

# Reskilling is key to thriving in a multi-generational workforce

 By [Amy Johnson](#)

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If you're a veteran in the workplace, you have most likely referred to "the good old days" at least once in the latter course of your career. It's not uncommon to nostalgically reminisce about a golden age in your life or career, however, idealists must be aware of the potential pitfalls with this line of thinking. The marketplace is changing, and workers must adapt and innovate to meet the demand for new skills. This doesn't mean that the older generation of employees are on the out and out or, worse yet, being replaced by the younger, tech-savvier Generation Y employees. It simply means that new skills must be acquired.

## The four generations of workers

The current workforce is defined by four distinctive generations, each characterised by a different set of core values, work ethic and motivational drive:

1. **The Veterans** were born between the years 1922 and 1945. This generation's core values include respect for authority, conformity and discipline. The majority of veterans come from traditional nuclear families. They believe that education is a dream, see work as an obligation and have a strong sense of duty. The communication style of the Veteran generation is characterised by the formal memo.
2. **The Baby Boomers** were born between the years 1946 and 1964. This generation's core values include optimism and involvement. Many Baby Boomers come from family situations that were disintegrating. They believe that education is their birthright, see work as an exciting adventure and are typically viewed as workaholics who desire quality and work efficiently. The communication style of the Baby Boomer generation is characterised by face-to-face interactions.
3. **Generation X** individuals were born between the years 1965 and 1980. This generation's core values include scepticism, a desire for fun and an informal approach to work and life. Those from Generation X are often referred to as the "latch-key kids" since they frequently returned home to an empty house because their parents were working. They believe that education is their way to getting where they want to be, view work as a difficult challenge, and are generally sceptical and self-reliant in this regard. The communication style of Generation X is characterised by direct, immediate interactions.
4. **Generation Y individuals were born between the years 1981 and 2000. This**

generation's core values include realism, confidence, a desire for fun and a craving for social interactions. Generation Y individuals typically come from merged families. They believe that education is an incredible expense, view work as a means to an end, and are generally good at multitasking, looking ahead and being goal oriented. The communication style of Generation Y is characterised by immediate digital interactions -email, sms, social networking and the like.

The same rules apply across the generations

The four generations described above make up our current workforce and, while these descriptions do not claim to capture the ethos of each generation entirely, it is good to have an overview of the different values and mindsets that you may encounter in the workplace. It's not uncommon to find yourself in a team with a member from each generation. The ingredient that should bind everyone together is respect for the different skills that each individual brings. While Generation Y employees may be more flexible and tech-savvy, The Baby Boomers are still obsessed with quality and can be counted on to see a project through to its end.

The problem that many workers from the older generation face, however, is acquiring skills that were not taught in a traditional educational set-up. But this is not to say that many Generation Y individuals aren't faced with the same problem. The majority of South African schools still cling to rigid syllabuses that teach Biology, History, Maths and Science, and make barely any allowances for subjects that could lead to careers in newer fields such as graphic design, software development, photography and blogging, to name a few.

## Developments in online education

Fortunately, developments in online education are addressing these societal needs by offering short courses aimed at working professionals. The impetus is to see people acquire relevant skills that can be applied immediately in evolving work situations. You may not have matriculated or graduated with any business knowledge, but it's now possible to acquire a certificate in small business management by taking an online short course. With the rise of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) through learning platforms like [Coursera](#), [Udacity](#) and [edX](#), personal development can be pursued for free, through some of the most reputable Universities in the world.

In terms of locally-based online training institutions, GetSmarter is the leader in its field. Offering courses that result in a certificate through the University of Cape Town, GetSmarter courses differ from MOOCs in that they offer a personalised learning experience online, with individual feedback on assignment tasks. Courses in as far-ranging fields as Financial Management, Social Media, Internet Marketing and Bookkeeping are based on continuous assessment and offer practical skills that are relevant in today's workplace. GetSmarter's 2013 Career Guide has been well-received since its release in January, having been featured in The Star newspaper as well as several other online platforms. Dealing with the real-world challenges faced in the 21st century world of work, this is an invaluable resource for job seekers and working professionals looking to add to their skill set. The 2013 GetSmarter career guide is freely available on the company's [website](#).

## ABOUT AMY JOHNSON

Amy Johnson is an Academic Officer at online education company, GetSmarter, which presents a portfolio of over 30 online part-time short courses to working professionals throughout South Africa. Amy is the principle content writer for the University of Cape Town Social Media short course. Find out more at [www.GetSmarter.co.za](http://www.GetSmarter.co.za) or follow @getting\_smarter on Twitter.

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