210 | LEADERS
GROW. BUILD. LEAD.

LESSON 7-2: Multi-Generational Leadership
Generational Engagement

"The young, no doubt, make mistakes; but the old, when they try to think for them, make even greater mistakes." — Bertrand Russell, British philosopher, mathematician, political activist, and Nobel laureate

"Youth cannot know how age thinks and feels. But old men are guilty if they forget what it was to be young." — J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

WELCOME & PRAYER

PREVIOUS LESSON FOLLOW UP

- What did you learn about the way someone from another generation was shaped by external events? How did this conversation help you understand their values and behavior?

KICK OFF QUESTION

What are some businesses that failed because their business model did not meet the preferences of a new generation? What lessons can you learn from this?

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven." - Ecclesiastes 3:1 (ESV)

<u>Discussion Question</u>:

- How is your business being impacted by the "seasonal" demographic changes in its customers and workforce? How well is it adapting?

BIG PICTURE

- When generational differences are identified in the workplace, leaders and organizations might choose to:
  - Ignore those generational differences
  - Attempt to "fix" one of the generations
  - Cut a deal with one of the generations

- While these approaches could be used in the short-term, an effective business needs to ultimately choose to **lead** all of the generations in their organization.

Grow Build Lead

- A helpful approach to lead multiple generations is to work through a process when a generational difference causes friction in a business setting. Depending on the issue, you may need to use some or all of these four steps:
    - <u>Recognize</u> generational differences
    - <u>Value</u> the differences while also focusing on everyone's common needs
    - <u>Accommodate</u> different attitudes
    - <u>Leverage</u> the strengths of each generation to make the team and the company better

CONCEPTS TO UNDERSTAND

In Lesson 7-1 we discussed some of the differences in how Traditionalists, Boomers, Gen Xers and Millennials think and act. We want to take the next step in considering how we can deal with these differences. As with any other issue, there are some not-so-productive short-term responses that will keep your organization from moving forward.

- **Ignore:** Ignoring a generation by not hiring them may work when a new generation first joins the workforce, but eventually that generation will be too large to ignore. An organization can leave itself vulnerable by not being an attractive employer to an entire generation of potential contributors.

- **Fix:** A slightly more enlightened approach is to try to fix another generation. Our tendency to "fix" others often looks like trying to get them to act the way we do. This approach is naïve and unproductive since each generation is shaped by the unique world events and social dynamics that occurred in their formative years.

- **Cut a Deal:** In order to keep the peace, a manager can elect to cut a deal with another generation. As an example, casual Fridays came about to tackle the long-standing hot button issue of acceptable dress code in the workplace. Cutting a deal with one generation can lead to friction with other generations.

Each of the three approaches above reflect less than ideal management of an issue. In subsequent lessons, however, we will examine a dozen basic workplace issues that can cause problems if not resolved. True resolution will come from *leading* multiple generations, not just managing them.

An effective leadership approach can be summarized as Recognize, Value, Accommodate and Leverage the differences.

Recognize

Leading through a divisive generational issue can only happen if the work environment allows an issue to be brought out into the open. Even the most mundane issue like using earbuds in an open office concept can be a point of contention between a Boomer and a Millennial. A Millennial may assume that listening to music while working is very appropriate (they grew up on earbuds!), and using earbuds is respectful of their cubemates. Boomers might see the earbuds as an impediment to communication over the wall of a cubicle and a signal that somebody doesn't want to be bothered. Acknowledging the issue, not ignoring it, is the right place to start.

Value

Focusing on "what" generations do differently is likely to be a point of contention, but focusing on "why" they do things differently can allow for common ground. In the midst of an emotional discussion, it is helpful to remember that *"whats divide"* and *"whys unite"*. The Boomer needs to appreciate why the Millennial uses the earbuds, while the Millennial needs to appreciate why the Boomer feels the need to communicate over the cubicle walls.

Accommodate

In some cases, a leader can utilize different approaches for multiple generations to accomplish the same desired outcome. As an example, training can be accomplished effectively face-to-face in a classroom or online using a video. Different generations can then self-select the training method that works best for them. Of course, not everything in the workplace can be accommodated — some policies are unavoidable. The organizational challenge comes in trying to determine when a policy is a necessity, or simply a generational preference. At the risk of oversimplifying the difference,

- An organizational necessity is anything that will make you lose a body part, a customer, or money.
- A generational preference is something that is not an organizational necessity.

Leverage

In the midst of generational tension, a manager can tend to focus on the differences in team members in a negative way. But an effective leader sees those differences as opportunities to leverage the strengths of each group to make the entire team more effective. A multi-generational sales duo of a tech-savvy Gen Xer alongside a Traditionalist with a wealth of knowledge about the company's product line and customers can be more effective than a team without this multi-generational leverage.

EXERCISE

Identify a source of tension between generations in your current work environment. If you are struggling to come up with an example, it may be helpful to tackle appropriate clothing in the workplace. Come up with a solution by working through the issue using the approach of Recognize/Accommodate/Value/Leverage. You might choose to share this problem resolution with your leader at work to determine how it could be implemented.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you recall a time at the beginning of your career when you felt your generational preferences were ignored, or your manager tried to "fix" you by attempting to change your values to match their own?

2. Is there any simmering generational issue in your workplace that has not been acknowledged? What is a productive way to bring the issue forward so a solution can be reached?

3. What characteristic in another generation have you learned to appreciate?

4. How has your business leveraged the strengths of multiple generations to become more competitive with customers? Is your business an attractive place of employment for multiple generations?

5. How can the approach of Recognize/Accommodate/Value/Leverage be applied in your personal life with other family members?

TAKE ACTION

Spend some time this week with a co-worker from another generation. Learn something from them that is unique to their generation. Share what you learned at the next meeting.

CLOSING PRAYER

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *Sticking Points* by Haydn Shaw
- *Generational Differences Chart* by Midland Family Center
  (http://www.wmfc.org/uploads/GenerationalDifferencesChart.pdf)
- *Navigating the Multigenerational Workplace* by Leah Georges at TEDxCreightonU
  (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzfAOc4L6vQ)