reached or are approaching the end of their careers; we can look back on their contributions to the workforce almost in their entirety. Millennials, on the other hand, are only now taking the reins. Had Boomer behavior been analyzed by their superiors in the sixties and seventies, "hardworking" or "industrious" might not have been the adjectives chosen. In comparison, for all that is said about Millennials, they are at present a benign group. Second, when we talk about "primary characteristics" of the Boomer generation and then later the Millennials, we do not mean to imply that all members will be cast in this mold, but we do feel it is safe to venture some generalizations.

### Primary Characteristics of Baby Boomers

¶12 Before we address more work-related characteristics of Boomers, we want to note one characteristic that is in sharp contrast to Millennials—many Boomers grew up alienated from their parents. It is a commonplace that the sixties and seventies were times of great familial division. Parents forbade their children to wear bell bottoms, go to demonstrations, and grow long hair. Children thought their parents hypocritical, if not worse, to support the Vietnam War and to support political leaders the younger generation considered criminals. And then there was the drug taking. Turn on, tune in, drop out. Parents reacted with incomprehension as they watched their children slip further and further away. The expression "don't trust anyone over 30" was pat but widespread. Another popular slogan of the times, "Question Authority," also signaled the distrust between generations. This facet of Boomers' experience is a far cry from that of Millennials, which is described in the next section.

¶13 Boomers are often described as having strong work ethics and not a little competitiveness.<sup>13</sup> This is sometimes ascribed to being part of a very large cadre, which meant that many Boomers contended for a limited number of job promotions. This competition sometimes played out in the workforce as a need to work

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13. See, e.g., CAM MARSTON, MOTIVATING THE "WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?" WORKFORCE: MANAGE ACROSS THE GENERATIONAL DIVIDE AND INCREASE PROFITS 36 (2007). "Boomers excelled at long, hard work. In fact, no single generation had ever before put in so many hours with so much intensity, and a new term, *workaholic*, was coined in the 1970s to describe their work habits." *Id.*

until a job was done, no matter what was sacrificed. Boomers' personal lives sometimes suffered as a result. Women interested in advancing were afraid to acknowledge that they needed to shop for dinner or pick up sick kids, and men sometimes felt compelled to miss important family events.<sup>14</sup> As described by Lancaster and Stillman, "workaholism became a badge of honor."<sup>15</sup>

¶14 Boomers believe they had to work their way up and, as a consequence, expect others to do the same. Boomers had to fight for workplace equality. They did their time in the trenches to achieve the positions they hold today. Boomers can be irritated with demands made by workplace newcomers that Boomers never would have made in their day. Boomers' irritation with Millennials' demands is often accompanied by snarky references to the common practice of everyone on a Millennial team getting a prize. No, everyone doesn't get a prize! says the Boomer. Prizes are something you work hard for and earn.

¶15 Not only must one work hard like Boomers did to advance, but one must work the way Boomers worked—the same hours, the same intensity, the same location (that is, in the office, not remotely).<sup>16</sup> Boomers believed that working on-site is important because out of sight can mean out of mind.

¶16 Another characteristic is that of workplace independence and circumspect interaction with supervisors. Boomers have their tasks, receive instructions, do their assigned work, and turn it in. End of story. Feedback is something employees get once a year at their performance evaluations. And the feedback is circumspectly delivered, in an appropriate setting, and at the right time.<sup>17</sup>

¶17 Boomers tend to believe they will remain forever youthful<sup>18</sup> and resist many of the "images of slowing down that go with being retired, because they imply taking a less important role in the hustling, bustling scheme of things."<sup>19</sup> AARP had a really hard time getting Boomers to read its magazine when it was called (ugh) *Modern Maturity*.<sup>20</sup> That problem will probably ease now that an icon of Boomer youth, Bob Dylan (seventy-four, people), appeared on the cover of AARP's magazine.<sup>21</sup> Keep this in mind too: "The typical Boomer believes that old age doesn't begin until age 72."<sup>22</sup>

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14. One female Boomer described her sacrifices this way: "I had to make big sacrifices for work. For my generation . . . we had to give a lot to our jobs . . . [W]e had to sacrifice the time we wanted to spend with our children to be at work." *Id.* at 21.

15. LANCASTER & STILLMAN, *supra* note 11, at 99.

16. "It was important for employees to be seen working hard at their desk—it was visible time. Output was not measured nearly as much as hours spent working." MARSTON, *supra* note 13, at 37.

17. Interestingly, Lancaster and Stillman claim that Boomers adopted the once-a-year performance appraisal as a reaction to being supervised by taciturn Traditionalists who believed that "no news is good news." That was a good-enough method of feedback for Boomers who worried about where they were in the food chain, who was gaining ground and who was losing: "Boomers are comfortable waiting for feedback until the next scheduled meeting, and Traditionalists might be willing to wait until the next performance appraisal." LANCASTER & STILLMAN, *supra* note 11, at 257.

18. *Id.* at 83.

19. *Id.* at 129.

20. *Id.* at 127–28.

21. Robert Love, *Bob Dylan: The Uncut Interview*, AARP: THE MAGAZINE, Feb./Mar. 2015, <http://www.aarp.org/entertainment/style-trends/info-2015/bob-dylan-aarp-the-magazine-full-interview.1.html>.

22. D'Vera Cohn & Paul Taylor, *Boomers Approach 65—Glumly*, PEW RESEARCH CTR. (Dec. 20, 2010), <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/12/20/baby-boomers-approach-65-glumly/>.

¶18 One way to hold on to youth is to keep up with technology. Librarians have had little choice about this. Librarians continue to be early adopters of technology due to the nature of their work,<sup>23</sup> but has anyone else noticed the escalating number of job advertisements for “emerging technologies” librarians? Methinks the Boomers have technology fatigue.

¶19 For a generation that fought so hard to change so many things, Boomers lost a lot of steam when they got to the workplace. In *You Raised Us—Now Work with Us*, author Lauren Stiller Rikleén describes the workplace in which Boomers most typically found themselves. This setting, created by the Traditionalists of the previous generation, is described as “rigid office hours, face-time demands, [and] inflexible work arrangements.”<sup>24</sup> Rikleén contends that Boomers did little to change the rigidity of the workplace they inherited. In fact, Boomers have thrived in these work environments, working long hours and expecting those around them to do so as well.<sup>25</sup>

¶20 Observations about Boomer culture are not always flattering. Indeed, in some quarters a steady drum beat of negativity is common. Leonard Steinhorn has a section entitled “Boomers under Fire,” summarizing this negativity in his book *The Greater Generation*. Interestingly, one of his repeated criticisms is that Boomers are self-centered, spoiled, and selfish;<sup>26</sup> this is fascinating in view of the most prevalent criticism Boomers now lodge against Millennials—yes, the “entitled” card!

### Primary Characteristics of Millennials

¶21 Millennials are defined as those born after 1980 and before 1999.<sup>27</sup> Overall, Millennials are judged to be less ready than Boomers to assume the mantle of adulthood. And a steady supply of commentators weighs in about why that is.

¶22 A much talked about *New York Times* magazine article assessing the perceived failure of Millennials to “mature” explores the idea of a new stage in human development labeled “emerging adulthood.” Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, a psychology professor at Clark University, has been the most vocal advocate for adopting the

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23. One Boomer librarian had this to say:

I recall the now quaint-seeming leap from a keyboard to a mouse and the enormous challenge it posed just in terms of physical coordination. In considering the distance Boomers have traversed technologically, it is mind boggling and quite impressive. Millennials, who were born maneuvering a mouse, are often lauded for their adeptness and comfort with technology. As a group they readily embrace the latest technology and can sometimes exhibit frustration with—and occasionally even arrogance toward—their older colleagues who may not adopt the latest technology as readily or with the same level of enthusiasm. While it is likely that the Millennial Generation will change the profession exponentially through technology, we should not forget that our seasoned library veterans were—and continue to be—the technology pioneers who learned, adapted, and developed technological innovations that transformed the profession.

Jennings & Markgraf, *supra* note 9, at 95.

24. LAUREN STILLER RIKLEÉN, *YOU RAISED US—NOW WORK WITH US* 7 (2014).

25. Leonard Steinhorn has an opposing point of view to Rikleén. Steinhorn believes that Boomers injected egalitarianism into the workforce. However, chapter 8 of Steinhorn’s book, which is devoted to Boomers in the workplace, is light on support for his theory that Boomers had great impact on the workplaces they inherited. LEONARD STEINHORN, *THE GREATER GENERATION* 161–78 (2006). In any event, this article focuses on the legal workplace, and few would argue that the law environment has experienced much flattening of the hierarchy under the Boomer reign.

26. *Id.* at 44.

27. Robin Marantz Henig, *What Is It About 20-Somethings?*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 18, 2010, at MM28.

term.<sup>28</sup> Arnett points to several cultural shifts as explanations for the Millennials' protracted journey to full adulthood:<sup>29</sup> the need for more education in a knowledge economy, a dearth of entry-level jobs, a long wait before marriage in a world increasingly tolerant of cohabitation, and a trend among young women to feel less rushed to start families due to the greater availability of assisted reproductive technology.<sup>30</sup>

¶23 The common traits of this new phase include “identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between” and what Arnett refers to as “a sense of possibilities.”<sup>31</sup> Classic adolescence shares many of these traits, particularly identity exploration. However, there is a key difference: because career and marriage commitments are no longer far-off abstractions but right around the bend, emerging adulthood contributes a new sense of urgency to this exploration. As such, this period is fraught with a new sense of anxiety about a still uncertain future.<sup>32</sup>

¶24 Millennials have trouble as a group deciding on a profession, either due to the economic nadir they faced after graduating from school or—let's be frank—because of their own dithering. As one author put it, many of today's twenty-somethings find themselves “wandering in the purgatorial landscape of post-graduate inertia, premarital indecision, and proto-careerist yearning.”<sup>33</sup> This collective dragging of heels leaves elders shaking their heads and asking Millennials: when will you finally grow up?

¶25 Despite the unease and frustration that Traditionalists and Boomers may feel toward their Millennial progeny, Millennials as a general rule look back on earlier generations with great respect and deference; many maintain strong ties to their parents—mostly Boomers, it is worth pointing out—well into adulthood, seeking their advice on everything from work to personal relationships. This is good news for Boomers since they went to great lengths as parents to support, encourage, and steer their children.<sup>34</sup> Almost eighty-four percent of Millennials reported that they “frequently” or “sometimes” sought career and personal advice from their parents.<sup>35</sup> One survey asked Millennials to characterize their relationships with their families: more than seventy-three percent reported “very close,” while twenty-three percent reported “close”; fewer than four percent reported “not

28. *Id.* Arnett argues that recognizing a new stage in human development is actually nothing new; while widely accepted today, the concept of adolescence is only about a century old. *Id.*

29. It is important to note that emerging adulthood does not apply across all social classes. Middle-class-and-above Millennials have more exploratory opportunities. RIKLEEN, *supra* note 24, at 132.

30. *Id.* Of course, women may be gravely misinformed about their own long-term fertility. Compared to their twenties, women are about half as fertile at thirty, about one-quarter at thirty-five, and about one-eighth at forty. MEG JAY, *THE DEFINING DECADE: WHY YOUR TWENTIES MATTER AND HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THEM NOW* 180 (2012).

31. Henig, *supra* note 27 (quoting Jeffrey Jensen Arnett).

32. *Id.*

33. PAUL TAYLOR, PEW RESEARCH CTR., *THE NEW AMERICA: BOOMERS, MILLENNIALS, AND THE LOOMING GENERATIONAL SHOWDOWN* 19 (2014).

34. RIKLEEN, *supra* note 24, at 32–36 (including a section called “Boomers as Parents—Coach, Advisor, and Best Friend”).

35. *Id.* at 34.

close.”<sup>36</sup> This is in stark contrast to Boomers, who responded to similar survey questions with a very different attitude: in 1974, a majority of teenagers “felt unable to comfortably talk to their parents about personal concerns” and forty percent stated that they would rather not live with them.<sup>37</sup>

¶26 This respect for elders is arguably the result of a widely scorned child-rearing technique: helicopter parenting. Much has been written about the astonishing amount of control parents have exercised over Millennial children’s environments outside of the home.<sup>38</sup> Parents have challenged grades, hiring decisions, and even compensation levels.<sup>39</sup> One Millennial put it this way: “[O]ur generation of parents are very involved in our life and try to help us become better—whether we want/need it or not . . . .”<sup>40</sup>

¶27 Knowing that they were the center of their parents’ lives, Millennials are entering into adulthood with a sense of self-assurance that could be perceived as unearned by members of older generations. Jean Twenge notes that children born after the widespread availability of birth control and abortion were “the most *wanted* generation of children in American history.”<sup>41</sup> In the workplace, this can mean that they are more likely to assert themselves when confronted with protocols and procedures that make little sense to them. Millennials respect those senior to them, but they won’t keep silent if they see room for improvement.

¶28 Millennials are also defined by their early exposure to the Internet, coming of age at the very moment it took a hold of our cultural imagination. Beginning in middle school, Millennials were chatting online with each other—and sometimes other more predatory figures—and typing their papers for school on word processors. In fact, it didn’t take long for Millennials to demonstrate their natural ability to navigate computer networks and outsmart their older peers; they have been at the forefront of almost every major hacking scare covered in the news.<sup>42</sup>

¶29 An affinity for new technology manifests itself two ways in the office: one, Millennials have greater faith in technology’s ability to help them make more efficient use of their time; and, two, they often feel overburdened by the demands of older coworkers who seek their help with computer problems, whether it is part of their job descriptions or not. Some professional Millennials even complain that they have to instruct administrative assistants in the more advanced features of programs like Adobe and Word. While in a certain sense this natural skill makes the Millennial a valuable asset—perhaps even an indispensable one—it sometimes leads to resentment as it can take them away from their defined work responsibilities.<sup>43</sup>

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36. *Id.*

37. *Id.* at 33.

38. *See, e.g., id.* at 27.

39. At Western New England University School of Law Library, one staff member was shocked to see a parent fill out and turn in a job application for an undergraduate student. He did not get the job.

40. RIKLEEN, *supra* note 24, at 27.

41. *Id.* (quoting JEAN M. TWENGE, *GENERATION ME: WHY TODAY’S YOUNG AMERICANS ARE MORE CONFIDENT, ASSERTIVE, ENTITLED—AND MORE MISERABLE THAN EVER BEFORE 4* (2006)).

42. *See, e.g.,* Adam Clark Estes, *A Teenage Hacker Ring Stole \$100 Million in Army and Xbox Tech*, GIZMODO (Sept. 30, 2014, 4:00 PM), <http://gizmodo.com/a-teenage-hacker-ring-stole-100-million-in-army-and-xb-1640880835> (discussing four young hackers who breached U.S. military servers and were being prosecuted by the U.S. Department of Justice).

43. RIKLEEN, *supra* note 24, at 98–99.



¶30 Though some have derided Millennials as lacking the work ethic of the industrious Boomers, Millennials see things differently. Working long hours in an age of increased technological efficiency makes little sense to them. If quality work can be accomplished in fewer hours, why not reap the benefits of that extra time? As one researcher put it: “The tension between measuring productivity by hours worked seems anathema to a generation raised on devices that promote efficiency and multitasking.”<sup>44</sup>

¶31 Unlike the “workaholic” Boomers, Millennials as a group favor “work-life balance” over career advancement. This attitude can in part be traced back to the common experience of being raised by two working parents who often prioritized work over family time. Millennials don’t want this for themselves and do their utmost to find jobs with flexible work schedules; this allows them to spend more time on outside pursuits or with family and friends.<sup>45</sup>

¶32 Finally, it is worth noting that Millennials are also in a financially disadvantageous position compared to where their parents were at the same age. They are graduating with historically heavy student debt burdens into an environment of diminishing entry-level jobs. Despite this economic reality, Millennials are still stubbornly optimistic, not only in general but also with regard to their financial futures.<sup>46</sup>

### On Finding Middle Ground—Never the Twain Shall Meet?

¶33 To list Boomer and Millennial qualities as we do in the previous sections is to begin to understand how ripe for misunderstanding the workplace can be, not to mention the training and mentoring processes. It has become clear through our reading that each generation tends to use itself as a measuring stick. The problem that arises in the context of training or mentoring is that this overvaluation of one’s generational importance, and the lack of understanding of what is important to the other generation, may lead to senseless misunderstanding and, ultimately, unrealized potential due to intergenerational frustration.

¶34 In this section, we use excerpts from our journals to examine situations that evolved in the library workplace and how we each perceived them. We also try to identify aspects of our generational identities that we believe came into play, along with any lessons we took away from the situations.

¶35 In comparing our journal entries, you will see how a Boomer and a Millennial could be on a workplace collision course. Some of these collisions are normal

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44. *Id.* at 144.

45. *Id.* at 181.

46. In fact, Paul Taylor says that Millennials’ two defining but “seemingly incompatible characteristics” are their “slow walk to adulthood and their unshaken confidence in the future.” TAYLOR, *supra* note 33, at 20. He elaborates, saying this:

Despite inheriting the worst economy since the Great Depression, despite rates of youth un- and underemployment that are the highest since the government began keeping such records, despite the growing albatross of student loan debt, and despite not being able to think about starting a family of their own, Millennials are America’s most stubborn optimists.

*Id.* In fact, when polled, almost nine out of ten say they “already have” or “one day will have” enough money to meet their needs. *Id.* at 19–20.

intergenerational conflicts that support the Boomer's initial theory that things have not changed very much. However, some things that come out in the following paragraphs go beyond that. These result from influences on each generation that can truly make working together difficult and the mentoring process nearly impossible.

### Hey, I Have an Idea About How To Do This!

¶36 *Renee*: As a Boomer, while still new on a job, my tendency would be to just do my assignment, raising as few flags as possible. On the other hand, Liza comes from a generation that is known for its confidence and not being reluctant to express its opinion. There is an illustrative anecdote in *When Generations Collide*: one Boomer's child was completely absorbed in a miniseries called *The '60s*. The Boomer questioned her child when it was over—well, what did you think about the protest movements of the sixties? “Well,” the Millennial answered confidently, “I thought it was a very inefficient way to make the point.”<sup>47</sup>

¶37 Therefore, from Liza's first days on the job, she has thought about the tasks given to her and proposed different ways to do them. This is not all that surprising since in addition to being a research librarian she is the emerging technologies librarian. Still, that didn't prevent me from being startled the first few times it happened. The Boomer behavior at issue here is the tendency to just do a job as best as possible without creating a lot of notice, and also wanting to be circumspect in dealings with a supervisor. Journal entry: “Day One: I know from my earliest experiences with Liza that she has very good problem-spotting skills. This ability leads her to ask many questions and to suggest different ways to do things.”

¶38 My initial surprise gave way to pragmatism; it didn't take long for me to realize that the suggestions were good ones and that we were lucky to have someone so invested in her workplace. Because of Liza's questions and suggestions, we now have a more efficient way to keep our daily reference statistics, we used Google Docs to collaboratively write this article, and we have explored ways to use our iPads in the classroom for more dynamic lectures.

¶39 *Liza*: I have a tendency to make suggestions when I'm confident—like when it relates to a fix that could be accomplished with the help of technology. This behavior by a newcomer could be considered forward by members of an older generation. I'm less inclined to offer suggestions when I feel like I'm out of my depth in comparison to someone more skilled, such as when Renee and I are working on a reference request together. This attitude does seem to be in keeping with my generation generally. Lancaster and Stillman conducted interviews with Millennials and found that “they are simply accustomed to a household, school, or work situation where job assignments are based on capability, not seniority.”<sup>48</sup>

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47. LANCASTER & STILLMAN, *supra* note 11, at 30. Lancaster and Stillman go on to describe this behavior as emanating from being raised by “highly communicative, participation-oriented parents.” Millennials have been participating in family decisions “since they were old enough to point.” *Id.* at 31.

48. LYNNE C. LANCASTER & DAVID STILLMAN, *THE M-FACTOR: HOW THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION IS ROCKING THE WORKPLACE* 56 (2010).

They go on to point out that while historically “it was assumed that employees who had been around a long time automatically knew more than the younger ones did,” that is not necessarily true today.<sup>49</sup>

¶40 I was surprised to hear that Renee was “startled” by my suggestions concerning reference statistics. In my journal, I wrote only this: “I had a great time working on a new way to do reference statistics using Google forms and I’m glad that Renee was open-minded about it.” My confidence, while partially arising out of the already discussed “participation-oriented parents,” could conceivably<sup>50</sup> be attributed to the so-called self-esteem movements that prevailed when Millennials were school-age children. Whether they have a sense of healthy self-esteem as a result, though, is up for debate. Studies have found that children who are constantly praised develop a shakier sense of self than those who are given honest feedback; in the workplace, this can mean that some Millennials are too easily traumatized by negative feedback.<sup>51</sup> I can attest to being a bit oversensitive at times, but I wouldn’t go so far as to say that Renee has traumatized me just yet.

¶41 *Lesson:* Boomer had to let go of the idea that in the Millennial’s early days in the library, the Millennial would quietly take on tasks with no comment. The Millennial came to realize that it might not be necessary to say out loud every innovative thought that came into her head. Boomer came to expect that Millennial would have suggestions about how to do a task and that the suggestions would most likely be good ones or at least worth trying. Boomer had to let go the slight feeling that every suggestion about how to do something differently was a *sotto voce* comment that the way it had been done was “old fashioned.” Result: The Boomer can feed knowledge, tasks, and advice to the Millennial, and sometimes those tasks get a makeover.

### Questions and Guidance

¶42 *Renee:* I mentioned above that I recognized that Liza had great issue-spotting skills and was not afraid to ask questions. This was definitely a contrast to my Boomer behavior. The Boomer behavior at issue here is that although I am not afraid to ask questions, I place a high value on figuring things out. Also, in terms of the workplaces in which I cut my teeth, I am not sure I wanted to be distinguished as the person who asked a lot of questions. Boomer behavior also does not encourage a lot of interaction of this nature with supervisors. In fact, in some situations, supervisor interaction might be something to avoid. The Millennial value here is that it is better to ask questions than to waste time guessing.

¶43 *Liza:* I suppose I didn’t think there was anything unusual or inappropriate about asking questions. Renee must have been nice enough about meeting my requests since I didn’t even address this issue in my journal. Thanks, Renee! I can agree that I’m prone to asking questions. Maybe this is a residual effect of helicopter parenting; I appreciate direction and clarity, especially when I’m on unfamiliar

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49. *Id.* at 57.

50. I refuse to attribute a false sense of self-worth to my own behavior, but it provides a nice segue to the discussion that follows in the text.

51. *Id.*

terrain. Additionally, given that Millennials are used to the significant role adults play in their decision making, they often view problem solving as a collective process involving advice from their parents, as well as teachers and coaches.<sup>52</sup> One Boomer librarian tentatively reached a similar conclusion, speculating that “[t]he intimate and open relationships that Millennials have with their parents may contribute to their relative comfort and confidence in professional relationships with older colleagues.”<sup>53</sup> Growing up, I was also always encouraged to ask questions when starting new jobs or when I was in school. From my perspective, it’s less a signal of weakness and more a sign that I’m trying to do a good job. In general I enjoy collaboration, especially with someone who might be able to offer a different viewpoint, like a more experienced colleague; I’ve genuinely enjoyed writing this article, for instance. From my perspective, it’s better not to work in a vacuum, especially when you’re part of a team.<sup>54</sup>

¶44 At the same time, relying too much on clarification from more senior colleagues can be viewed as a crutch, at times appropriately. Put bluntly, “Millennials tend to be uncomfortable with ambiguity” and expect detailed information and specific guidance with their assignments.<sup>55</sup> While ambiguity can be avoided in the school room, where assignments are meted out carefully and with an instructive function in mind, this is not how real-world office spaces operate. Tasks are assigned as needs arise; Millennials must be called on to adjust to an environment that bears little resemblance to their highly structured childhoods.

¶45 When faced with this behavior, Boomers can be left feeling exasperated and impatient. They view Millennials as less savvy when it comes to problem solving than they were at the same age. Boomers may have some legitimate qualms with their junior employees. However, frustration on the part of supervisors is not a helpful response to someone who’s trying to find his or her way in the workplace. At the same time, Millennials should try to recognize when it’s appropriate to ask questions and when they can solve a problem on their own. The expectation that their supervisors will devote to them the same nurturing attention that they received from concerned parents and teachers is unrealistic in “the real world.”<sup>56</sup>

¶46 *Lesson:* In order not to discourage the Millennial from asking questions but also to maintain the Boomer’s schedule, we hit on the idea of scheduling quick catch-ups throughout the day. From Boomer’s journal: “It is interesting to me that I thought of this option to protect my schedule, but there were several times during the day when I would have popped next door to Liza’s office to impart some not very important piece of information, thereby being a disruptive force in her day!” In retrospect, the Millennial’s information-seeking behavior is a strong point because for the Boomer, the scariest thing about a new librarian being on the Refer-

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52. RIKLEEN, *supra* note 24, at 134.

53. Jennings & Markgraf, *supra* note 9, at 97.

54. See generally TEGAN AND SARA, FEAT. LONELY ISLAND, *Everything Is Awesome*, on THE LEGO MOVIE: ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK (WaterTower 2013), <https://soundcloud.com/watertowermusic/everything-is-awesome-tegan/> (arguing for the proposition that everything is awesome and cool when you’re part of a team).

55. RIKLEEN, *supra* note 24, at 134.

56. *Id.*

ence Desk is giving our patrons, especially students, misinformation. The Millennial can be counted on to be sure about her work in this regard and to ask questions if she is not. In fact, my journal says about the Millennial's first day on the Reference Desk: "I felt perfectly comfortable with her taking the desk at 4:00 with only three days at our school because I knew that she would not hesitate to come to me with questions."

### Work Ethic

¶47 The literature is filled with descriptions of Boomers as being workaholics, willing to pull all-nighters and cancel dinner plans to get the job done. Often this is ascribed to the reality that Boomers came of age in an environment where there were lots of contenders for available jobs, and then, once in the job, lots of contenders for advancement. The idea of work/life balance came into the workplace with Gen X and is seriously embraced by Millennials.

¶48 *Renee*: The Boomer belief here is that a good employee is a hard-working employee, and a hard-working employee does not leave at 5:00 p.m. Did my role of training and mentoring a Millennial encompass discussing this topic? From my journal: "If someone is just starting out in the profession, how are they supposed to *know* these things?" Fortunately, after mulling this question over, I decided that "training a new librarian does not mean having to tell him or her everything that pops into my head *when* it pops into my head. I think it is more important to preserve the enthusiasm and freshness that a new Librarian brings rather than make lots of nitpicking corrections that might make the new Librarian unsure of him- or herself." As will be shown below, this was good advice to myself that I evidently did not take.

¶49 *Liza*: I do think people often misread the Millennial concern with efficiency and work-life balance as an indication that we're somehow less dedicated or less "hard working." The idea that working long hours and losing sleep leads to greater productivity is actually something of a myth anyway. Studies show that taking vacations<sup>57</sup> and working from home<sup>58</sup> actually *increase* worker productivity. Though Boomers may like to pat themselves on the back for the hours they put in, they might not be working at full capacity.

¶50 I did address this issue in my journal fairly early on. In my second week, I recall a conversation where Renee stressed the importance of "working hard—even if that meant staying after 5." I pondered this for a while since it seemed like an unnecessary comment. I had no doubts about my ability to work hard since I attended law school, worked on a law review, and worked full-time while getting my M.L.I.S. In response to Renee's comment, I wrote that of course I'd stay late if I was working on something, but I wouldn't stay late just for appearances' sake.

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57. Tonya Mohn, *Take a Vacation: It's Good for Productivity and the Economy, According to a New Study*, FORBES (Feb. 28, 2014), <http://www.forbes.com/sites/tanyamohn/2014/02/28/take-a-vacation-its-good-for-productivity-and-the-economy-according-to-a-new-study/>.

58. Nicholas Bloom, *To Raise Productivity, Let More Employees Work from Home*, HARV. BUS. REV., Jan./Feb. 2014, at 28.

¶51 The literature supports my own anecdotal observation that Boomers are skeptical of their younger colleagues' work ethic. As such, Millennials have reason to be concerned about how they are perceived; in one survey, only twenty percent of employers rated Millennials "above average" with regard to their willingness to work long hours.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps this reflects a truth, but Millennials don't equate long hours with quality work or a mark of dedication; instead, they look to technology to accomplish the same tasks in less time. Due to their comfort with and affinity for technology, Millennials are often frustrated when supervisors continue to view a relationship between work and time. Millennials view technology as a true game changer, something that can deliver greater flexibility and work options.<sup>60</sup>

¶52 At the same time, Millennials perceive themselves as having solid work ethics, but ones "integrally tied to a holistic view of their lives," which treats work as important, but not singularly so, compared to family obligations, personal relationships, and health and wellness.<sup>61</sup> To sum up the Millennial mindset: working hard is laudable, but it's misguided to view one's career as the sole or even primary purpose of one's life.

¶53 **Lesson:** Well, the Boomer was surprised to see from the Millennial's entry that despite thinking she hadn't mentioned the whole "working hard" thing, the Boomer had! That's telling. But the Millennial's points are important and likely represent a recurring theme in workplaces as Boomers and Millennials strive to achieve equilibrium. Interestingly, NELLCO, an international consortium of law libraries, had a conference in 2014 that highlighted the Results-Only Work Environment (ROWE). Under this concept, the emphasis is not on the "outdated model of last century workplace flexibility" but on a workplace that holds employees accountable for results. One of the corollaries of this is that how an employee spends his or her time is not judged.<sup>62</sup> The ROWE workplace is inspired to some extent by the demands of the Millennial workforce. So it may be that the Millennials will be able to bring about important workplace changes that eluded the Boomers. In our own

59. RIKLEEN, *supra* note 24, at 140.

60. That technology should free us from drudgery is nothing new, of course. John Maynard Keynes, in an essay called *Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren*, predicted in 1930 that we should be working fifteen-hour weeks by now. John Maynard Keynes, *Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren* (1930), <http://www.econ.yale.edu/smith/econ116a/keynes1.pdf>.

Bertrand Russell, in a 1932 essay entitled *In Praise of Idleness*, made this point:

Suppose that at a given moment a certain number of people are engaged in the manufacture of pins. They make as many pins as the world needs, working (say) eight hours a day. Someone makes an invention by which the same number of men can make twice as many pins as before. But the world does not need twice as many pins: pins are already so cheap that hardly any more will be bought at a lower price. In a sensible world everybody concerned in the manufacture of pins would take to working four hours instead of eight, and everything else would go on as before. But in the actual world this would be thought demoralizing. The men still work eight hours, there are too many pins, some employers go bankrupt, and half the men previously concerned in making pins are thrown out of work. There is, in the end, just as much leisure as on the other plan, but half the men are totally idle while half are still overworked. In this way it is insured that the unavoidable leisure shall cause misery all round instead of being a universal source of happiness. Can anything more insane be imagined?

Bertrand Russell, *In Praise of Idleness*, HARPER'S MAG., Oct. 1934, at 553.

61. RIKLEEN, *supra* note 24, at 141.

62. ROWE: RESULTS-ONLY WORK ENVIRONMENT, <http://gorowe.com> (last visited on Jan. 24, 2016).

case, this ultimately was a nonissue since the Millennial demonstrated flexibility and willingness to put in the hours required to accomplish a task. In fact, within her first weeks the Millennial volunteered to work extra hours to help the Boomer complete a long, tedious assignment for which the Boomer remains grateful.

### Feedback

¶54 *Renee*: In the past, the Boomer's approach to training a new librarian has been to give the new librarian a task, give the overarching guidelines for how to do the task including the resources to consider, and walk away, giving the new librarian "space" to do her job. The Boomer might also throw the new librarian "into the Reference fray," letting her have the satisfaction that comes from facing an issue on her own and finding a solution to it.

¶55 Any article one reads about Millennials makes it clear that they are uncomfortable with a hands-off approach. A Millennial is going to want more input as she goes along; and, when the job is completed, she is going to want a critique of the work product as soon as possible, perhaps even as the work progresses. Moreover, a Millennial is not going to want to be thrown into any situation for which she is not prepared.

¶56 This is another generational difference that can have serious implications for the workplace. As noted in *When Generations Collide*,

71% of top performers who received regular feedback were likely to stay on the job versus just 43% who didn't receive it. That means that even among peak performers, feedback plays a vital role in an employee's decision to stay in a job. Which means, of course, that quality of feedback, or lack of it, has a direct relationship to turnover.<sup>63</sup>

This statistic is relevant to our article because here is a generational difference that can have a very big impact on employee retention. Also, if the mentor is not able to give the kind of feedback that the mentee needs, misunderstanding may result; and misunderstanding, left unaddressed, can fester into irreconcilable differences.

¶57 *Liza*: From the Millennial's perspective, the need for feedback has less to do with hand-holding and more to do with a desire to produce quality work that's in line with the mission of a particular library. The desire for feedback is directly linked with the Millennial concern with efficiency; why waste hours on a project that will have to be completely revamped if a supervisor sees something he or she doesn't like? In reality, I think the feedback issue harks back to certain qualities of the Millennial upbringing. Due to helicopter parenting, we *are* looking for a lot of feedback and a certain amount of direction, but we also are independent and outspoken because we've been told from a young age that our opinions mattered.

¶58 We may also be more collaborative than older members of the workforce. How much of this issue is a generational difference and how much is due to the constant collaboration Millennials grew up with in a networked world is hard to say. I definitely think I'm a fan of dialogue—of talking out problems as they arise instead of trying to predict them.

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63. LANCASTER & STILLMAN, *supra* note 11, at 264.

¶59 *Lesson*: The solution to this difference may actually take some changing on both sides. While it is possible for the Boomer to react to this as an excessive need for hand-holding, this reaction is neither helpful nor correct. This seems like an instance of a Boomer saying, “Why isn’t this person more like me?” and the underlying thought is that being “more like me” also means being somehow “better.” There is no harm in a Boomer being more aware that a Millennial would like more feedback or input throughout the mentoring or training process. On the other hand, perhaps the Millennial can be more self-aware of this need and realize that for some Boomers, providing feedback above and beyond what they are used to feels exhausting.

### Conclusion, or “The Real Purpose of This Article”

¶60 Recall that one of the tasks we set ourselves was to see how much of the difference between Millennials and Boomers was attributable to the typical feeling that the upcoming generation does not measure up to the standards of the elders. We did discover some of that, but more importantly, we discovered that certain concrete differences between the generations do need to be addressed. The good news is that just talking about these potential issues can dissipate their power over us.

¶61 Unexpectedly, we also found that some characteristics that Boomers fault in Millennials are qualities that Boomers themselves are accused of possessing. For example, Millennials are famously accused of bringing an attitude of entitlement to the workplace, but Boomers are also often labeled an “entitled bunch.”<sup>64</sup> And while much is made of Millennials’ seeming inability to take on adult responsibilities, isn’t that just the other side of Boomers’ inability to accept their own aging?<sup>65</sup>

¶62 Here we come full circle from Chiorazzi’s emphasis on mentoring in law librarianship to ask our own questions: how can established librarians mentor and train new librarians if they don’t understand them? How can common ground be found if the relationship is fraught with misperceptions? It would be so easy for established librarians to squash the enthusiasm and optimism of the incoming group by over-reliance on routines and requirements that daily lose their relevance. The rush to judgment is equally unhelpful. Observers of the workplace have come to unhelpful predictions about the Millennials. Consider the following: “Many Boomer managers believe the concept of a work ethic will die with them (meaning with the Boomers.)”<sup>66</sup> That seems a little bombastic. In any event, we wonder if working hard, even to the extent of robbing time from family and friends, is really the virtue we have made it out to be.

¶63 We advocate individual efforts as the starting point to increase our knowledge about each generation. We particularly recommend four books used in researching this article: *When Generations Collide* and *The M-Factor*, both by Lynne

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64. TAYLOR, *supra* note 33, at 24; *see also* STEINHORN, *supra* note 25, at 44 (stating “as the world now knows, what’s on the Boomers’ minds is themselves and their riveting encounters with the routine phases of life”).

65. *See supra* ¶ 17.

66. MARSTON, *supra* note 13, at xxii.



C. Lancaster and David Stillman; *You Raised Us—Now Work With Us* by Lauren Stiller Rikleen; and *The Next America* by Paul Taylor. We have found that greater knowledge breeds humor, a welcome quality in any workplace. Liza loves to point out when Renee reverts to Boomer behavior, for example, by saying things that equate to “let’s put our nose to the grindstone and work really hard to get this done.” Conversely, Renee loves to tell Liza that a job particularly well done will surely earn Liza a trophy. We are also the first to admit that even after all our research, we can still fall into unhelpful or polarizing behaviors. But that doesn’t mean we will stop trying to get it right.

¶64 In addition to being better colleagues, mentors, mentees, trainers, and trainees, familiarity with each other’s point of view is becoming an economic necessity. With the workforce soon to be dominated by Millennials, all efforts to understand what motivates this generation will go a long way to ensure their workplace loyalty and stability. Conversely, Millennials’ understanding toward non-Millennial co-workers will perhaps help them to wear their “largest generation” status with grace. The health of our profession depends in part on taking measures now to ensure our roles going forward as effective mentors and trainers.