

Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Different generations working together

As discussed previously, each generation has different beliefs about the structure of authority within the work setting, the role of technology, and the emphasis to place on work versus leisure activities. These beliefs and values must be taken into account when communicating with team members from other generations.

For example, Gen X employee, Sam, is asked by his supervisor to explain a new computer program to Rebecca, a Silent Generation team member. Sam will need to remember that technology is not something that Rebecca grew up with, and that she may have some discomfort or lack of knowledge about using computers and/or specific computer programs. Sam will need to be patient and explain things step-by-step, while not acting cocky or condescending since that will only make it more difficult for Rebecca to focus on learning. If he takes time to communicate his desire to help her learn and master her computer program, she will likely respond well, particularly because her motivation to learn the program was based on a request from a supervisor (someone above her in the company hierarchy).

Providing feedback in a constructive, non-judgmental way is another critical skill for an intergenerational team player. For some generations, such as the Silent Generation, conflict in the workplace is something to be avoided. Therefore, it can be difficult for member of this generation to speak up and share a dissenting point of view, especially with people who occupy superior positions within the company hierarchy. Members of other generations should be aware of this reluctance when asking Silent Generation members what they think, especially in public settings. One good way to make Silent Generation team members more comfortable speaking their minds might be to divide work groups into smaller teams which report back to the larger group. Then, the small groups can discuss the issues and one member can be appointed to speak to the larger group on behalf of the small team. This arrangement will allow Silent Generation and Baby Boomer members to feel more comfortable sharing their opinions and thoughts without feeling put "on the spot" in front of everyone.

Team members should also be aware of differences in values and beliefs regarding budgets and goals. For example, as discussed previously, Baby Boomers are results-oriented rather than budget-focused. They believe in getting the job done and don't particularly care how this occurs, so it can be difficult to "pin them down" with regard to creating steps or parts to a project as well as establishing objectives and goals. Members of other generations will likely have the best success if they help to establish time-lines and then let Boomers take control over how they wish to meet their own deadlines. Micro-managers will end up with frustrated Boomers if they try to control exactly how the work process must unfold.

Teams can also become more successful by setting initial ground rules that can help govern each member's behavior. These rules should take into account the various beliefs of each team member and generation. Examples of such rules include:

- No phone calls in or out during scheduled sessions.
- Sessions will start and end on time.
- Commit to being on time for all meetings; if you will be late, let the group know in advance.
- As much as possible, we will stick to the stated agenda times. However, agenda items are flexible. We'll do as much as possible in the allotted time.
- During the session, there will be no recap of earlier meetings for those previously not present.
- All participants are considered equal during these sessions.
- One person talks at a time.
- Every idea and comment is valid.

- Before judging the idea, listen to it first as an advocate.
- What is said here stays here.
- Anyone can pass on any activity.
- After the meeting, accurately represent the decisions of the group to others who weren't in attendance.
- Every effort will be made to reach consensus.
- No lectures.
- The meeting facilitator will structure time and tasks.
- It's okay to have fun.
- We seek common ground for collective, coordinated action, rather than agreement.
- Personally investigate the assumptions/beliefs underlying your positions.
- Suspend predetermined positions to allow the collective intelligence to emerge.
- All ideas are held up for consideration, reflection and inquiry.
- There are no taboo topics; nothing should be withheld from discussion.
- Advocate the best ideas that emerge from the group.
- Say what you mean and mean what you say.
- Use "I" messages.
- Speak first about your own personal experience.
- This is a put-down free, safe, non-sarcastic environment.

Monitor your participation (some need to hold back more to allow others to share. Others need to force themselves to share more).

Each team member can be asked to prioritize the rules or to choose the top 3 to 5 rules for their group to follow. The group can then formally adopt the rules that will govern the particular group or project team. Starting groups and teams with this type of activity can also help group members begin to understand each other and know what is important to each person, which in the end creates a stronger and more effective team.

Intergenerational Mentoring

Over the past decade, mentoring has become increasingly important in the workplace. Companies have discovered that partnering inexperienced and experienced team members has many benefits beyond just the transfer of skills. There is also a greater understanding of the other person's perspective and recognition of the skills and experiences that each person brings to the table. Intergenerational mentoring can be particularly rewarding, as it is a way to learn about the beliefs and values of coworkers from different generations and backgrounds.

For example, Company ABC has asked Baby Boomer Susan and Generation Y member Mark, to enter into a mentoring relationship. Because of her long career in business, Susan is able to share with Mark how to build a career and have long-term success on the job. She can share life-lessons and gain the satisfaction of helping someone younger to get a good start in his career. This helps to re-energize her about her own career and the skills that she's gained over time. At the same time, Mark is able to assist Susan with technology concerns about how to use computer programs to make her more efficient. He can also share different ways to multi-task on the job and to think creatively with regard to managing and completing her work.

If you are asked to participate in an intergenerational mentoring relationship, you can begin the process by identifying your own skills and strengths on the job. Then, list your goals for growing and improving current skills or gaining new skills. You can work with your mentor to determine how you can help each other, and both people can benefit from the relationship over time.

Working with a Supervisor of a Different Generation

Developing a good relationship with your supervisor is obviously critical to your job success. With four generations in the workplace, it is likely that your supervisor may be from a different generation than

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yourself. It is important to think about your supervisor's beliefs and values about workplace roles and responsibilities when interacting with him/her. As the examples in the team section demonstrate, thinking about the perspective of your supervisor can allow you to ensure that both of your experiences and backgrounds work together to create a stronger, more satisfying relationship for both parties. A strong relationship will benefit both of you while allowing both parties to meet job expectations. You and your supervisor also should establish ground rules, just like teams, for how you will interact during meetings and projects. These rules, along with an understanding of generational values and beliefs, can lead to ultimate success for both of you.

Conclusion

In order to be successful on the job, you need to understand the perspective of your coworkers and supervisors and their values, beliefs and ideas concerning communication, technology, hierarchy, goal setting, and other workplace characteristics. By understanding the differences between the four generations, you can create better and more productive relationships that benefit all involved.

please refer to your benefit material for more information. For immediate assistance, call 1.844.880.9137.