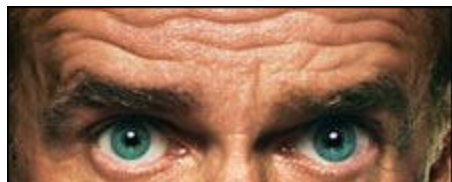




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**ASK ANNIE**  
Do Gen Xers Balance Work and Life Differently?

If you're a manager (or co-worker) trying to figure out what makes Gen Xers tick, a new study on their attitudes toward careers and families may shed some light.

By [Anne Fisher](#)

Let's say you're a baby-boom generation manager (age 40 to 58), and you've got a team of people in their late 20s to late 30s working for you—or, heck, maybe you report to one of them. Does it puzzle you when a 30-year-old employee with a great track record and a stellar future goes out on maternity leave—and decides not to come back full time, opting for part-time work instead? Or when a Gen X dad asks for more time off—a lot more—to spend with his family? Would you be surprised to know that Gen Xers as a group are more likely to contribute to their companies' 401(k) plans than are boomers? (Just 22% of boomers pay into a 401(k), while 29% of Gen Xers do.) Did you know that Gen Xers are, or would like to be, far more loyal employees than their older counterparts? Only 23% of boomers say they want to work for the same company until they retire, but almost half—47%—of Gen Xers voice that hope.

These findings come from a fascinating study by Boston-based



Anne Fisher

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marketing strategy firm Reach Advisors (<http://www.reachadvisors.com>).

In an effort to figure out how advertisers can most effectively woo Gen Xers who are raising families, the researchers polled 3,000 of them. "We found significant differences between parents from Generation X, born between 1965 and 1979, and their postwar-baby-boom counterparts," says Reach Advisors principal James Chung, who ran the study. "With both attitudes and actions, Generation Xers demonstrate that their families take extreme priority. Their staunch commitment to family and family time is striking. Instead of trying to fit family into their work life, Gen X parents are more likely to fit work into their family life." Growing up in an era that saw the simultaneous rise of two-income families and divorce rates, Chung adds: "This is a generation that is rethinking how to raise their own families. Boomers defined 'having it all' as not only having a career and a family but also literally having a lot of stuff. But Gen Xers in large numbers are forgoing a dual-income lifestyle—meaning they are spending their time and money much differently than the previous generation."

One example: The study says that twice as many Gen X moms (25%) as boomer moms (12%) spend 12 hours a day or more on child-raising and household tasks. And 48% of Gen X dads say they spend three to six hours daily on those activities, compared to 39% of boomer dads. So who's happier? "Since Generation X parents are working less and spending more time with their kids, you'd think they'd be happy about it. But they aren't," says Chung. "Gen X parents told us they are dissatisfied with the amount of time they spend on family. The dads in particular wish they could spend even more time on the home front." While only 28% of Gen X papas are happy with the amount of time they devote to family, 41% of boomer dads are, even though the time they put in is less.

Although more than half the mothers from both generations are working outside the home, the Census Bureau has noted a decline in the number of women returning to work within a year of having a baby; and, since 2000, the number of families with a single income-earner has grown sharply. "Our survey indicates that Gen X moms are more likely than boomer moms to expect to weave in and out of the workforce over time," says Chung. "The currency of highest value for them is family time, meaning significant amounts of time. The phrase 'quality time' may be disappearing."

But that family-first, career-second approach appears to carry a financial penalty. Gen Xers "are struggling with debt," Chung notes. "Even though many Americans are funding their dreams by

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assuming more debt, Generation Xers are less comfortable with their level of debt than are boomers." The problem isn't just student loans, which many Gen Xers are still paying off. Because of the run-up in real-estate prices, Gen Xers' housing debt is 62% higher than it was for boomers at the same age. Overall, according to the U.S. General Accounting Office, Gen Xers' total debt levels are a staggering 78% higher than was the case for boomers at comparable ages; and Gen Xers are almost twice as likely to have a negative net worth than were their baby-boom counterparts. Gen Xers also "have less confidence in secure employment prospects and feel less certain about their financial futures," says Chung. "No wonder their debt level makes them anxious."

As a result, Gen Xers are relatively frugal. "Bragging rights have changed," Chung says. "It's no longer about signaling how much one paid for something, it's all about how much one saved, even among wealthier families. Sharing word about savings is actually a means for this generation to signal their savvy to those around them."

What does it all mean in the workplace? Well, for one thing, less of the 70-hour-a-week, driven ambition that boomers know and love (or, love to hate), and more requests for time off—but also a well-founded preoccupation with making ends meet. Smart companies that want to keep these folks won't skimp on raises.

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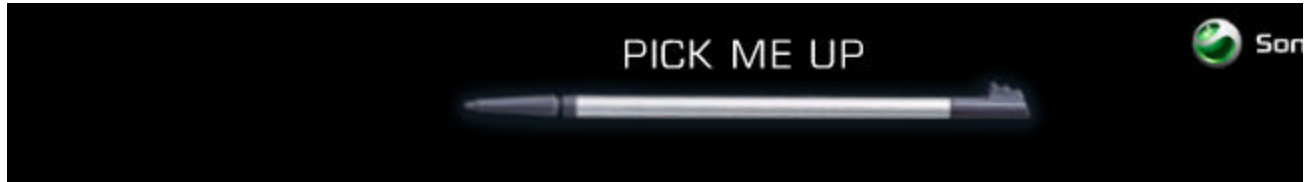
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