



FEATURE

THE 3 SECRETS TO LEADING A MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

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For the first time in history, there are five generations working together in the workplace. For you, that can mean your team in the office or out in the field could be comprised of people from each generational group. Innovation and technology have dramatically changed the world, resulting in differences in the way distinct generational groups think and work. At first look, the generations may seem more different and at odds with one another than ever before. But, do not let this intimidate you. There are three secrets to help you effectively manage multiple generations:

1. COMMUNICATE WITH CLARITY

Communication is one of the most basic and underrated keys for being a great leader. If you can get this right, chances are you will be able to get through any challenge much more easily. Good communication starts and ends with understanding the people that make up your team. It is important to find out what they prefer, what works for them, what they are comfortable with and how you can help bridge the gap between

employees. An example: a millennial employee is getting frustrated with the lack of response from her baby boomer boss. After further investigation, we find that she has been texting her boss in the evening. Her boomer boss has a strict rule against work-related communication once she is off-the-clock and is not especially fond of texting. Clearing up the disconnect between the two communication preferences can bring your teams together and lead to smoother communication in the future.

Here's how: If you are not already doing so, send out regular employee surveys to your team. Years of studies have shown that surveys are one of the best ways to engage employees of all generations. Surveys make employees feel heard, show that you care and, ultimately, help you to predict behavior. On your survey, include a question about communication preferences. Whether it be text, phone call, email or face-to-face, do your best to align with your employees' expressed preferences when conveying the most

important information. They will feel valued, and you are much more likely to get a response in a timely manner. It is a win-win. In addition, be sure to incorporate a mix of communication styles when working with your teams rather than just settling on the one you prefer. This will keep all generations satisfied and feeling like their voice is heard.

Keep in mind: As with anything, it is important to set guidelines and expectations when discussing communication. Get potential issues out in the open; establish what is okay with you, what is okay with them (i.e. after-hours text messages; using slang in email, etc.). Having these important conversations early on with everyone decreases the likelihood of major miscommunication down the road.

2. TWO IS BETTER THAN ONE

Team connection ultimately begins with taking the time to understand one another and recognizing that we are not all the same. As obvious as it may sound, acting on this notion can be harder than

you think. The next time everyone is in the office, make it a priority to have a conversation about communication differences. Sometimes just a simple discussion can be the missing link to avoid generational conflict altogether. To sidestep common misperceptions and stereotyping, there is a simple solution: **a mentorship program.**

Here's how: To start a mentorship program, connect people on your teams based on their experience with your company and approximate generational group (i.e. boomer, Gen X, etc.). You can even intermix these pairings amongst office and field workers, as they can often already feel disconnected based on their everyday responsibilities. Once you have pulled together some matches, hold an orientation with the mentors and protégés, introducing conversation points and discussion topics (see sidebar *Top-Performing Discussion Topics*). Encourage regular meetings and give themes to help guide their interactions but leave it open-ended for the pair to learn from and guide one another; this program is meant to be mutually beneficial.

Keep in mind: It is important to monitor these programs to ensure participation. Often one member will be more engaged than the other, so arranging regular meet-ups and social gatherings amongst mentors and protégés will help facilitate their progress and connection.

3. FIND COMMON GROUND — BUT DON'T FORCE IT!

A big misconception in working with a multigenerational workplace is that you must treat everyone very differently according to their generational group. However, as it relates to your team dynamics, finding the commonalities is critical to surviving and thriving as you move into the future together. Use your influence as a leader to bring out the similarities among people

working in the same room or on the same team who might normally think that they could not be more different.

Here's how: Encourage team gatherings outside of work or host activities centered on those things you might find people have in common. This can be a great focus for a team retreat, encouraging younger and older generations to connect based on their past, their future and what motivates them rather than what makes them different. It is a HUGE win for long-term team connection and engagement.

Keep in mind: Everyone can sense when an activity is so forced that it makes it awkward and uncomfortable. Sprinkle

TOP-PERFORMING DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

These questions can (and should) be asked by mentors or protégés:

- Explain how you got to this point in your career. What drives you?
- What are you most proud of in your career so far?
- What are your goals for the future in this role, at this company?
- How can I help you — either with your goals or in everyday life?
- What is your greatest passion?

GENERATIONAL COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

This chart indicates each generation's most preferred or leading communication styles. The star indicates the strongest preference for the generation. Use this information as a guide when focusing on communication tactics with your teams.



Color Key and Approximate Average Age for Each Generation



these questions and conversations in with the normal routine so it does not give the impression of a mandatory question-and-answer session. The conversations will come naturally once they have begun. It is up to you to help facilitate and guide the connections with some suggested questions to get the conversations started (see sidebar *Questions For Your Next Team Meeting or Retreat*).

There you have it; the secrets for leading multiple generations in your business. What are you going to do with them? As a leader, it is your responsibility to stay on top of trends and continue educating yourself on communication techniques to manage your teams effectively. Now is your chance to start making some real

change, right away. These secrets can be easily implemented to develop teams that are more connected, engaged and working together more productively than ever before. They will have a lasting impact on your company and create success in leading an increasingly diverse workforce into the future.

For more resources and workshops, visit www.generationwhat.academy or contact Caitlin Crommett at hello@caitlincrommett.com. ■

Caitlin Crommett is the founder of DreamCatchers Foundation & GenerationWHAT Academy. She consults with companies nationwide on building effective intergenerational workforces to improve productivity and profitability.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR NEXT TEAM MEETING OR RETREAT:

Ask these questions on a notecard and have groups discuss their responses, or do it all together!

- What is your favorite hobby?
- Any type of food you like to cook?
- If you could plan the next retreat, what would we do?
- What gets you out of bed each morning?

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“I had a tough childhood growing up without a positive male role model. My parents divorced when I was an infant, leaving my mother to raise 4 kids on her own. My mind was in a fog without direction or purpose. Suddenly, I was expecting my first child and needed to be the stable father I never had.

I remembered on the jobsites, I’d visit, the teamwork and respect the construction workers shared. Now as a plumber, Shapiro & Duncan provides that same family atmosphere and supports my goal of raising a family of ten.”

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