



Leading Across Generations

For the first time in modern history, four generations are represented in the workplace, each with its own distinct set of values, characteristics and priorities. This intersection of generations in the workplace provides a unique opportunity to increase the productivity, creativity, problem solving and learning of a team when the differences between generations are harnessed as strengths.

Why is This Important?

As a leader, it is important to understand what motivates employees. Developing an understanding and appreciation of how generations differ can help you create higher-functioning teams and a more satisfying environment as it helps you address natural points of tension that emerge because of these differences.

Please note, these key characteristics are not meant to stereotype individuals based on their generational group. Instead, they are meant to provide awareness of differences between the generations to empower leaders and teams to communicate and interact more effectively in the workplace. Ultimately, getting to know each team member on an individual level will provide more insight on how to bring out the best in each of them. The following are key characteristics of each generational group and tips on how you can be more effective in managing and coaching your team.

The Four Generations in the Workplace

Generation Y (Born 1982 – 2002)

Members of this generation (also known as Millennials) crave work/life balance, and are entrepreneurial and goal-oriented. They respond well to continuous feedback and greatly benefit from very clear and specific work expectations.

Strengths:

- Good at multi-tasking
- Technologically-savvy
- Achievement-oriented
- Confident
- Global world-view
- Likes to have fun at work

Tips for Coaching Generation Y:

- Set ground rules early, particularly around technology usage
- Provide clear direction, support and regular feedback
- Provide people skills training
- Provide stimulation through a variety of roles in the team
- Show openness to their ideas
- Be flexible – find ways to allow them to pursue the activities they enjoy
- Involve them in decision-making

Generation X (Born 1961 – 1981)

These individuals are typically very independent and enjoy having freedom in the workplace. This generation appreciates the use of technology and prefers immediate feedback in the form of an email rather than holding meetings.

Strengths:

- Independent and likes autonomy
- Ambitious
- Adaptable
- Technologically literate
- Challenges the status quo

Tips for Coaching Generation X:

- Be approachable and encourage ideas
- Provide challenging and varied work
- Use performance-based rewards and promotion
- Take time to personally engage and acknowledge them individually for contributions
- Avoid micromanaging
- Maintain two-way communication. Gen Xers want to interact and participate in decision-making
- Help them see how their contributions achieve organization's goals
- Be prepared to be flexible to allow them to balance family and work responsibilities
- Provide regular feedback

Baby Boomers (Born 1943 – 1960)

Professional accomplishment, competition, and personal fulfillment are key characteristics of the Baby Boomer's ideal work environment. This generation prefers recognition in the form of monetary compensation or title recognition.

Strengths:

- Optimistic
- Dedicated and hardworking
- Good team players
- Respect for authority and hierarchal structure
- Experienced

Tips for Coaching Baby Boomers:

- Treat them as equals. Ask their opinion; don't direct
- Provide challenging and varied work assignments
- Provide public recognition for their contributions
- Show respect for their input, knowledge and experience
- Offer professional development opportunities
- Use them as mentors to transfer knowledge and experience to younger generations

Traditionalists (Born 1925 – 1944)

Traditionalists have a great respect for authority and pride themselves on being hard workers. This generation favors one-on-one communication and feedback only when necessary.

Strengths:

- Strong work ethic
- Experienced
- Disciplined
- Loyal
- Understands the “chain of command”
- Values tradition
- Avoids conflict

Tips for Coaching Traditionalists:

- Show respect for their experience
- Be honest, candid and direct
- Provide sufficient time and information regarding any upcoming changes
- Use them as mentors to transfer knowledge and experience to younger generations
- Provide recognition for their contributions
- Continue to offer development opportunities