

HIRING AND LEADING A MULTI-GENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

For the first time in history 4 generations are sharing office space. [Each generation bringing with it varied experiences](#) that could potentially create an environment of creative collaboration. 50+ years in the workforce allows The Silent Generation and Baby Boomers to share their vast knowledge of best practices as well as those that have failed during their tenure. Gen X'ers can add an additional layer of knowledge as their experiences have evolved with the rise of mass media and its impact on the workplace. Millennials, while the youngest at the table, have spent the majority of their professional years riding the rise of the Digital Information age. If we can get these groups to team-up, communicate clearly, and collaborate with one another, the economy would have a treasure trove of knowledge and innovation.

Experience tells us, however, that meshing these varied experiences and philosophies is not quite that simple. [According to work place consultants](#), "Baby Boomers, are competitive and think workers should pay their dues. Gen Xers are more likely to be skeptical and independent-minded. Millennials like teamwork, feedback, technology and supporting a cause." Effectively blending these groups within a professional setting, leveraging a supportive culture and relying on progressive leadership, will result in a "dream team" of productivity and efficiency.

The question is, what do you do when circumstances prevent this diverse workforce from thriving under the same roof? In many cases, leadership roles are held by those in the older, more experienced generation. Simultaneously, however, workplace culture is adapting to suit the [style and preferences](#) of the younger generation that consistently chooses workplace flexibility over pay, a non-traditional schedule that supports the work/life balance, and seeks out socially-minded employers. When the children of the "boot strap" generation mix with the children of the "helicopter mom" generation, there's bound to be conflict. At the end of the day, while no company should be a dictatorship--just as no company can be run completely by consensus--it is up to leadership to make a definitive decision outlining the best course of action. While it is imperative that employees operate in a supportive and non-hostile environment, the primary goal of each employee is to positively impact the business. Sometimes, tough decisions must be made, and not everyone will be pleased with the outcome.

What's a manager to do?

5 Ways to Manage a Multi-Generational Workforce

Remember that "new" isn't always better. Companies (and subsequently its leadership) are often quick to adopt whatever 'new' technology, managerial practices, or workplace culture that is sweeping the business world. Unfortunately, business is not "one size fits all" and by continually introducing the latest trend in management style or departmental procedures, you are disrupting the current flow that has not been given enough time to make an impact.

Remember that "old" isn't always better, either. The saying goes, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." In the business world, however, this is not always true. While existing practices, procedures, and managerial styles have worked, that does not mean there aren't newer and more efficient ways of doing things.

Encourage (and when necessary, force) collaboration between generations. Few dogs, young or old, like to learn new tricks. However, creating a mentor/mentee environment allows for both sides of the generational gap to offer insight and experience, often creating a new hybrid way of doing things.

Accept that not all teams will do things the same way. In an ideal situation, this hybrid outcome, born from collaboration, is possible. However, in some circumstances, team leaders will inevitably disagree. There may in fact be different methods of attacking the same issue, and that's ok. This is perfectly fine and senior leadership must be open to a variety of approaches, so long as the fundamental business is not negatively impacted. If these differing approaches lead to the desired outcome, without hindering the other, that should be considered a success.

Respect your elders (and young adults). Being a Millennial myself, I was raised in a culture of "you can do anything, go out and change the world, do it your way." While this kind of attitude inspires people to improve existing practices, success rarely comes in the form of the "instant gratification" our generation is used to. That doesn't always mean you need to push harder. Sometimes it simply means you have to be patient, and spend the time learning what you need to know. If you're lucky, you'll have the best resource at your fingertips: seasoned professionals. Tap into that resource and learn all you can from the generations that have seen the professional world evolve from a face-to-face, 9-5 environment to a world of virtual meetings and social selling.