

Managing the Challenges of Multiple Generations in the Workplace

The workplace is going to look different over the next several years. With people living longer and often postponing retirement for financial reasons, we are entering a phase where four, possibly even five generations will be working side by side. Over the next few years, this change can lead to employers managing a wide age range of employees from any of these five generations: Traditionalists (born prior to 1946), Baby Boomers (born 1946-64), Generation X (born 1965-78), Generation Y or Millennials (born 1979-1997), and the newest to enter the workforce, Generation Z (born 1998 – ongoing). Each generation has distinct characteristics and values stemming from the particular time in history that they were raised. These common experiences affect their attitudes, motivations, and the way they approach work and life. It is important not to stereotype but to take these general differences into account. Here are some best practices and tips to make the multi-generational workplace more productive and harmonious.

Encourage Feedback

Keep the lines of communication open and establish a process for receiving feedback from everyone. You need to be aware of the particular generational issues that exist in your workplace so you can design your strategy to address any particular concerns.

Establish a Culture of Respect

Facilitate regular discussions on generational issues and help employers/employees better understand each other's differences. Include this topic in manager training, as leaders will set the tone for the entire organization. Your goal is to create an open and inclusive environment where all ages can contribute and work with one another to grow the business.

Focus on End Results, Not the Journey

Workers from different generations will often have different learning styles, communication and work setting preferences. Focus on the work that is produced rather than the way he or she chooses to get it done. If you can be flexible and offer perks such as telecommuting, your employees will be able to choose the work environment that suits them best.

Try to Engage Everyone

High employee engagement leads to higher performance, productivity and overall employee happiness. Employees in different stages of their careers will have different needs and contributions. Seasoned employees need to know that their contributions and experiences are valued while younger, newer employees may enjoy extra projects that can help them gain experience in areas outside of their core job responsibilities. Use your employees' strengths and interests to keep them connected to your company's mission and give them opportunities to further develop their skills and experience.

Learn From One Another

Set up a program where more experienced employees can share their career knowledge and younger employees can offer training in technology and share a fresh perspective. Employees can help each other grow in multiple areas.

Accommodate Different Styles

The way we communicate in the workplace has changed over the past few decades so it is helpful to deliver your messages in multiple ways to effectively reach everyone. Some traditionalists, baby boomers and gen Xer's may prefer communicating in person and on the phone, while generation's Y and Z may be more comfortable with email, texting and instant messaging. However, it's important not to assume a communication preference or technical ability. Communication styles are based on other factors aside from age including personality and experience. Communicate in the way that employees and co-workers prefer and help avoid miscommunications and misunderstandings.

Review Your Recruiting and Rewards

Your business may need to re-evaluate the compensation package and reward system that currently exists. Different generations may value certain perks and benefits and this may need to be taken into consideration.

Each generation in the workforce may look, communicate and perform differently from each other but it's important to develop practices to bring out the best in everyone. If employees can't communicate or work together effectively, this may lead to low morale and increased turnover.

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