

# BOOMERMAG

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REWIRE YOUR BABY BOOMERS:  
10 TIPS TO MOTIVATE YOUR 50-SOMETHINGS

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CHAPTER//002

BY DEVON SCHEEF AND DIANE THIELFOLDT





**REWIRE YOUR  
BABY BOOMERS:  
TEN TIPS TO  
MOTIVATE YOUR  
50-SOMETHINGS**

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## Is your organization taking Boomers for granted?

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**A**re you focusing attention only on younger workers and letting your Boomers self-manage? The Boomer portion of our workforce has been assaulted with layoff concerns, sandwiched families and deferred retirement. Boomers, who make up roughly one-third of the U.S. workforce, have been shown to be the least engaged and most actively disengaged generation working today.

**Rewire Your Baby Boomers** shares research from The Learning Cafe on the issue of Boomer motivation, what engages -- and turns off -- Boomers at work. We offer eleven practical tips to respect and motivate the generation that continues to bring value and expertise to our workplace.

- Why Focus on Boomers?
- Who are the Boomers?
- Fact and Fiction
- Boomer Drivers of Engagement
- Boomer Demotivators
- 10 Tips to Rewire Boomers

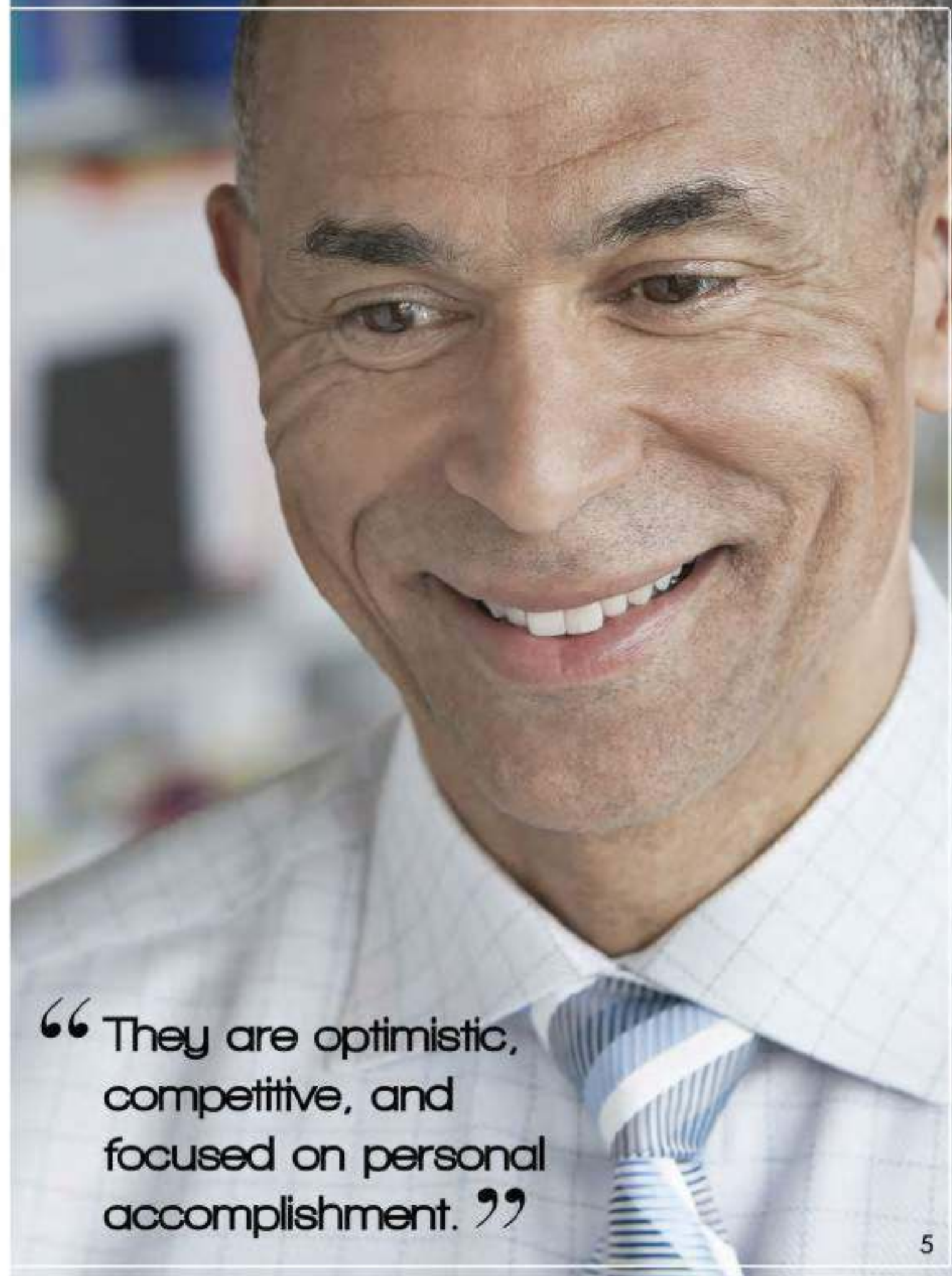
## Why Focus on Boomers?

**B**aby Boomers comprise 37% of the US workforce (and more in many industries), and they are the least engaged and most actively disengaged generation in the workforce. Given that Boomers may be in the workplace long past the traditional retirement age, a targeted effort to raise their engagement levels could have a very positive impact on your organization. Boomers are the most likely of all generations to hold management positions, making it even more important for organizations to understand and motivate this generation. It's critical to know that this lack of Boomer involvement or engagement is not fatal.

It's partly due to the fact that they have been working for a long time – length of service is a barometer for engagement (at all ages). Boomers often have full lives outside of work. These obligations can detract from their commitment to work. And, it's easier for employers to overlook the needs of older employees for training and job enrichment support.

Instead of retiring your Boomers, try rewiring them.

**▶ 37%**  
PERCENTAGE OF BOOMERS WHO  
COMPRISE THE WORKFORCE.



“They are optimistic, competitive, and focused on personal accomplishment.”



## Who are the boomers?

The first step in rewiring your Boomers is to understand who they are as a generation, and how the events and experiences of their time shaped who they are today. With those insights, you can then best engage them as productive, valuable contributors to your organization.

Born between 1946 and 1964, Boomers have been on the world stage since infancy. They were Time Magazine's Person of the Year in 1966. Boomers have redefined everything from social values, politics, economics, corporations, the environment to the media.

**B**aby Boomers were raised in traditional families amid post WW II prosperity and Cold War threat. For the first time, almost every family had a car and a TV, enabling the growth of suburbs and mass media – both of which helped define the Boomer experience: Cold War, Civil Rights, JFK, Moon Landing, Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, Women's Liberation, and Woodstock. Boomers came of age during a time of social unrest, civil rights, new frontiers; a time of novelty and experimentation, a culture of unlimited possibility.

Ambitious, Boomers came into the workplace and created the rules that many companies play by. Many define themselves by their career, their profession, the work they do. They are optimistic, competitive, and focused on personal accomplishment. They continue to work hard, often times waiting for younger generations to pick up this traditional approach to work.

Understanding how Boomers feel about their work and careers, and implementing ways to “rewire” them can have a tremendous impact on their performance.

## Fact or Fiction

Let's begin by exploring a few myths and misconceptions about the Boomers.



### **Fact or Fiction: Boomers retire early.**

*Fiction.* About two-thirds of Boomers know what they want to do when they reach retirement age. And it's not retire. Whether to build up depleted savings, repay additional debt incurred during the last economic downturn, wait for their portfolios to recover lost value or they simply prefer working – Baby Boomers will be a part of the workforce for many years to come. Many Boomers plan to maintain an active and purposeful lifestyle when they reach retirement age and 72% plan to work part or full time after 65.

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Only 11% plan to stop working at 65.

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### **Fact or Fiction: Boomers are married empty nesters, so you can count on them to keep working a 40-50 hour week.**

*Fiction.* Only 25% of Boomers are married empty nesters. Thirty-seven percent still have children under 18 at home and 33% are single. Boomer families may include three or four generations as they continue to raise children and grandchildren, and care for aging parents.

### **Fact or Fiction: Boomers are the "me" generation. Meaning, it's all about "me."**

*Fiction.* Boomers are the "we" generation. Seventy percent say they have a responsibility to make the world a better place. Fifty-seven percent buy from companies that give back to their communities. Many volunteer. They vote and are politically active.

### **Fact or Fiction: Boomers are tech challenged. They can't be trained and they won't be successful adapting to new technology.**

*Fiction.* Boomers are not tech challenged. They were in the workforce during the evolution of computers, email and the internet. They bank online, game, send instant messages, text, use social media, download music and stream movies. They run their homes (and their calendars) from their smart phones. While some Boomers may not love technology, others are early adopters.

### **Fact or Fiction: Boomers have stopped learning. So how will we teach them anything new at work?**

*Fiction.* Boomers are a learning industry, valuing personal growth and continuous learning. Boomers built the self-help industry – defining themselves by their personal and professional accomplishments. For many Boomers, knowledge is power.

### **Fact or Fiction: Boomers are workaholics.**

*Fiction.* Sort of. Boomers have internalized a strong work ethic. They equate work and position with self-worth. This generation extended the work year by one full month. Now, many are committing to a slower or more flexible work pace. Sandwiched between raising children, taking care of aging parents and a significant commitment to work, many are eager to find creative ways to simplify their lives.



## Boomer Drivers of **ENGAGEMENT**

With the knowledge and expertise baby boomers possess, organizations that leverage the strength and skill sets of this generation will experience sustained success long after these professionals retire. Understanding what motivates (and demotivates) them is critical to helping them rewire. The Learning Café's research reveals the following top four drivers of Boomer engagement.

### **1. Provide challenging work and encourage them to discover the challenge in their work.**

To continue feeling challenged, Boomers must see their work as meaningful and contributing to the organization. Boomers enjoy expanding their abilities and participating in projects that can gain them recognition. They want to know how their projects and tasks fit and how their productivity makes a difference to the success of the organization.

### **2. Making a difference.**

Many Boomers are returning to their generational roots of social contribution and change. With maturing careers and a keen social sense, many Boomers are motivated to give back, locally and globally. They are looking beyond their immediate surroundings. At work, this may translate into seeking renewed meaning in their jobs, or thinking about the next chapter. Outside of work, they are giving back to their communities with their time and their resources.

### **3. Boomers expect to be noticed and appreciated.**

They want their managers to recognize them as people beyond the work assignment. Also, Boomers want and expect their work ethic and dedication to be appreciated by their managers and the organization.

### **4. Create an environment that is both productive and fun.**

Baby Boomers work too hard and need help lightening up. This generation believes they should be at their desks all day, every day and those are long days. For many Boomers, the number of hours worked is still a badge of honor. They appreciate having a bit of fun in the workplace, but they need permission to take a break.

# Boomer DEMOTIVATORS

It's equally important to know what causes Boomers to disconnect, be unhappy, dissatisfied, disengaged or ineffective.

## 1. Lack of appreciation, respect or recognition.

Boomers do not want to be labeled as aging and see any such labeling as disrespectful. It is better to focus on their skills and accomplishments than their seniority. In addition, they have worked hard – often 60 to 70 hour weeks and they want recognition and appreciation expressed for this investment.

## 2. Bad Boss.

Tied to their need for recognition, Boomers want a boss who acknowledges they have worked hard and earned their stripes, a boss who appreciates their expertise. For Boomers who personalize their work, a bad boss may also be someone with whom they simply do not get along.

## 3. It is crucial to give this generation independence at work.

This means giving them autonomy and accountability to define projects, create plans, implement changes and produce their own results. Give Boomers specific goals but also great autonomy over how to achieve those goals. Organizations and managers may need to let go. Micromanaging is neither necessary nor preferred. Ask yourself: do you know when to let go?

## 4. Boredom, no challenge.

Boomers are more likely than younger generations to have worked for the same company for years, but that does not mean they want to do the same tasks repeatedly. They too seek new challenges. Provide them with opportunities to tackle new projects, take on new assignments and build on existing core skills.

**Now knowing who Boomers are, what motivates (and demotivates them), let's discuss what you and your organization can do.**



## Ten Tips to REWIRE BOOMERS

It begins with you. If you want to keep your Boomers productive, motivated and inspired you may have to create a workplace where conventional assumptions about job descriptions, how work gets done, hours, pay, benefits, and so on go out the window. Why does it matter? We know that employees who are engaged tend to remain loyal, are more productive, incur fewer healthcare costs, take fewer days off, and share knowledge and skills.

1

Acknowledge  
and Appreciate

2

Subject Matter  
Mentors

3

Give a  
"Time Out"

4

Flex

5

Teach and  
Learn

6

Job Redo

7

Give to Get

8

Change it Up

9

Networking

10

The 3rd Chapter





## Acknowledge and Appreciate

Respect and honor Boomers as individuals with unique talents, and let them know that their contributions are appreciated. Boomers are motivated by feeling valued and needed.

At least once a month, make sure you tell Boomers they count – tell them why and how their work is significant. More than any other generation – knowing that their supervisor cares strongly influences Boomers' performance. Schedule lunch dates and invite them to select the restaurant, and then simply take the time to get to know them better.

Acknowledge their expertise with titles and authority commensurate with their responsibility – position and power still

matter to many Boomers.

Identify Boomers as “designated experts.” Acknowledge their “expert” role and encourage learners to turn to them for advice. Acknowledge Boomers' role as legacy leavers – inventory your department's most critical knowledge and skills – who are the keepers of this information, the masters of critical skill sets? Most often your Boomers. Invite some of your newer employees to learn from the experts by shadowing them and recording their instructions and insights.



## Six Minute Celebrations

It's easy to get caught up in making deadlines and getting the job done. Once a week take six minutes to review recent accomplishments. Congratulate your Boomer on work well done.



## Subject Matter Mentors

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**Y**ou are familiar with Boomers in the role of Subject Matter Expert (SME). Boomers can also fill the role of Subject Matter Mentors. Pair their expertise with a desire to find meaning and you have mentoring potential. Put your Boomers in teaching roles as formal (and informal) mentors, informal job coaches, orienteers for new hires, buddies for newer employees, or "on call" complex problem solvers for continuous improvement teams.

Ask Boomers to document their knowledge and skills and serve as subject matter mentors for new hires or employees with less experience. Ask them to share their checklists, quick start guides, tips, tricks and templates – tools they have created to accomplish a task.

Consider apprenticeships – two days a week pair boomers (Masters) and Millennials (Apprentices) to learn on-the-job with supervision and immediate feedback. Your Boomers will be teaching younger workers about the business, leadership and life. Their expertise could be the most powerful on-the-job training for your other employees.

To capture the learning, you could use Google Hangouts to record a video or Google Docs to take notes that can be edited collaboratively. Post instructional or teaching videos on YouTube. Build an internal Q&A Forum like Yahoo Answers to let anyone ask questions and have the Boomers answer.



## Give a "Time-Out"

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**O**ffer a working "time out", time off for work well done, a break in the form of a short trip to a conference, a visit to a critical supplier or key customer – leverage Boomer experience and expertise. Encourage (or allow) Boomers to attend conferences and participate in associations. Boomers enjoy networking and maintaining their professional connections with peers. Set expectations about what they bring back to the team.

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### Encourage personal and professional development

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Consider sabbaticals so Boomers can give back and pursue personal passions. Offer unpaid time off, releasing Boomers for community projects or charitable interests.

Schedule Power Down Days. On Power Down Days Boomers must delegate tasks to team members. They cannot do any tasks that team members can effectively handle. Pay attention to how work gets done and what gets accomplished.

Even if your company doesn't offer formal programs, ask yourself how you can find a way to make a time-out work for your department or team.

“Flexibility is about thinking differently.”



## Flex

Promote a culture of flexibility. Offer flexible time so Boomers can attend school activities, sporting events, or participate in medical appointments with parents.

Extend the same considerations to Boomer caregivers. Many Boomers juggle aging parents and growing children with a significant time commitment to work. Provide flexibility with alternative work arrangements, part-time work, reduced hours, compressed work week, job sharing, and working from home.

Flexibility isn't only about working fewer hours – it's also about working differently. You probably have newer or less experienced employees who would benefit from job shadowing or doing a rotation with a tenured expert.

The length of time will vary but plan on at least 90 days. At the end of the time encourage your Boomer to shift some work tasks to the newer employee, freeing up the Boomer's time for personal or professional pursuits.

Flexibility is also about thinking differently. Appoint a Baby Boomer to the Maverick Thinker role. Encourage team members to spend time with the Maverick Thinker; someone who has an interesting, thought-provoking or atypical view about an important topic. Discuss the differing opinions.

## Teach and Learn

The Boomer quest for a better self is legendary. Give Boomers opportunities to learn, grow and develop. Forty-one percent of Boomers say they are keeping their job skills up-to-date. Staying on top of their professions is especially important as Boomers seek to remain competitive and viable in their organizations -- and the job market.

Food Works! Offer Lunch and Learns or Brown Bags where Boomers can teach or learn. Create an informal, social setting keeping in mind that the expert may be a Boomer and or someone quite a bit younger.

Career Chutes & Ladders – ask Boomers to lead career discussions

about career paths and options at your company. Discuss the “must have” assignments for an internal resume.

If your organization has multiple locations, initiate a Traveling Masters program – with expert Boomers as both teachers and learners.



## Job Redo

Boomers want autonomy, a sense of meaning and a chance to learn new things. Redesign jobs to keep Boomers challenged, use their valuable skills and pick up new skills. Look for opportunities to shift Boomer work to be more collaborative and/or project based.

Boomers also value time with Senior Leaders. Arrange for a senior manager to have lunch or a meeting with your Boomers. Discuss industry trends, the future outlook or projections for the company. Tap Boomer insight about the industry, the business, and ask them to talk about their own lessons learned. Discuss and ask Boomers to lead a similar discussion for your less tenured employees.



## Give to Get

Boomers value personal growth, social involvement, making a meaningful contribution and making a difference. Make extra effort to include Boomers on committees concerned with philanthropic activities. Provide opportunities to participate with a favored charitable organization or even emergency preparedness.

Find ways for their expertise and skills to be used to contribute outside of work in your community – a loaned leader or executive or subject matter expert to a school or not-for-profit.

Encourage your Boomers to lead efforts that support your local community or the charity of their choice -- build a Habitat for Humanity house, support a food bank for a day, adopt a school. Perhaps your organization can match their charitable contribution.

## Change It Up

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**B**oomers value "shaking things up," trying it a different way. The antidote to boredom is to keep it fresh. Provide ample opportunity to try new assignments, to build on existing core skills and develop new ones.

To freshen up routine jobs, implement Annual Spring Switch. Boomers and Millennials for example switch jobs for a day, a week, a month. When the switch is done, bring the people who traded jobs together and find out what they learned. Is this worth doing more often than once a year?

Mix old and new responsibilities: Job rotations, shorter job swaps, special assignments, task forces, projects, international travel. Think of cross training as CrossFit for the mind.

Team a Boomer and Millennial and put the pair in charge of workplace climate. Ask them to lead efforts to lighten up. With so much time spent at work, no one wants to be tense all the time. Keep a sense of humor, laugh, party, celebrate successes and encourage friendships. Make the workplace more fun.

## Networking

Encourage enterprise networking – online communities to share documents, job details, knowledge profiles, best practices. Invite Boomers and Millennial employees to partner; Boomers taking the lead on creating the people connections and Millennials contributing social media and connection tools like Chatter.

Boomers attribute much of their success in the workplace to the relationships they've built. Boomers are networkers (clients, customers, colleagues) . . . how can you leverage that skill?

Ask yourself: are you sharing your network with your Boomers and encouraging them to grow their own network?

## The 3rd Chapter

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**B**oomers respect employers with established policies who treat their employees fairly. Their parents were from a generation that had a strong employer-employee commitment. This upbringing made it desirable for Boomers to work for companies that are loyal to their employees and value their years of hard work and dedication.

For Boomers thinking ahead to retirement, help them explore their next life chapter, provide career counseling, and financial resources to help them prepare and make an orderly transition out of your organization.

Keep in mind that many Boomers want opportunities for retirement and employment (part time, consulting, free agents.) Boomers approaching the traditional retirement age either cannot afford to stop working or feel that their lives may be less fulfilling without work. They are interested in an active retirement or flexible, part time work arrangements. Employers should take advantage of this mindset and tap into their experience and skill sets on a flexible basis.

And one additional tip....

When in Doubt, ASK



This may be the top tip. When in doubt ask because most of all, motivation is personal and individual. "Baby Boomers are extremely hardworking and motivated by position, perks, and prestige. Baby Boomers relish long work weeks and define themselves by their professional accomplishments." Baby Boomer J.R. Kimmerly describes his own experience well: J.R. says he has been working for as long as he can remember. "I've always had a sense to accomplish something; I always wanted to learn more," he says. "I was raised to believe that if I wanted anything I had to work for it. I had to earn it." J.R. — like many Baby Boomers — attaches a sense of pride and purpose to his job.

"I was raised to believe that if I wanted anything I had to work for it. I had to earn it."

The wise boss or peer inquires about each Boomer's personal motivation – do you know if your Boomers are satisfied or enthusiastic about their work, projects, colleagues, reputation, and development? When in doubt ask each of your Boomers what inspires them. Make your conversations count. Not sure how to get started? The following Conversation Starters are designed to launch a discussion with your Boomers to learn more about what motivates them.

## Conversation Starters

What initially attracted you to our organization and your current role? To what degree does it still apply?

What are your favorite parts of your job?

What about our culture is satisfying and motivating to you? Less motivating?

How and by whom do you like to be acknowledged for a job well done?

What about your job makes you jump out of bed in the morning? Hit the snooze alarm?

What's important to you in a relationship with your manager? Your co-workers?

Don't take Boomers for granted. Use these tips to retain, engage and inspire the Boomers – our valuable, expertise-rich generation.

# The Learning Café

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## WE TURN POTENTIAL INTO PERFORMANCE

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The Learning Café creates fast, flexible, winning solutions for talent development. Our areas of expertise include growing leaders, mentoring, personal branding, bridging the generation gap at work, and creating inspiring events. We consult, create, facilitate, speak and research.

Our presentations, training materials and learning experiences have provoked thought, changed behavior and educated thousands of managers and employees in a dozen industries and over 100 organizations.



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### OUR AREAS OF EXPERTISE:

- Multi-generational workforce
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- Creating inspiring events