

Tips for Working with Every Generation

The following tips are useful for working effectively with ANY generation.

DO

- Recognize that generational differences influence our ideas, expectations, values and behaviors at work.
- Acknowledge that everyone wants to be treated with respect—and recognize that respect might look and feel different, based on differing experiences and perspectives.
- Know that you have different life experiences and can learn from others' experiences and perspectives.
- Find ways to create shared values and common ground.
- Be open and honest about your “hot buttons” (i.e., recurring sources of tension or conflict).
- Give your colleagues specific suggestions on what they can do to help you perform your best.
- Focus on what really matters—productivity, teamwork and customer relationships.
- Challenge assumptions and raise awareness regarding the multigenerational workplace.

DON'T

- Stereotype (e.g., judging your colleagues' capabilities by what they wear and what their work hours seem to be).
- Ridicule or make derogatory remarks like “dinosaur,” “bureaucrat,” “slacker” or “kid.”
- Miss chances to improve communications/strengthen relationships.
- Assume every member of any given generation thinks or behaves exactly alike.

Working with Traditionalists

(1925-1942)

Motto: Pay your dues.

History: Grew up during a time of economic and political uncertainty
– influenced by clearly defined sex roles and the military model.

Characteristics: Generally seen as dedicated, loyal, long-term employees.

Tips:

- Acknowledge their experience, expertise and dedication.
- Pay attention to the chain of command and its importance to getting things done in certain areas of your organization.
- Speak positively of your company's history and legacy.
- Express interest in the work (e.g., projects, processes, products and bottom-line results).
- Seek the insights they've gained from years of experience.
- Use them as a resource when you have questions or problems.
- Acknowledge their respect for rules and hierarchy.
- Avoid age-related name call or offensive comments, such as, *When are you going to retire?*; grandpa/grandma; senior moments; *Are you still here?*

Working with Baby Boomers

(1943-1960)

Motto: Anything is possible.

History: Grew up during a time of economic prosperity and positive change that was viewed as “progress” and that included progressive views on child rearing (Dr. Spock).

Characteristics: Generally seen as optimistic and competitive, willing to work hard to ensure their (organizational) success.

Tips:

- Acknowledge their experience, expertise and hard work.
- Find a communications balance between email (can be seen as too impersonal), voicemail and face-to-face conversations and meetings.
- Seek their help with workplace politics. Use them to navigate politically charged environments.
- Use them as a sounding board to test ideas before plunging in. Ask a lot of questions about what has worked or not worked in the past.
- Avoid age-related name calling or offensive comments, such as, *They will do anything to get ahead.*; workaholic.

Working with Generation X

(1961-1981)

Motto: Work-Life Balance

History: Grew up in the shadow of the Baby Boomers during a time of change that negatively impacted family (divorce/latch-key kids); jobs (massive layoffs); economy (double-digit inflation); public trust (Watergate); and the environment (oil spills/endangered species).

Characteristics: Generally seen as skeptical, with loyalty and work ethic defined more individually, based on personal needs rather than organizational needs.

Tips:

- Acknowledge their experience and expertise and that you can learn from them.
- Be clear and direct in your language. Avoid corporate jargon, buzzwords and clichés.
- Find a communications balance—save meetings for issues that really require face-to-face communication.
- Allow flexibility and autonomy in work style and processes.
- Honor the need for work-life balance.
- Encourage a friendly, open and informal work environment.
- Avoid age-related name calling or offensive comments, such as, slacker; lazy; no loyalty; poor work ethic.

Working with Generation Y

(1982-2002)

Motto: Technology Rules!

History: Soon to be the largest group in the workforce, their history is still forming. They have grown up with multitasking, multimedia and an unprecedented exposure to diversity, technology, violence and sexual themes.

Characteristics: Generally seen as self-assured with a global view; they respond positively to opportunities involving technology.

Tips:

- Acknowledge their expertise and perspective and that you can learn from them.
- Be open to new and different ways of working.
- Encourage and embrace technology.
- Create opportunities to involve them in projects of significance.
- Show respect by asking their opinion or asking for help.
- Offer to be (or to find) a mentor.
- Find a communications balance—speak directly and quickly, avoiding long-winded explanations and matching words with actions.
- Foster a fun and fast-paced work environment; find ways to incorporate work and play.
- Give frequent and timely feedback.
- Avoid age-related name calling or offensive comments, such as, the baby; new kid; wet behind the ears; they need instant gratification; *We don't do it that way here.*

Summary of M.E.E.T. in Action

We need to be aware of generational differences and ways to work successfully in a multigenerational workplace. M.E.E.T. will help us communicate effectively and build a respect-filled workplace where people of all generations can do their best work.

Make time to discuss — Deal with a situation when you first become aware of a problem or concern.

- Communicate your need to M.E.E.T.
- Suggest a time and place
- Use a courteous and considerate tone
- Assess the situation and be prepared to communicate the issue in **30** seconds or less

Explore differences — Be open to other view points; do not assume you know it all. Ask to hear the other side.

- Explain the problem, situation, need or concern from your perspective
- Invite the other person's perspective
- Acknowledge the similarities and differences that exist

Encourage respect — Encourage respect even when you don't agree or understand why a person has acted the way s/he did.

- Demonstrate consideration for the other person
- Use respectful communication styles
- Stay in the present and focus on the future vs. rehashing the past

Take responsibility — Take responsibility to take action. Model the behavior you want to see.

- State what you need and your willingness to help the other person with what s/he needs
- Reach agreement
- End on a positive note
- Follow up