

Being People Smart

Lesson 7-5: Multi-Generational Leadership

Discussion Guide – Confidentiality Reminder

One Word Check-in

Update – Personal, Business, Leadership

“Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. ... Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.” Colossians 3:12-14 (NLT)

A key aspect of leadership is building relationships with people that are generationally different than you.

It is easy to build relationships with people that think like you, but your organization has many people who do not. This lesson focuses on generational differences that can create challenges for leaders. The Silent Generation that grew up in the Great Depression and served in WWII had challenges in dealing with Baby Boomers. This is not a new phenomenon.

Many of the perceived issues that people have of other generations are not correct, according to Hayden Shaw in “Why Half of What You Hear About Millennials is Wrong.”¹ Statistically, there are some truths, but there are also similarities between generations. As Simon Sinek states in “The Challenge with Gen Z,”² Gen Z wants work that matters, flexibility (especially since Covid), support and appreciation; however, all generations want this. Many people state that they have no allegiance to the company that they work for, but this started in the 1980s when people got laid off from companies that had never done this before. As we have stated in other lessons, staff were treated as expendable “cost centers” and not valued appropriately.

Today’s workforce is more generationally diverse than ever. The person who fought in WWII and lived through the depression of the 1930s certainly thinks differently than subsequent generations. They had a hard life, but they wanted a better life for their children and grandchildren. The Baby Boomers worked arduously and sacrificed their family to some degree. Subsequent generations have said that they do not want to be like that. They want to invest in their family and enjoy life as it happens, not after retirement.

The pandemic changed everything. During Covid many people lost their jobs and voluntary resignations decreased until the restrictions ended. At that point, resignations accelerated. There was low unemployment and a record number of job openings. Research shows the top reasons cited for people leaving were the desire for better working conditions, burnout and the pursuit of higher pay.³ They learned that they could do much of their work from home and they believed that they could be just as productive.

We must recognize that we all need each other. Older people need the young and vibrant to help keep them young. Younger generations need the wisdom and lessons learned from older generations. There is much to be shared if we get to know each other. Interestingly, the older generations tend to adopt some of the thinking of younger generations. A wonderful life has wonderful relationships across all generations. This brings value and appreciation across a broad spectrum of people.

Our recommendation is to build relationships one at a time and develop relationships with those who do not share your demographic and background. Learn to appreciate what is valuable and meaningful in each person’s life. The result will be unity and lasting relationships.

Shared Experiences:

- Can someone share their experience in leading older or younger generations?
- What is your biggest challenge in working with other generations?
- Can someone share how their job has changed for the better or worse since the pandemic?
- What have you learned from those older than you? Younger than you?

Bottom line: We need relationships to bring meaning to our lives, and we need mentoring so that we do not make the same mistakes that others have made. Leaders need to respect others in a way that builds relationships and helps people along the way. Older people need younger people, and younger people need older people. We need each other.

One Word Check-out

Dig Deeper

Want to learn more?

- *Article:* [On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What We Know About Gen Z So Far](#) by Kim Parker and Ruth Igielnik and published by Pew Research, May 14, 2020
- ¹*Video:* [Why Half of What You Hear about Millennials Is Wrong](#) by Haydn Shaw presented at TEDxIIT. (An excellent video. It is more than generations; it is life stages.)
- *Video:* [Navigating the Multigenerational Workplace](#) by Leah Georges presented at TEDxCreightonU (Another excellent video that challenges conventional thinking about generational differences.)
- *Article:* [Can 5 Generations Coexist In The Workplace?](#) by Jack Kelly writing in Forbes, May 1, 2023
- *Article:* [Generational Mindsets Affect the Workforce](#) by Allen Smith, J.D. and published by Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), September 10, 2021
- *Article:* [Generational Differences in the Workplace: Managing a Multi-Generational Workforce](#) published by PayCheck.com
- ²*Video:* [The Challenge with Gen Z](#) by Simon Sinek (A comment posted with this video by a GenZ: “I’m GenZ, and I’ve been watching Simon Sinek since 2011. Just about everything he says I agree with. And he totally hit me on the marker with this.”)
- ³*Article:* [What Is The Great Resignation? Causes, Statistics, and Trends](#) by Amy Fontinelle published in Investopedia
- *Chart:* [Generational Differences Chart](#) by Midland Family Center

Five Generations in the U.S. Workforce

| Generation | Years Born | Some Formative Experiences |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|--|
| Silent Generation (or Traditionalist) | 1928 – 1945 | WWII, Fixed-gender roles, Rock ‘n’ Roll, Nuclear families |
| Baby Boomer Generation | 1945 – 1964 | Cold War, Post-war boom, Sixties sexual revolution, Apollo Moon landings, Woodstock, JFK assassination, Vietnam, Higher standard of living |
| Gen Xers | 1965 – 1980 | End of Cold War, Fall of Berlin Wall, Reagan/Gorbachev, First PC, Latch-key kids, Rising divorce rate |
| Millennial Generation | 1981 – 1996 | 9/11 terrorist attacks, PlayStation, Social media, Iraq invasion, Grown up with technology |
| Gen Z | After 1996 | Economic downturn, Global warming, Mobile devices, Energy crisis, LGBTQIA, Gender dysphoria |

Notes:

1. Be cautious of dates and lumping people into a specific group. Human beings are complicated and diverse. Not everyone born in the years listed shares the typical traits of the generation associated with their birth year.
2. This is only for the U.S. workforce. Those in Europe and Japan do not conform to these generalities.
3. Taken from [Characteristics of Generations and the gap](#) published by researchgate.com plus additional research.