Kolena
Pure. STEAM.

Generation Gaps

ABSTRACT

While having various cultures in one workplace can present communication problems and conflicts, the benefits of such a variety in the workplace outweigh it. The workplace can present challenges to management in terms of handling the different generations present. As older workers delay retiring and younger workers are entering the workforce, the work environment has become a patchwork of varying perspectives and experiences, all valuable to say the least.

Kolena Corporation
https://kolena.com

Kolena
Pure. STEAM.

Copyright Notice

Table of Contents

A single conversation with a wise man is better
than ten years of study.

Chinese Proverb

Preface

The workplace can present challenges to management in terms of handling the different generations present. As older workers delay retiring and younger workers are entering the workforce, the work environment has become a patchwork of varying perspectives and experiences, all valuable to say the least.

While having various cultures in one workplace can present communication problems and conflicts, the benefits of such a variety in the workplace outweigh it. Both the young and older worker has many ideas to offer, which can help the organization thrive in the marketplace. Learning how to deal with the generation gap at work will help you become a better manager or co-worker.

This book will help you understand the various generations present at work and understand what motivates them and how to deal with them on a daily basis.

Each generation wants new symbols, new people, new names.
They want to divorce themselves from their predecessors.

Jim Morrison

Chapter One: History

The term generation gap is a term used to describe the different values and attitudes between one generation and another. This term is typically used to describe the gap between parents and their children.

Since the 1960's, the term generation gap has also been used to describe the clash one age group has with another in various settings. The workplace is such an environment where different generations must intermingle and deal with each other's way of thinking.

This chapter will discuss the following topics as it relates to the generation gap in the workplace:

- What generations exist in the workplace

- What defines a generation

- What this means in our workplace

What Generations Exist in the Workplace

Today's workplace presents many challenges that are based solely on meeting goals, business objectives, and project deadlines. Threaded throughout the normal business activities are dynamics that could present issues and conflicts if left unchecked.

Since many older workers remain on the job longer and younger workers are entering the workplace right out of college, the work environment is fragmented into various generations. In order to understand this eclectic environment, it is necessary to understand what generations are present in today's workplace.

Because humans live on average 77 to 80 years, four potential generations may exist in the workplace today.

The four generations that could be present are the following:

- Traditionalist

- Baby Boomers

- Generation X

- Generation Y

Understanding the background, attitudes, and work styles of each generation is essential for a manager or supervisor. If they want to effectively coach and communicate then understanding these differences is paramount in creating a respectful and peaceful work environment for all employees.

This book will help you learn the characteristics of each of the four generations and how to deal with their uniqueness.

Before we get into the details of each of the four generations, we are going to learn what defines a generation.

What Defines a Generation

A generation is a group of people born during the same period and shares the same attitudes and values. The period is the factor to dividing the generations into groups. The four generations mentioned in the previous section have time ranges that define their period.

For example, the Traditionalist Generation represents people in a generation born before 1946. The Baby Boomers are people born between 1946 and 1961. Generation X represents people born between 1962 and 1980 and Generation Y represents people born in the 1980s and 1990s.

In each period are experiences that shaped the attitudes and values of each generation. In addition, the interaction between generations is also a factor in shaping the subsequent generation. For example, Generation X sought to be different by the larger more influential Baby Boomers. This thinking affects their behaviors and preferences.

What this Means in our Workplace

When groups have the same values and attitudes, communication and other dynamics typically go smoother. When there are multiple groups and each group brings their own style, values, and attitudes, this could create tension and other issues if not paying attention.

Multiple generations in the workplace presents challenges in many areas. Let us review two perspectives that must be managed.

First, the employee-to-employee perspective is critical; it shows how different generations interacting with each other may lead to miscommunication or misunderstanding. Furthermore, the way each generation handles confrontation may also be a point of friction.

The generation gap between employees could be seen more in the modes of communication, the words, and gestures used.

The manager-to-employee perspective is another sensitive area. Generation gaps in this situation could be difficult if the relationship starts on the wrong foot. For the manager, knowing that there are differences in the way generations communicate, view authority, life-work balance, and relationships is just the beginning.

The manager must also plan how to address these issues proactively, avoiding difficult or tense situations. Having difficult situations at work could lead to poor morale and productivity, which will reflect on the manager's performance.

Generation gaps at work means more work is needed to cultivate an environment that respects each generation's perspective and way of life. This also means the manager has to be observant and knowledgeable of the various traits associated with each generation.

Over the next three chapters, we are going to learn about each of the four generations in detail. We will begin with Traditionalist first.

Kolena
Pure. STEĀM.

Practical Illustration

When Josh's father retired from the family business, Josh became the company's manager of operations. Some of the employees who worked for him were recent high-school graduates while others had been in the workforce for decades. Josh noticed that the younger employees worked and communicated in ways that were different from the older employees. Unspoken tensions made it difficult for people to understand and respect each other. To address these issues, Josh required all employees to attend a workshop on generation-based differences. After attending the workshop, communication was improved and employees began to understand and respect each other better.

Every generation laughs at the old fashions, but follows religiously the new.

Henry David Thoreau

Chapter Two: Traditionalist

In this chapter, you will learn the traits and behavior of the Traditionalist generation. This generation is probably the oldest generation you may encounter at work. The members of this generation were born before 1946. You are going to learn the following about this generation:

- Their background

- Their characters

- Their working style

Their Background

Being born before 1946 is what classifies a Traditionalist. Their background touched on dealing with some incredible social issues. For example, a traditionalist may have experienced the Great depression, World War I and World War II. The military influenced their way of life since war was a great part of their cultural event and many served during this era.

The traditionalists were brought up during "tough times" where scarcity of resources was caused by economic troubles and war. Since the country was in a military and social program mode, individuality was not celebrated. The culture saw a uniform thought pattern, which was brought on by rallying against a visible foe.

Traditional values in terms of family structure and gender roles influenced the workplace during this generation. Men mostly dominated the workplace. In essence, the traditionalist had to work hard and see that as the way to live life.

Their Characters

Traditionalists are considered hardworking because they grew up during a time when jobs were not abundant. They are willing to put in long hours and believe that hard work is the way you earn a better position in the company.

Traditionalists are loyal to their employers and tend not to move from employer to employer. They stay where they are if possible. Furthermore, traditionalists are submissive because they were taught to respect authority.

Traditionalists will avoid causing trouble and are good team players. They are the least likely to initiate conflict at work. There is also a tendency to resist change. They value safety, security, consistency, and commitment.

Their Working Style

Today, traditionalists comprise of about five percent of the working population. Most traditionalists are retired. Nonetheless, Traditionalists bring a strong work ethic to the job place. They are dedicated to their employers and value leadership and hierarchy.

Characteristics:

- Traditionalists like to be recognized for their hard work.

- Traditionalists also see work as a team effort and avoid conflict.

- This group is also technically challenged and they may struggle to learn new technology.

- They also prefer lecture style training over web-based.

Since traditionalists are near retirement, their zeal for working their way to the top may be less than the other generations. They tend to be satisfied with their life situation and do not see advancement or achievement as important as the younger generations.

Motivating a traditional employee may be a challenge because of their tenure at work and lack of desire to prove something. They will usually conform and strive to keep the status quo.

Practical Illustration

Barbara worked diligently at her desk, preparing for the presentation in the morning. Betsy, a younger worker, had offered to help her collate. Betsy said it would make putting together packets easier, but Barbara doubted it would actually take -her- less time. She had such a tough time with the office printer. Sometimes she couldn't wait to retire. Her boss, Fred, stopped by. He said, "Wow. You've got a ton of papers there."

Barbara held back a sigh. Was he going to suggest she collate too? Fred said, "I've noticed how hard you've been working. I really appreciate all you do here, Barb." Barbara smiled. After work, she found herself still smiling to herself later about the kind words her boss shared with her, and she found herself really looking forward to the presentation.

Each generation goes further than the generation preceding it because it stands on the shoulders of that generation.

Ronald Reagan

Chapter Three: Baby Boomers

In this chapter, you will learn the traits and behaviors of the Baby Boomer generation. This generation has members that were born between 1946 and 1964. You are going to learn about their background, character, and working style.

Their Background

Baby Boomers were the product of post war efforts to absorb soldiers returning home from battle. The government passed the GI Bill of Rights in 1944, which gave soldiers a means to obtain a home, job and start a family.

The result was a boom in childbirths, which is where the title Baby Boomer is derived. Baby Boomers grew up in an era of prosperity and growth in the United States. Baby Boomers grew up mostly in suburbs and experienced a similar experience in education and upbringing.

Baby Boomers grew up in the year of innocence during the 1950s and seen model lives portrayed on television. Television was a large component of the Baby Boomers' upbringing. As mothers began working outside of the home, Baby Boomers grew up more and more with television.

As the Baby Boomers moved through the 1960s, their generation was becoming more defined. The 1960s brought about social changes like Civil Rights, a different kind of war in Vietnam, and rebellion against established institutions like the Hippy Revolution.

The Baby Boomer generation represents a departure from the traditional and movement towards changes in society, beliefs, and attitudes.

Their Characters

Baby Boomers are known to be confident and independent. They were exposed to a changing world where challenging the established culture was normal. Baby Boomers are willing to confront others and they will challenge the status quo.

Baby Boomers are well educated and are exposed to more financial resources than the past generation. Baby boomers are hard -working and they define themselves by their careers and professions. Baby Boomers are disciplined and they mirror some of their parents' work ethics.

Since Baby Boomers know they make up most of the working population, they tend to have more of their generation connect with work, making it more difficult for non-Baby Boomers to affect the organization.

On the other hand, Baby Boomers support change and will advocate for it if they see it being a benefit.

Their Working Style

Baby Boomers are work-centric. They are hard-working and they are motivated by incentives. Baby Boomers tend to work long workweeks. They tend to be workaholics and think that everyone should do the same in order to advance in their careers.

Characteristics:

- Baby Boomers are career focused and enjoy achieving at work.

- They like doing complicated work that makes a difference.

- Baby Boomers are very competitive and they equate their worth by their status and position at work.

- Baby Boomers are resourceful and look for different ways to win.

- Baby Boomers do prefer a hierarchal work structure and may find it difficult to work in a flexible environment.

- Finally, Baby Boomers tend to favor face-to-face interaction instead of remote means like emails, text, etc.

Practical Illustration

David and Patricia had been discussing ways for their company to increase their customer base while also increasing their profits for the quarter. While Justin, a young, new employee, was also in the meeting with them, he hadn't added much to the conversation.

David said, "Well, we have our list of ideas. I guess this brings our meeting to an end."

Justin said, "I just had an idea. What about giving discounts to our regular customers, as part of loyalty benefits?"

David thought to himself, 'That would never work. We tried that five years ago, and profits dropped'. But instead of shooting down the idea, he said, "I'll add that to the list. It couldn't hurt to revisit that idea. "He added, "Thanks for the input, Justin."

While they never used that idea, it broke the ice, and Justin felt more comfortable adding his thoughts during their meetings.

Each generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it.

George Orwell

Chapter Four: Generation X

This chapter discusses the traits and behaviors of Generation X. This segment of the culture was born between the mid-1960s and the mid to late 1970s. You are going to learn the following about them:

- The Gen X background

- The Gen X character

- The Gen X working style

Their Background

Generation Xers were born between 1965 and 1980. They are the generation right after the decline of the baby boom of the post war era. Generation Xers live during a time when the country shifted from manufacturing to servicing.

This generation grew up with technology as a part of their lives. They experienced computers, video games, cell phones, email, etc. They have seen the evolution of technology and understand its origins.

Generation Xers also experienced difficult times in the 1980s and learned to live in tough times. Finally, Generation Xers were raised in two-income homes or single-parent homes. These situations forced many Generation Xers to be placed in day care.

Their background allowed them to develop new characteristics that went against the Baby Boomers.

Kolena
Pure. STEAM.

Their Characters

Generation Xers are individualistic people and independent. They are self-sufficient and flexible. This character trait enables them to changes jobs more frequently than the previous generations. They usually see this as a way of moving up the corporate latter.

This generation is more ethnically diverse and is better educated over their previous generation. More than half of Generation Xers attended college.

Generation Xers also believe in more balance between their work and home life than the previous generation. They rather focus on family than work and value jobs that allow flexibility in their schedules to meet the demands of their family.

Generation Xers are more willing to try new things because of their technical experience and they welcome new technology into their lives easily and adapt to them quickly. Generation Xers are also tolerant of other lifestyles and accept this as part of the change in their environment.

Generation X's perspective allows them to foster a more accepting environment at work.

Their Working Style

Generation Xers enjoy freedom at work. They crave responsibility and politely reject authority and fixed work schedules. This generation does not do well in a micro-managed environment. They will thrive in a workplace where management allows them to complete their tasks without too much supervision.

Generation Xers will be the first ones to take advantage of technology and incorporate it into their work. They see technology as a tool and a way to do things more efficiently.

Generation Xers will look for other employment opportunities if it promises advancement of their career. They are less committed to their employers than the Baby Boomers. On the other hand, Generation Xers adapt well to change in their workplace and are key drivers of change.

Finally, this generation believes in a healthy balance between work and their personal life. They also like to have fun at work and believes in a work and play hard ideal. Generation Xers like a dynamic work environment that challenges them yet support their need for fun and balance between work and home life.

Practical Illustration

Deborah sighed as she felt her anxiety level rise. The quarterly meeting was fast approaching, and her superiors wanted to hear that things were running smoothly. She looked over at her employee, Stephanie, a woman in her late 30's. Stephanie kept saying that she was 'almost done' of the reports, but that had been almost a full twenty-four hours ago.

Deborah walked past Stephanie's cubicle. She almost said something to Stephanie, but then she stopped herself. She'd never seen Stephanie thrive under micro-management, and Stephanie had agreed to email Deborah the reports by the end of the day. It was barely one o'clock

Deborah returned to her office, sat down, and opened her email. Like magic, there it was. An email with the reports attached, along with a cheerful message asking if Deborah needed anything else.

Nothing so dates a man as to decry the younger generation.

Adlai E. Stevenson

Chapter Five: Generation Y

You are going to learn about Generation Y or the millennial generation in this chapter. This group was born between 1979 and 1994. This chapter will teach you the background, characters and working style of Generation Y.

Their Background

Generation Yers are those born from the mid to late 1970's through the 1990's. The earliest part of this generation is just entering the workplace. The Generation Y group had technology as a normal part of live and do not know what it is to be without a computer, cell phone or any other electronic device the older generation had to adapt into their lives.

This generation can thrive on electronic communication and prefer that than face-to-face conversation. Generation Y prefers using the Internet as a means of learning and making purchases. They are exposed to vast amounts of information, music, and media than the older generations.

This generation was exposed to more group interactions through playgroups, team sports and other group activities than the previous generation. This was due in part to their parents' higher education and success.

Finally, this generation is used to getting what they want when they want it. The speed of technology and information coupled with rapid delivery systems has made this generation expect things to be done faster and better.

Their Characters

Generation Y is prone to communicating via electronic devices and is capable of multi-tasking while carrying a text messaging conversation. This generation relies on technology to do their jobs and expect to have the resources available when they are at work.

Generation Y is family-centric and value family over work. This generation looks for flexible schedules at work and a balance between work and life. They are willing to take less pay for this benefit.

This generation is achievement-oriented and is confident. Generation Y will question authority without fear and challenge ideas and motives. Generation Y enjoys meaningful work and are ready to keep on learning new ideas and things.

Generation Y works well in a team environment. They seek positive reinforcement from others and believe no one should be left behind. They rather slow the process down in order to give a teammate the opportunity to catch up.

Finally, the Generation Y group appreciates feedback and being kept updated on the latest developments. They do require periodic recognition and praise for their work.

Their Working Style

Generation Y's working style is vastly different from those of the previous generation. This generation is motivated by benefits that give them the ability to have flexible schedules. They are less motivated monetarily.

They are not happy with long working hours and this may send the message that they do not care about work or are lacking discipline. Family is first for Generation Y and they will push back on work that crosses this boundary.

This generation does expect a lot from their employer in terms of new challenges and the opportunity to achieve things. Generation Y does see promotions and climbing the corporate ladder as a way to demonstrate their worth.

Generation Y is loyal to their employer and seeks to be included in important activities at work. They will call attention to themselves by suggesting bold ideas and challenging the status quo. However, they do become concerned with what others think about them and need affirmation every so often.

Since this generation is relatively young in the workplace, there is a need for mentoring. They see this as normal and expect it from their leaders. The like guidance and development when it comes to their careers.

Practical Illustration

Hector smiled at Chelsea, a young woman in her early 20s.This was their second interview, and he was hoping that Chelsea would choose to work for their organization. Chelsea had been honest and let him know that she had received offers from other employers.

Hector said, "Are there any other questions you'd like to ask me, Chelsea?"

Chelsea asked, "I can't think of any. Is there anything else I should know about your organization before I leave today?"

Hector remembered that workers her age valued benefits and family life over long working hours at the office. "Have I told you about our generous benefits package and vacation time allotted to workers?"

Hector went over the benefits for working at their office, focusing on how his company respected employees' work-life balance. She later accepted the job for many reasons, but told him their benefits had been the deciding factor for her.

That which seems the height of absurdity in one generation often becomes the height of wisdom in another.

Adlai E. Stevenson

Chapter Six: Differentiations Between

Now that you have a better understanding of each generation found in the workplace, let us take a moment to compare the differences. In this chapter, you will learn the differences between the generation gaps on the following topics:

- Background

- Attitude

- Working style

- Life experience

First, we are going learn about the differences the generations have in terms of their background.

Background

The background differences among the four generations are the main factor in the formation of their attitudes and values.

Effects of technology: The use and understanding of technology is a main difference among the generations. The Traditionalist had very little exposure and need for computers and other devices that we take for granted today. Even some Baby Boomers may struggle with technology. They tend to use it only as needed, and usually only at work. On the other hand, Generation X and Y grew up with technology and they use it more as a part of daily life. Technology changed the way humans communicate and process data. The use or nonuse of technology creates a gap that could be seen by a generation as either an advantage or disadvantage.

For example, a Generation X or Y could become easily frustrated with their older generation counterpart when they struggle with technological issues they see as easy.

Effects of media: Media has boomed over the last 20 years. Television, computers, Internet, and smart phones have increased the amount and availability of entertainment programming. Many Generation X and Y's were raised with media as a large part of their diet. On the other hand, the older generations relied on human interaction for their daily entertainment. This affects how the generations interact with each other.

For example, an older generation may prefer to speak with a coworker face-to-face, but the younger would rather text or instant message their conversation.

Finally, social events like war and culture revolutions distinguish a generation's background. Traditionalist lived through many years of war and it became a real part of their lives. Baby Boomers experienced the Hippie revolution of the 1960s, which opened the door to changes in our society. Generation X and Y's enjoy the benefits of the changes but they have not lived through such dramatic social events.

Attitude

Attitudes among the generations are different. This has to do with their background and the way each generation interacts with other humans during their time.

Attitude towards authority: As the generations progressed, their attitude towards authority is one that will challenge them. The older generation was taught to revere authority due to the military presence in the culture during wartime. As the decades passed, the generations rebelled and eventually created an attitude of challenging the status quo in the younger generation.

Attitude towards individuality: The younger generations were brought up during a time where most parents worked outside the home leaving them in day cares. This environment taught the younger generation to be independent and self-sufficient. The older generation seeks to work with groups and think of others over themselves.

Loyalty to their employers: The older generation is more likely to stay with one employer their entire life, if that is possible. This tendency was brought on by living through difficult times. The older generation believes that devoting themselves to their job will bring rewards. The younger generations are not as loyal. They see changing employers as opportunities to advance their careers by themselves—again this is an individualistic perspective of the younger generation.

Working Style

As we learn about the background and attitudes of the generations, we see a pattern that moves the focus from a group to individual perspective. This is true of the working styles between the older and younger generation.

Flexible hours: The younger generation values flexibility in the workday to attend to personal things. They value their family life over their work life and seek to find employers that will provide working arrangements that will allow them to work and manage their family life. The older generation value hard work and see a clear separation of work and their family life. They value their jobs and see the work hours as a fixed part of their day.

Challenge the status quo: The younger generation sees it as a benefit to challenge other thinking and is quick to present their point of view. The older generation is more submissive and sees challenging the status quo as disrespecting the authority. Challenging the status quo could cause tension between the older and younger generation.

Motivation: What motivates each generation varies greatly. The older generation values a stable work environment where conformity is valued. The younger generation is motivated by achievement and they will create an environment of competition, which may be threatening to the older generation.

Life Experience

Life experience is another area where the generations vary. These activities represent unique experiences for that generation.

Hard times: The older generations experienced harder times and lived without for long periods. This taught them the value of having the basics like food and clothes. Baby Boomers know what it is to fight for civil rights and protest against the government. The younger generation did see economic hard times, but where sheltered by their parents, diminishing the effects.

Entertainment: The older generation experienced entertainment as traditional events like the movies and non-technical activities. The younger generation grew up with video games, 4D rides at amusement parks and other activities that are designed to stir the senses. Reading books and doing manual things are appreciated by the older generation, but may be seen as boring activities for the younger generation.

Technology: The younger generation experienced technology as a way of life. Generation X had technology grow into their lives and Generation Y never did without it. The older generation was slow to adapt and use technology as a social tool. The advent of social networks and electronic communication gave the younger generation exposure to more detailed information about each other than the older generation.

Practical Illustration

Chris rushed to his meeting. He looked at his watch and realized that he only had five minutes to spare. On the way to the meeting room, he overheard someone speaking in frustrated tones under their breath. Chris realized that Shirley, a shift supervisor in her late '60s, was at her computer, having a difficult time. Chris bet it had something to do with the new electronic documentation system that started three weeks ago.

Chris didn't have time to help her at the moment. He got to his meeting on time, but afterwards, he stopped to talk to his boss, Frances. He suggested that they spearhead a committee to help with questions about technology and to give guidance to employees that might have trouble with the new system.

Field of Dreams is probably our generation's
It's A Wonderful Life.

Kevin Costner

Chapter Seven: Finding Common Ground

In order to be successful bridging the gap across the generations, you must find common ground that enables you to close the gap and effectively reach your opposing generation. In this chapter, you will learn the following:

- Adopting a communication style

- Creating an affinity group

- Sharing knowledge

Adopting a Communication Style

Being sensitive to the way you communicate will help you bridge the generation gap at work. Understanding that the older generation prefers face-to-face communication and the younger prefer electronic methods should give you a base to form a flexible communication style that reaches all generations at work.

Here is an easy way to adopt your communication style. Use the **TAP** method for communicating. You will have to think a little before you communicate to someone, but the investment is well worth it. **TAP** stands for the following components:

- **To-the-Point:** Make your communication brief and succinct. The older generation will appreciate the clarity and the younger generation will appreciate the brevity.

- **Adapt:** Change the method of communication for your audience. If you are going to engage an older worker, make the effort to either call them or better yet, see them in person. They will feel respected and valued. For the younger generation, use email or instant messaging, etc. to reach them. They will feel independent and not micro managed.

  If you need to address the entire group, younger and older, in an email, make yourself available for follow-up by telling the group to reply, call or see you in person if they have questions.

- **Professional:** When in doubt, communicate professionally. Avoid jargon and text abbreviations in your communication. Use salutations and close your communication properly. You will show the older generation that you respect them and set the example for the younger generation on how to communicate professionally.

Creating an Affinity Group

Affinity groups are groups of people sharing common interests. You can create such groups at work that give different generations a chance to work with each other with an activity, which is not directly work related.

These groups provide a way for the generations to learn more about each other's interests and values. You can create several affinity groups, promoting cohesion among the various generations. Affinity groups are usually non-hierarchical. They are typically small and do not require centralization.

Affinity groups could tend to become closed. That is why allowing groups that focus on non-polarized topics are the best way to introduce affinity groups in your workplace.

Here are some groups to consider:

- Work newsletter group

- Professional book club

- Recycling task force

- Community service group

- Improving work morale group

- Work safety group

- Speech club group

Sharing Knowledge

The lack of knowledge could breed fear between generations or lead to misinterpretations. Sharing knowledge helps to break down barriers and create an understanding and collaborative environment. There are many ways knowledge can be shared.

Here are some ways to share knowledge at work:

- You can set up a blog where a topic is introduced and then the team can submit comments. Blogs provide a safe and open structure to hold discussions. If you use a blog, be sure to set up clear rules of what and how to share. You want to avoid sensitive topics for discussions. This can undermine the sharing process.

- Form focus groups to resolve an issue or generate new ideas. Focus groups containing various generations is a great way to get different perspectives from your diverse work group. Read up on how to facilitate meetings so you can better manage the dynamics in such a meeting.

- Create a newsletter where employees get to share their thoughts in an interview. This can be a creative way of sharing knowledge.

- Place an ideas box where employees can submit ideas for review by you team. This can be a real box or an electronic version via email or other form of communication.

Practical Illustration

Melissa sat down at her computer, and she noticed an email from her co-worker, Greg. Greg was an employee who had been with the company for twenty-five years. He had expressed frustration with email, but lately Greg was reaching out to employees using the computer, instead of just face-to-face contact. She emailed him back, remembering the TAP method for communicating:

Hi Greg,

Thank you for emailing me so quickly. I will address the issue by contacting support services within the next twenty-four hours. If you have any other thoughts or concerns, please let me know.

All the Best,

Melissa

After sending the email, Melissa had an idea. She later went over to Greg's cubicle in person to check in with him.

Greg appreciated the face-to-face talk, and Melissa noticed that when she met him halfway, he was more willing to use email and texting to communicate with her.

Every generation revolts against its fathers and makes friends with its grandfathers.

Lewis Mumford

Chapter Eight: Conflict Management (I)

Conflict is normal in the workplace, but it could happen more often between two people of opposing generations. Understanding how to manage conflict across the generations will help to reduce the confrontation and perhaps avoid them in the future.

This chapter will teach you the following:

- Younger bosses managing older workers

- Avoid turnover with a retention plan

- Breaking down the stereotypes

Let us begin with our first topic of younger bosses managing older workers.

Younger Bosses Managing Older Workers

Managing older employees could be a source for conflict. Older employers may feel they should be in charge or that you lack experience. The key to avoiding conflict with an older employee is to demonstrate respect and showing them that they are valued.

Use the **ACE** technique in avoiding conflict with your older employees. ACE stands for the following process:

- **Acknowledge** your older employee's experience and the value they bring to the team. Older employees may feel as if they are no longer valuable because of their age. Show them you value them by reflecting on their achievements and contributions to the team.

- **Caring** for your older employee comes in many ways. Become interested with their personal life or hobbies. Take note of special things that took place in their lives. Show interest in their family and listen to them when they talk and mirror back what they have said to show you were listening.

- **Exchange** ideas and ask for input from your older employees on issues and demonstrate that you value their opinions and solutions. Implement good ideas and give them recognition. When you implement their ideas, your older employee will be more willing to take in your ideas. Create a give-and-take environment between you and your older employee.

Avoid Turnovers with a Retention Plan

Avoiding turnover is easier when you are prepared. If you let turnover surprise you, then you are not paying attention to your environment. Whenever you are speaking with your employees, always attempt to gauge their level of engagement with their job and try to determine any issues before it is too late.

A retention plan should be made for each of your employees. You can make it as specific or general based on your needs. Here are some things to consider when creating a retention plan for your employees based on generational traits:

- Determine what values this person has based on their generational trait. Think of things that could be a motivating factor like schedule flexibility, incentives and recognition.

- Prepare several focused questions that may lead to underlying issues. For example, you may ask questions about the reasons why they are dissatisfied with their job. Be frank with your employees and tell them that you want to keep them and will set up a follow up meeting to discuss possible solutions.

- Ask questions about their personal goals and career milestones and see how you can help them achieve them.

- Be ready to become an advocate for your employee. This means that you may need to do some research or speak with key people in human resources to help find more solutions.

- Work with your human resource contact to develop a retention plan. They can give you solutions that are aligned with your company's policies.

Breaking Down the Stereotypes

Stereotypes are formed when there is lack of information from the other side. Stereotypes are difficult to break because the thought process is difficult to detect. The best way to address stereotypes is to get your team involved in activities that helps build the team and places them in a situation that challenges all the participants.

For example, you can have your team take on a project that you team never done before. Perhaps you can engage your team with a friendly competition with another group of department where the focus is on the team.

Many activities can challenge your team. When your team is challenged, their best traits will come through. You may encounter resistance at first, but your job is to coach them through it.

Once you are done with your activity, hold a debrief meeting to spotlight the team and their achievement. Share commonalities that span the entire team. Finally, relate those commonalities to work related activities like project work, etc.

Practical Illustration

Carlos, a young manager in his twenties, found himself thinking about Sandy, one of his lower-level employees. She was a good worker, who was in her late 50's. Lately, Sandy had seemed distant. She crossed her arms, frowned, and avoided group meetings.

Carlos stopped by and addressed this concern with Sandy. Sandy immediately said, "I guess I didn't know how to say it, but I've been feeling bored with my work duties here. I'm not sure exactly what I'm working towards, besides just another day that's the same as the last one."

Carlos said, "Let's work on a plan to help you first identify and then reach your work goals. For example, ideally, where do you see yourself in five years?"

Once Carlos understood that Sandy needed a new challenge, they worked together well. Carlos then went on to build retention plans for all his employees.

*Struggle is a never-ending process. Freedom is never really won;
you earn it and win it in every generation.*

Anonymous

Chapter Nine: Conflict Management (II)

This chapter continues on the topic of conflict management across the generations. You will learn the following over the next few sections:

- Embrace the hot zone

- Treat each other as a peer

- Create a succession plan

Embrace the Hot Zone

When dealing with generation gap issues, there is a hot zone that you must recognize and address. The hot zone is an area you know there is conflict. It could be between two employees or groups within your team.

Take a moment and jot some of these ideas down:

- First, you must acknowledge the hot zone exists. Ignoring it could result to more widespread hot zones.

- Next, you should engage the hot zone as soon as possible and provide feedback to all the parties involved.

- Set expectations with your employees on how to handle future conflicts.

- Hold one-on-one coaching with each employee involved in the hot zone and have him or her come up with ideas on how to make things better avoiding hot zone issues.

Treat Each Other as a Peer

Treating each other as peers requires some key behaviors that demonstrate this characteristic. It is not enough to tell your employees to treat each other as peers. They need a guideline and coaching in order to achieve this.

The **CARE** model is a good way to start this process and they should be coached at the individual level. **CARE** stands for the following behaviors:

- **Collaborate.** Your team should be exposed to an environment where ideas are exchanged and at times challenged. Set ground rules in your meetings on how to handle disagreements. Encourage other points of view. Make sure all participants are involved. Be fair in your assessments and use objective means to determine the best ideas.

- **Acknowledge.** Teach your team to acknowledge each other's value. In addition, teach them how to deliver the feedback. Do not assume they know how to do this. Remember that feedback is behavior-based.

- **Respect.** Teach your team how to show respect to each other by using proper greetings and posture towards each other. Set the expectation that derogatory remarks about age are not tolerated by anyone.

- **Equal.** Teach your team that all members of the team are equal in value and contribution they bring. Age is not a factor.

Create a Succession Plan

A succession plan is a map of the career path for your employee. When you create a succession plan, you give that employee something to focus on in terms of a career goal. When they are focused on a plan, they will be less susceptible to conflict because they are doing what it takes to achieve the goals of this plan.

Building a succession plan takes time. It requires you to know the personal goals of your employee and their gaps. You also have to be committed to their succession plan. If you do not show commitment, your employee will disengage and may become frustrated and confrontational.

Here are some tips to creating a succession plan:

- Determine a clear career goal

- Make sure it is a real goal

- Make sure it is attainable

- Make sure it is time driven

- Consult with your human resources department to determine what their requirements are

- Consult with the head of the department if the career path takes them to another area

- Determine any educational requirements and provide guidance

- Set up a mentor program with someone currently doing what they want to achieve

- Track their progress

- Meet with them periodically to specifically discuss their progress on their succession plan

Practical Illustration

Juanita called Caleb, one of her younger employees, into her office for a one-on-one talk. He had seemed hostile lately, especially towards Nancy, one of their older workers. Juanita said, "It seems as if you're angry with Nancy in office meetings from the way you raise your voice at her."

Caleb said, "She's always talking over top of me. Every idea I give, she comes up with a reason why it won't work. I know she's been here a long time, but I have good ideas, too. She should hear them out."

Juanita listened and said, "I understand where you're coming from. Have you tried addressing this with her directly in a calm, professional way?"

Juanita coached Caleb to talk to Nancy about his issue. Later, she then worked on ways that she could help create an environment in their office where her employees treated each other as peers.

Parents who wonder where the younger generation is going should remember where it came from.

Sam Ewing

Chapter Ten: The Power of 4

Leveraging the best of all the generations at work could result in benefits that help your workplace become a better place work. Each generation brings unique traits that can complement the other generations. In this chapter, you are going to learn the following on leveraging the power of the four generations present at the workplace:

- Benefits of generation gaps

- How to learn from each other

- Embracing the unfamiliar

Benefits of Generation Gaps

Having various generations at the workplace gives you access to varying perspectives and ideas. You should avoid discounting the value of a particular generation. Here are some benefits to having multiple generations at work:

- You gain a good perspective of the external culture

- You can generate more ideas based on varying experiences

- The older generation can help the younger generation refine their social skills

- The younger generation can help the older learn how to leverage technology

- Create a mentoring environment

Keep in mind that whenever you have access to different views, ideas and way of doing things, you have a source of knowledge that is profound and leveraged for the organization's benefit.

How to Learn from Each Other

Learning from each other is possible if you create the environment. In order to achieve this, you must create the opportunities for learning to take place, make it a safe environment, and tie it to a team-building goal.

The **FIT** model for meetings is a helpful way to create a learning environment in your meetings. **FIT** stands for the following:

- **Frequent**—make sure your team meets frequently in a team-meeting environment. It can be once a month, once a week, etc. Having your team together in a group will help them engage each other, communicate, and dialogue. This is essential to any learning environment.

- **Informal**—make your meeting less formal. This way everyone puts down his or her guard. Use an icebreaker activity or energizer. Making your meeting informal will allow your employees to share and learn. When it is formal, you will get very little interaction.

- **Team building**—make your meetings about team building. Topics like updates, reports, etc., are best delivered by other means like email in a presentation. When your team gets together, celebrate achievements and discuss what went well and how they can do things better the next time. Also, bring in some new information to learn. Make it a mini training session. Create projects for them to accomplish in the meeting.

Embracing the Unfamiliar

Embracing the unfamiliar is something you need to do and help your team learn. It is easy to dismiss the unfamiliar, but that sends the wrong message to your team. Model the behavior by using the **LEAD** model.

LEAD stands for the following behaviors:

- **Look for unfamiliar things in the workplace**. Be on the lookout for new ideas, attitudes, trends, etc. in the workplace you can investigate and learn more on the topic.

- **Engage it immediately.** When you identify an unfamiliar concept or idea, embrace it immediately. Ask questions about it and take notes.

- **Acquire more knowledge on the topic.** Research the topic and learn more about it. Look for reasons why this is valuable and why one should adopt it.

- **Disseminate the knowledge to the rest of the team.** Once you gather the information, share it with your team in your meetings. Gain input on perspectives and tell them how this information helps you.

- If you want to have your employees embrace the unfamiliar, you must lead the way with your own actions and behaviors. Model the behavior you want them to adopt. They will follow you if you do.

Practical Illustration

Donald sat with Chris at lunch. Chris helped Donald with his technological skills, and in working together, the two had become friends; even though they were from different generations. Donald wanted to reciprocate the help so he asked him, "Hey, Chris. What's the deal with you and Michelle? You seem to disappear whenever she comes around."

Chris said, "She never has anything positive to say. It's all negative. It makes me feel unappreciated."

"Well, have you tried talking with her about it?"

Chris said, "No, I don't want to make things worse. It's better if I just avoid her."

Donald said, "Sometimes face-to-face talks get a lot done. If you were going to talk to her, what would you want to say?"

Donald coached Chris and they role played the difficult conversation. Later that week, Chris let him know that he addressed things directly with Michelle and that it had helped.

Education is simply the soul of society as it passes from one generation to another.

Gilbert K. Chesterton

Closing Thoughts

- **Marcus Tullius Cicero:** What nobler employment, or more valuable to the state, than that of the man who instructs the rising generation.

- **F. Scott Fitzgerald:** My idea is always to reach my generation. The wise writer writes for the youth of his own generation, the critics of the next, and the schoolmasters of ever afterward.

- **Charles M. Schulz:** If I were given the opportunity to present a gift to the next generation, it would be the ability for each individual to learn to laugh at himself.