

LESSON 7-1: Multi-Generational Leadership

Multi Generations in the Workplace

“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

WELCOME & PRAYER

KICK OFF QUESTION

- In a business setting, do you find it is easier to communicate effectively with others from your own generation or those from an older or younger generation? Why do you think this is the case?

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

“Guide older men into lives of temperance, dignity, and wisdom, into healthy faith, love, and endurance... We don’t want anyone looking down on God’s Message because of their behavior. Also, guide the young men to live disciplined lives.” Titus 2:2, 6 (MSG)

Discussion Question:

- Titus was a protégé and assistant to Paul, the Apostle. Here, he is giving instruction to Titus on counseling both older generations and younger generations. How is this relevant to you in the workplace?

BIG PICTURE

If you do not understand how to lead across multiple generations, people will be dissatisfied and leave your company. If they do not leave, they will not be fully engaged. Effective leadership involves:

- Recognizing generational differences
- Valuing the differences while also focusing on everyone’s common needs
- Using a flexible leadership approach
- Leveraging the strengths of each generation to make the team and the company better

A leader must help create an environment for young and old that is engaging and rewarding. To do this, we must understand the differences between the generations that are in, or moving into, the current workplace.

In this lesson and the lessons that follow, we will tackle common issues that are inevitable in a multi-generational workplace. All generations bring a valuable perspective to these conversations. We can all learn from and grow to better understand each other.

CONCEPTS TO UNDERSTAND

For the first time, four distinct generations are represented in the workforce; Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials. Social, relational, economic, political, and technological changes have shaped each of these generations uniquely compared to the others.

Definitions of the multiple generations in today's workforce vary slightly, and not everybody in these groups fits neatly into the typical preferences and characteristics of their generation. But typically, the four generations in today's U.S. workforce are defined as:

- Traditionalists (also known as Builders or the Great Generation), born before 1945
- Baby Boomers, born from 1946 to 1964
- Gen Xers (also known as Busters or the Lost Generation), born from 1965 to 1980
- Millennials (also known as Generation Y), born from 1981 to 2001

A fifth generation, Gen Z, is already a formidable force as consumers and are just beginning to join the workforce. Large numbers of Gen Z are still in adolescence, so their characteristics are not fully understood at this point. While we won't examine this group in detail, their current arrival in the workplace guarantees that a multigenerational workforce will continue to be the norm even after the Traditionalists have all retired.

Let's look at a quick summary of what sets each of these generations apart from the others.

Traditionalists

- Were shaped by the Great Depression, which left them cautious and conservative in their finances and other areas of their life.
- Experienced or fought in World War II, which taught them to sacrifice for the greater cause and developed their confidence in large organizations and the command-and-control style of leadership.
- Migrated from the rural areas to the city in large numbers for employment, bringing a strong work ethic and assuming responsibilities at a young age.
- Could be characterized by the mantra "Keep Calm and Carry On."

Baby Boomers

- Grew up at a time marked generally by peace in the world and a strong post-war economy which allowed this generation to advance from worry about survival to a value system that could focus on self-improvement.
- Experienced a growing middle class, huge improvements in the quality of consumer goods, and a rising standard of living.
- Were the first generation in which television became ubiquitous, which made historic events like the Kennedy assassination, The Beatles, and the lunar landing truly shared experiences. This broader view of the world impacted their relationships, resulting in the "generation gap" with their parents.
- Could be characterized by the mantra "Do Your Own Thing."

Gen Xers

- Faced the demographic reality of being a smaller generation than the Boomers, who have taken up many of the positions to which they aspired.
- Experienced more volatile economic growth, high inflation and interest rates, and corporate layoffs, which resulted in risk of downward mobility compared with the Boomers.
- Grew up at a time of changes in family structures, characterized by divorce rates tripling between 1960 and 1982 and became latchkey kids, fending for themselves after school.
- Gen Xers could be characterized by the mantra “Get Real.”

Millennials

- Were the recipients of high parental involvement and social rewards growing up, which has translated to workers who value mentorship but also chafe at the prospect of not receiving promotions and responsibilities sooner than prior generations.
- Have grown up with technology which makes them valuable in the marketplace.
- Were shaped by 9/11 to feel that tomorrow is uncertain, so they value work/life balance. They search out meaningful work and volunteer opportunities in their area of passion.
- Millennials could be characterized by the mantra “Can We Fix It? Yes, We Can!”

EXERCISE

Review the generational descriptions above. Complete the chart at the end of this lesson. What is your perspective of each generation?

Discussion Questions

1. What major life events beyond those noted above do you believe contributed to defining your generation or you specifically? How did these events affect you?
2. Which stereotype of your generation best describes you? Which stereotype do you dislike the most?
3. In your own family structure, how have you seen generational differences cause conflict?
4. Which generational difference causes the most dysfunction at work? Why? What needs to change?

5. How do you see generational differences in your 210Leaders group?

TAKE ACTION

- Ask someone from another generation about their perspective on how their values were formed. Try to understand at least one dynamic and one external event that made them who they are today.

CLOSING PRAYER

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *Sticking Points* by Haydn Shaw
- *Generational Differences Chart* by Midland Family Center
(<http://www.wmfc.org/uploads/GenerationalDifferencesChart.pdf>)
- *Generational Diversity in the Workplace Podcast, April 5, 2019* by Andy Stanley

Exercise: Generations from Your Perspective

Generation	The characteristics I respect the most.	The characteristics that annoy me the most.
Traditionalist <1945		
Baby Boomer 1946 - 1964		
Generation X 1965 - 1980		
Millennials 1981 - 2001		