Managing Generational Communication Differences in the Workplace: How to Be Most Effective and Productive

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Objectives

To thrive in today’s competitive marketplace, all the generations need to communicate successfully with each other as professionals. Our objectives today are to help you:

- Understand the differences in generational expectations
- Understand the differences in generational values and behaviors but don’t stereotype
- Understand the different communication styles
- Use the information gained to be more effective in the workplace
What is Different Now?

• This is the first time in American history there are four generations working side by side.

• The older boss and younger worker scenario is over!

• Generational differences affect everything at work:
  • Recruiting
  • Teamwork
  • Managing
  • Productivity
Defining the Generations

While studies vary slightly, most agree with these parameters:

• Traditionalists – or Silent Generation (born prior to 1946)
• Baby Boomers (born between 1946-1964)
• Generation X – or Nexters (born between 1965-1981)
• Millennials – or Gen Y - or Echo Boomers (born between 1982-Present)
Generational differences contribute to workplace obstacles, such as:

- Hiring challenges
- High turnover rates
- Communication confusion
- Poorly defined roles and responsibilities
- Lower morale
Understanding Communication Styles

- Recognize generational communication differences
- Be prepared to adapt – *these will not go away over time*
- Be insightful and attuned when managing across the generations
- Increase teamwork
- Use communication to lead, inform, engage and inspire
Understanding the unique differences between the four generations can improve:

- Culture
- Morale
- Recruiting
- Communication
- Motivation
- Productivity
Understanding the Generations

Each generation has distinctive:

- Historic experiences
- Attitudes
- Behaviors
- Expectations
- Habits
- Motivational “buttons”
What the Traditionalists Value

Characteristics of Traditionalists:

This generation of ‘conformists’ is very civic minded - molded by World War II, the Great Depression, the Korean War and the Atomic Bomb.

As such, they tend to value:

- Hard work, dedication, sacrifice
- Fiscal conservatism
- Respect for authority and formal rules (institutional attitude)
- An education
How the Traditionalists Behave

How Traditionalists Behave:

Their conservative attitude and adherence to *professionalism* influences them to embrace –

- A direct leadership style (top down)
- Formal communications
- Respect for experience
- Neat and conservative dress/appearance
What the Baby Boomers Value

Characteristics of Baby Boomers:

This generation of workaholics was molded by the focus on civil rights, space travel, the Cold War, sexual revolution, political assassinations

As such, they tend to value:

- Optimism
- Team work
- Work ethic
- Personal gratification, growth and success
How Baby Boomers Behave:

Their positive, more informal approach influences them to embrace -

- A consensus, collegial leadership style
- Team work and interaction
- In-person meetings
- A comfortable, affluent lifestyle
What the Gen Xers Value

Characteristics of Gen X:

This generation was molded by the fall of the Berlin Wall, women’s liberation, Watergate, the energy crisis

As such, they tend to value:

- Diversity
- Techno literacy (newly emerging)
- Fun and informality
- Self-reliance/independence (latch key!)
- Entrepreneurial
How the Gen Xers Behave

How Gen Xers Behave:

Their more confident, pragmatic approach influences them to embrace -

- Leadership that respects everyone (diversity)
- Immediate communication
- Freedom
- A return to fiscal cautiousness and conservatism
Characteristics of Gen Y (Millennials):

This generation was molded by technology (Google/cell phones/video games), violence (Columbine, Oklahoma bombing), environmental awareness, ethnic diversity

As such, they tend to value:

- Self-expression
- Balanced life style
- Relaxed, flexible work environment combined with meaningful work
- Resiliency
- Instant delivery of everything
- Positive reinforcement
- Socially responsible
How Gen Yers Behave:

Their early exposure to serious adult issues combined with exceptional technological advances influences them to embrace –

• Global causes
• Team work
• Multi-tasking
• Active versus passive involvement
• Impatience
Generational experiences impact work behavior:

- Traditionalists see work as an obligation; they work hard and put duty before fun; they are very serious and personal life has no place at work.
- Baby Boomers are workaholics with no life balance; they get personal fulfillment from working efficiently; they don’t appreciate money they question authority and prefer teams and collaboration (lots of meetings).
- Gen Xers want structure and direction, but find work to be a challenge; they are more entrepreneurial and value freedom to do things their own way; they want instant gratification and they want work-life balance.
- Gen Yers are terrific at multi-tasking, are very goal oriented and see work only as an end to fulfillment (unlike Boomers who enjoy work just for the work’s sake!); they treasure work-life balance, meaningful work and working on teams with smart people.
Generational experiences impact attitudes and can cause confusion, such as:

- Traditionalists and Boomers tend not to question authority; Gen X and Gen Y challenge this attitude.
- Gen X and Gen Y may not listen as well as previous generations; they don’t respect authority as much.
- Baby Boomers value in-person meetings and personal interaction; Gen X and Gen Y use technology to communicate with large groups (Facebook/Twitter).
- Gen X and Y use email and text as key communication tools.
- Baby Boomers are content with occasional feedback and semi-annual job performance reviews; Gen X and Gen Y want immediate and ongoing evaluation – and Gen Y likes to be praised.
- Business etiquette no longer is clearly defined – ex., is it a thank you on letterhead, a handwritten note, an email or a text message?
Generational experiences can cause conflict leading to lower productivity:

- Set the ground rules
- Give others the benefit of the doubt
- Walk in their shoes
- Show mutual respect
- Tailor communication and messaging for the receiver, not the sender
Managing Four Generations

Understand these fundamental differences

• Baby Boomers were told the future was theirs to own;

• Gen Xers found the future disheartening;

• Gen Y questions whether there even is a future for them.
Fixing the Generational Conundrum

Options for improving morale and productivity can include:

• Provide intergenerational leadership training
• Offer alternatives like telecommuting
• Understand and accommodate the working and learning styles of the different generations
• Facilitate mentoring *between* the generations
• Provide on going education and career advice
• Create recognition programs
• Judge employees on merit & outcomes
• Give all employees a voice – be less hierarchial
Fixing the Generational Conundrum

Focus on commonalities across the generations. They all share similar attitudes toward:

- Values (i.e., family, integrity, honesty, trustworthiness)
- Wanting to be respected
- The need for trustworthy leaders
- A fear change
- Being loyal
- Wanting to learn
- Appreciating feedback
Conclusion

Behavior, communication and leadership styles differ between the generations, with the potential for confusion, disruption, poor moral and inefficiency in the workplace.

Instead, we can strive for:

a) Increased sensitivity to different styles that can lead to more fruitful outcomes – productivity - in the workplace

b) A willingness to be flexible, and even adopt some of each other’s characteristics, without feeling compromised

c) Understanding Gen Z!
Please contact me with any questions!

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