



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Critical Career Junctures that Direct the Career Life-Cycle of Young Careerists

A publication of Business and Professional Women's Foundation

BPW Foundation's new issue brief discusses the challenges of today's workplace, which is a mosaic of different generations—each at a different point in the career life-cycle. This brief focuses on the critical issues faced by young careerists, defined by BPW Foundation as workers between 21–35 years of age. Three generations are examined in this report:

- Young careerists of the *Millennial generation* (Generation Y) are at the beginning of their career life-cycle, typically either working towards post-graduate degrees or working in their first jobs in their chosen field.
- Young careerists of *Generation X* are firmly established in the middle of their career life-cycle, and they are beginning to take on greater personal and familial responsibilities outside the workplace.
- *Baby Boomers* are on the brink of moving from mid- to upper-level management or are beginning to retire. They are often responsible for raising children and caring for aging parents, as well. As managers and employers, Baby Boomers are important to consider in relation to young careerists because they are instrumental in mentoring younger employees, making decisions about workplace flexibility options and shaping workplace environments.

During an individual's career life-cycle, four critical junctures shape the direction of the career path:

- Education
- Employment
- Gender Roles and Caregiving Status
- Generational Issues

This issue brief presents the ways in which these critical moments affect the career advancement and work-life balance of Millennials, Generation Xers and Baby Boomers. Academic experiences mold one's career direction and first jobs form the entryway to a career path. Decisions about field, industry and professional roles also set the stage for a young employee's entire career. Early personal choices made by young careerists, such as having children, can also exert long-term affects on employment. External factors, including gender issues, generational differences and caregiving status, further determine the topography of opportunities and experiences in the workplace, affecting the freedoms, successes and obstacles that young careerists may encounter.

Understanding the impact of workers' choices made throughout the spectrum of their career is essential if society is to successfully promote wage equity and workplace equality, thereby increasing women's lifetime earning potential and subsequently advancing the opportunities and improving the standard of life for women and their families.

Each generation has different needs in the workplace coinciding with where they are in their career life-cycle. Research suggests that workplaces are not addressing these specific needs, offering only a "one size fits all" approach in the form of work-life effectiveness initiatives.

Workplaces must equip themselves with policies and programs that will both attract and retain highly skilled young careerists, accommodating their diverse roles as individuals and caregivers outside the workplace. In addition, American public policy must shift to acknowledge and advocate for these changes, facilitating wide-spread recognition of biases, inequalities and systemic issues, thereby pressuring organizations to actively bring about change. This will subsequently heighten the personal and professional satisfaction of both young careerists and more seasoned employees, thereby enhancing the overarching productivity and success of their workplaces and organizations.



In 1956, BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S FOUNDATION became the first research and education institution of national scope solely dedicated to issues that affect workingwomen. BPW Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable, educational, national organization.

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