

Passing it on to the Generations

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With increasing generational diversity in the workforce, managers are faced with having to communicate with their various employees in a way that keeps each generation motivated. Here are some hints and tips to keep in mind as you have discussions with your generationally diverse employees.

Gen Y/Millennials/Echo Generation.

The newest and youngest group to enter the workforce goes by many names depending on whose book or article you read. These under-30 workers love collaboration, technology and flexibility in their work days.

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They resist the formality many of their older counterparts have been accustomed to in the workplace where hierarchy determines who has information and is allowed to contribute to projects. While most employees welcome praise for a job well done, this generation was raised in a time when giving regular praise and validation were considered necessary for healthy development. If you want to have an impact with someone from this generation, make sure your feedback is constant and prompt. They don't want to have to wait for formal meetings to find out how they are doing. This is a group that is comfortable communicating by e-mail and instant messaging so depending on your company's policies, take advantage of this means of getting your ideas across – just be careful about using it if you need to communicate criticism or other corrective feedback. When potential for misunderstanding is high, face to face still rules.

Gen X/The Independents.

Growing up in the Boomers' shadows, Gen Xers have less loyalty to the organization than their predecessors did due to the massive layoffs and downsizing they've seen their parents go through. By focusing on developing their skills and keeping them marketable, you are most likely to retain this generation of employees. Explain to them how your company can help them build a career path that will provide substantial opportunities, and they will move mountains for you. This generation values its personal life outside of work and a flexible schedule. Just like the Gen Ys, Gen Xers want immediate feedback, and they want it often. They prefer if you give it to them straight, and they want to be relied on to get their work done as they see fit, with minimal supervision.

Baby Boomers.

Having had to compete for just about everything, Boomers are your loyal workers. They see ownership as means to job security so like to have their personal stamp on projects and processes. Therefore, they respond best to goals and milestones that give them a sense of ownership in their projects. Younger managers should make sure they explicitly acknowledge the expertise these older workers have. Younger managers have to try and understand how these older workers feel about being led by someone who is their son or daughter's age. They want to feel respected by you, and the language you use will demonstrate that to them. They also expect you to be knowledgeable and won't appreciate you wasting their time.

Traditionalists/Silents.

These are the eldest of your employees; those who have stayed around past the historical age for retirement. They have devoted their lives to working hard and have the bulk of the company's knowledge. They are open to mentoring younger employees and to passing on their



expertise and tricks of the trade. While some will choose to slow down as they approach retirement, others will want to continue with new initiatives up until the day they leave. Take advantage of their knowledge and wisdom by showing your appreciation for their efforts and letting them know that they are always welcome in the company.

The workplace is a mosaic of personalities, skills and experiences. While generalizing always bring risks, understanding the life experiences that each group of employees brings to the workplace can help you manage with greater effectiveness.

