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Consultant is evangelist for new generation of HR

Washington Business Journal - by [Jennifer Nycz-Conner](#) Staff Reporter

Parents calling the boss of their 23-year-old to ask why the kid didn't get a good performance review. Younger workers feeling put off by older supervisors who seem annoyed when asked for feedback. Baby boomers who can't understand the nerve of a new hire who thinks flextime is to be expected, not earned.

Those are just a few of the generational knots that Shira Harrington wants to help human resources professionals untangle and retie to bind workers together with a better understanding of what drives each age group.

To 36-year-old Harrington, a senior recruiting consultant for placement firm **Positions Inc.**, a training initiative that helps workers better understand generational differences is the diversity program that directly affects the most people. Regardless of color, creed or gender, everyone is part of a generation.

Talking about generations has become Harrington's calling. It started when she saw Tom Davidson of Kinesis International in Richmond speak on the subject in 2000. Harrington had been noticing that employees of different age groups couldn't seem to understand one another and, suddenly, the friction made sense.

"Something clicked," she says.

Harrington progressed from disciple to preacher when Davidson's schedule couldn't accommodate a presentation for The Ritz-Carlton and he asked her to pinch hit in 2005.

She has been trumpeting ways to break down the generational barriers ever since, and her speaking



Joanne S. Lawton

My generation: Thirty-something Shira Harrington acts as a bridge between baby boomers and 20-somethings.

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circuit is expanding. Harrington has logged at least one presentation a month since January, with two in April.

During a recent lunchtime presentation to the American Association of Community Colleges in the District, Harrington took 24 of its 55 staffers on a time-traveling journey through the four generations now in the work force: World War II and Korean War veterans, the baby boomers, Generation X and the latest addition, known as the "millennials."

Harrington flew through a list of eight traits that differentiate the groups, ranging from technology to loyalty to the way they perceive rewards and recognition.

One of the most apparent is work style. For the nearly 80 million baby boomers, competition was a fact of their professional lives. Want to get ahead, move up the corporate ladder? Then you had to log the hours and out-compete your colleagues.

Now in charge, boomers are taking issue with the youngest workers. Their numbers are about the same, but the 20-somethings were raised on soccer trophies and teamwork, not cutthroat competition. They don't want work to be the center of their lives. So they ask for flexible schedules, the ability to telecommute and greater amounts of mentoring -- requests that baby boomer bosses find surprising and frustrating.

Harrington went into human resources because of a natural affinity for playing matchmaker. "I'm a connector of people," she says. "It's my whole life."

Now, her matchmaking extends into connecting generations and helping them better understand each other. Harrington is teaching a new work-life language, and like any good teacher she thrives on those singular, wide-eyed moments when the students suddenly understand and say, "Ah ha! This may be why you are behaving differently from me!"

E-mail: JNCONNER@bizjournals.com Phone: 703/258-0837

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