

## CHAPTER 4

# Baby Boomers

## I did it my way

### Baby Boomers (1946–1964)

“I’m 50 years old, but I think I’m 32.”

*Born in 1952, Susan grew up in suburban Philadelphia. During college, she protested the Vietnam War, became an ardent feminist, and thought she and her generation would save the messed-up world. Married with two college-age children, Susan works full time as a business manager for a multinational corporation. Outside of work, she goes to the gym and is a member of a book club, where she connects with good friends. Her management style is collaborative, and she enjoys leading her team. She works hard and can’t believe how addicted she has become to her BlackBerry.®*

Baby Boomers<sup>1</sup> are the largest U.S. generational cohort in history, with 76 to 80 million members, depending on how immigrants are counted. Boomers are the “pig in a python” generation who, because of their enormous numbers, have changed U.S. society at every stage of their lives. They are the first branded generation—before the Boomers, generations didn’t have names.

After World War II, the Boomers’ parents, the Traditionalists, were ready for a fresh start. Taking advantage of the new federal highway system, they moved out of the city, became commuters, and built new suburban communities for their families. They built elementary, junior high, and high schools for the huge number of Boomer children entering the system. In time, colleges and universities followed suit with their own building programs. When Boomers entered the workforce, management levels and layers grew to accommodate them.

The Boomers grew up in prosperous economic times. There were recessions but no serious hard times throughout the Boomers’ childhoods and early working years.

Boomers share many cultural memories based on television. When they were young, the family gathered to watch TV—all three channels. On Sunday nights they watched *Bonanza*, during the week they watched *Gunsmoke*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, and *Leave It to Beaver*. Boomers remember the NBC peacock signaling one of the wonders of the '60s—color television! Younger Boomers remember *All in the Family*, *The Brady Bunch*, *The Jeffersons*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and *M\*A\*S\*H*. Even now, many Boomers can sing the *Gilligan's Island* theme song and describe Steve Martin's arrow-through-the-head performance on *Saturday Night Live*.

Music is central to Boomers; perhaps it was one of the best things to come out of the '60s. Many people under the age of 70 (including Gen Y) have a head full of songs by Bob Dylan, Judy Collins, Diana Ross, Joni Mitchell, the Mamas and the Papas, Marvin Gaye, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and the Beach Boys.

The Boomers came of age in a turbulent time filled with social and civic upheaval and disillusionment with government and big institutions. Sex, drugs, and rock and roll were the signs

of the times, and the battle cry was “Don’t trust anyone over 30!” The introduction of the birth control pill in 1962 made “free love” a real possibility.

Boomers are optimistic, competitive, career-oriented, and focused on personal growth and fulfillment. A key difference between Boomers and earlier generations is their expectation of fulfillment in all areas of their lives. Having a good job or marriage isn’t enough—Boomers seek the best in careers, marriages, parenting relationships, friendships, spiritual lives, health,

### The Joneses

Some sociologists identify “the Joneses,” a subgroup of Baby Boomers born between 1955 and 1964. They share values, expectations, and work styles with earlier Boomers, but they didn’t experience the upheaval of the 1960s in the same way. They were in elementary school during the high times (so to speak) of Haight-Ashbury and Woodstock, and too young for the student protests. They missed the chaos and fear of the riots in 1968, when many Americans believed that the country was coming apart. In the words of one mid-Boomer, born in 1956:

*All the excitement was over by the time I got to college in 1974. We had depressing Watergate, the energy crisis during the Carter administration, the Beatles had broken up, and hippie life was almost passed. I always felt like I missed something.*

However, the Joneses share the older Boomers’ desire for personal growth and fulfillment, along with their optimistic outlook. In this book we include all Boomers in one group.

and wellness. It's exhausting, but they keep trying (case in point: a very high divorce rate). As we roll into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, therapists, life coaches, career coaches, and personal trainers are all ready to help yearning Boomers explore what's possible.

At work, Boomers are career focused, dedicated, and competitive. They work long hours, make family sacrifices, and move where the corporation sends them. They are team oriented and desire positive working relationships. Though their group as a whole is not as tech-savvy as younger generations, a core group of Boomers were early adopters, and most Boomers have used computers for decades. Most Boomers use e-mail constantly; executive and management Boomers are addicted to their BlackBerrys.<sup>®</sup>

As they near retirement age, Boomers are once again reinventing cultural norms. Making it clear that they have no intention of stopping working,<sup>2</sup> they want to do something different. Mature worker programs are flourishing, ideas about retirement and health care are being transformed, and Boomers are redefining what it means to age. They're pursuing the "what's next?" question with characteristic optimism and energy.

**Notable Baby Boomers**

- Hillary Clinton (b. 1947), U.S. senator from New York
- Richard Branson (b. 1950), business magnate
- Oprah Winfrey (b. 1954), media mogul, producer, philanthropist, actress
- Bill Gates (b. 1955), cofounder of Microsoft, philanthropist
- Steve Jobs (b. 1955), cofounder of Apple
- Indra Nooyi (b. 1955), CEO of PepsiCo
- Gregg Steinhafel (b. 1955), president of Target Corp.
- Mae Jemison (b. 1956), physician and former NASA astronaut
- Margaret Whitman (b. 1957), former CEO of e-Bay
- Katie Couric (b. 1957), television news anchor
- Andrea Jung (b. 1958), CEO of Avon Products, Inc.
- Conan O'Brian (b. 1963), humor writer, television host