

From 20 to 60 in a Lesson

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Learning and development practitioners face an exciting challenge to create learning experiences that will engage people of different ages and generations in the same classroom. The key to effectiveness is to create a program that has elements and activities that tap into each cohort's preferences. The following describes some techniques to help you manage a multi-generational learning environment:

"Having a better understanding of members of different generations can make the learning environment more productive for all involved."

Delegate ground rules.

Encourage all learners to create group rules that will create a respectful learning environment. Every age group will have something to contribute.

Partner up.

When learning is technology based, team up older participants with younger ones. This allows the younger learners to stay engaged as they get to learn and teach at the same time, and gives older learners a chance to get comfortable with the technology.

Give practice time.

Provide time in the learning program for learners to practice new skills without affecting performance evaluations. This will put Boomers at ease in the classroom, while Millennials will appreciate on the job assignments where they can practice their new skills.

Make it relevant.

While training should be relevant to all the generations, Gen Xers are particularly devoted to professional development, so you want to make sure you are providing them with marketable skills they could put on their resume.

Be flexible.

The need to interact with the facilitator varies from learner to learner, so create multiple interaction formats to support all learners. For example, make yourself available for face to face and telephone discussions, as well as through e-mail, texting and blogs. In the same way, use various techniques, games and activities that will engage all groups. You want to make the environment fun and interesting for younger generations, but you don't want to make your older learners uncomfortable with things that may seem 'over the top' to them. Use multiple examples that each generation can relate to, or have them come up with their own to deepen the learning.

Communicate.

Sometimes, it will be appropriate to openly discuss the generational differences with your learners, so that they will have a better understanding of each other's learning preferences and expectations in the classroom. However, you must be careful not to generalize and make assumptions due to age and generation. No one likes to be labelled, so it may be best to allow the learners to disclose their preferences and styles themselves. Perhaps you can use an activity to facilitate the discussion.



Trainers are beginning to recognize the changing demographics of the learning environment, and what this means to the way they manage the classroom. Having a better understanding of members of different generations can make the learning environment more productive for all involved.

Links:

http://media.wiley.com/product_data/excerpt/7X/07879697/078796977X.pdf

