

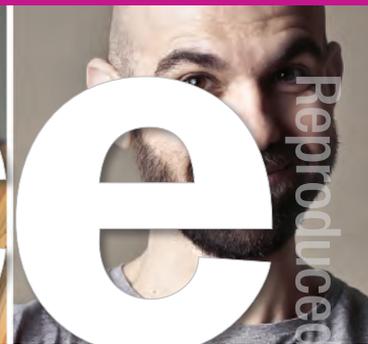
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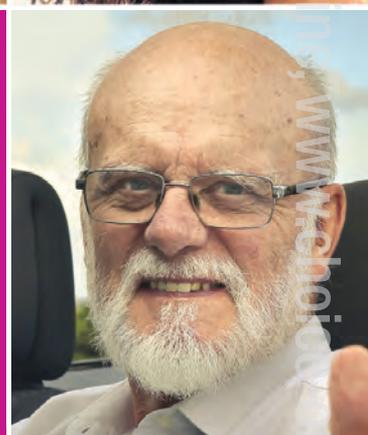
Coaching Across Generations

What we need to know about generational differences

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Generations



Is there really a difference between generations or is it about different stages of life, and how do we coach clients from this lens? What are the different generational needs, expectations, values and conflicts and what is the impact on coaching? What do you need to know about generational differences in order to build rapport and effectively work with them? How do you coach leaders to manage and build relationships with team members from different generations? Come along to learn more about intergenerational challenges presenting themselves in coaching.



Engaging Generational Strengths

How leaders can utilize multigenerational teams and ideas to benefit their organizations

By Valerie Pelan, MBA, PCC

Leaders manage teams and organizations, many of which are “diverse” as well as multigenerational, global and virtual. Driving projects and getting results can be a challenge, especially if the organizational culture and/or the leader’s style reflect a more historical or traditional approach to leadership. Generational differences can challenge a leader’s role and cause high turnover and low employee engagement. Executive coaches can support current and future leaders by helping them manage their teams, focusing on designing better communication and on finding generational similarities rather than differences.

The workplace is dynamic, and the interactions of the

generations can create complex situations for leaders. Coaching can help prepare leaders for global and diverse organizations of the future. The leader of today and the future will need to be flexible and influence the overall motivation of team members, be a role model, exhibit fairness and match people to jobs.

Boomer Leader Meets Millennial

Step back several years and the millennials were entering the workplace, challenging Boomer and Gen X leaders. I was coaching a leader who managed a multi-generational team. He was a Boomer leader steeped in the company culture and historical ways of managing, but he was also smart and astute: he understood that the environment was chang-

ing and that employees were from different generations. He was concerned about employee turnover and miscommunications among team members.

This Boomer leader wanted to work with a coach to improve his leadership presence and broaden his perspective on the situation. In addition, the company's culture was steeped in a historical perspective not focused on the future, yet younger generations were being hired to fill positions of retiring older Boomers. It was a challenging situation for the Boomer leader.

Coaching Engagement

The coaching started; I was invited to shadow coach the leader during an in-person team meeting. He asked the new team member (a Millennial) to take notes and to send out a summary for the team to review. While the meeting was going on, the leader noticed the millennial was busy on her phone, typing away. The leader became upset as the meeting progressed; he thought the millennial was texting her friends instead of taking notes.

After the meeting ended, we walked back to his office and there were the meeting notes in his in-box. What a coaching moment that was. He was surprised! He said that he expected the note taking to be on a "white pad." Millennials are adept at technology, and he was surprised at the speed and accuracy with which the notes appeared in his in-box. One of the reasons for coaching was to help him gain a broader perspective on the strengths of the younger generation, and this situation was the perfect teachable moment.

The coaching plan covered ways for this leader to be more flexible and effective leading the multi-generational team, with a focus on improving the communication and finding generational similarities that would help him manage his team more effectively. That meeting with the millennial taking notes was an a-ha moment and the beginning of this leader's transformation.

Communication Redefine

Next, the leader decided to tackle the communication disconnects. He realized that generations had preferences for communication – some prefer in-person; others email. The information was currently being delivered in a one-way, top-down direction with a lack of "real" information. This leader decided to engage a multigenerational sub-team to define communication guidelines for the organization

At the next team meeting, the leader asked for volunteers from different generations to work on the sub-team; they were expected to recommend ways to enhance organizational communications. They were required to outline im-

plementation steps to improve company communiques and improve communication among team members – including the leadership team and other teams in the company.

Sub-team members were committed and presented their recommendations for changes. The sub-team provided communication guidelines to accommodate generational preferences and virtual team member needs. The multi-generational sub-team agreed that communication was the way to share information to engage employees and keep them in the loop. If communication is information sharing, employees should be able to provide feedback. In other words, communication

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should be a two-way dialogue, engaging employees as well as informing them. This was very different than top-down company communiques the organization had engaged in for years. The multigenerational sub-team's recommendations changed the way the organization looked at and used employee communication.

Career Opportunities Broadened

To the leader's surprise, the multigenerational sub-team provided additional recommendations laying out generational similarities about career motivators and options that were important for all employees in every generation. The leader was challenged and energized. This list of career options was a concern shared by all generations.

The sub-team recommendations suggested ways to broaden career opportunities and tailor them to employees based on their strengths, skills and career aspirations. This changed the way the organization looked at career discussions and helped to revamp the outdated and formula mapping approach that had been used for many years. This is the list of career opportunities all generations want:

- Projects that contribute to the success of the company or the team
- Face time with executive leaders
- Belonging to a winning team

These points provided guidelines for future one-on-one career discussions between the leader and his team. The leader felt this approach would help reduce employee turnover and increase productivity. It offered a fresh perspective on career drivers and indicated to the leader and company that people were motivated by similar career goals and opportunities regardless of their generation. These similarities opened up a more effective and positive leadership style for this Boomer

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leader by providing a framework to start effective conversations about career and helping to make those one-on-one career meetings more personalized.

End Results

The Boomer adjusted his leadership style. Organizational communications became more of a dialogue. Career discussions were tailored to each person's goals, aspirations and strengths, not their generation. This approach replaced an outdated, formula mapping that was ineffective. As a result of the new insight, this leader improved employee morale and engagement by focusing on areas that were of concern to all of his team members.

The sub-team received positive feedback and special recognition for their recommendations and their hard work. The leader became more coach-like in his leadership style and his executive presence improved. Team members felt more personally accountable for solutions and goals, connecting their projects and results with the company performance. There were fewer miscommunications and lower employee turnover, as the employees felt they had more career opportunities and an open avenue to discuss career advancement and areas of concern.

The bottom line: helping leaders take a multigenerational approach to organizational challenges makes them better leaders, makes their organizations better employers, and makes us more effective and valuable as coaches.

