

Six Strategies for Multi-Generational Harmony

So, now that our workplaces are more generationally diverse than at any time in history, but at risk of conflict because of this, how do we all work together harmoniously? Here are six strategies for thriving within a multi-generational mix.

1. Establish Respect

It doesn't matter how old or how experienced we are, we all crave respect. And, just as newcomers need to respect older generations' seniority and experience, so long-servers need to adjust to and respect the talent and potential of younger generations. Only when each group respects the other can both thrive.

The key to respecting other generations is to understand and accept that they are different. Add to My Personal Learning Plan from yours. Consider what motivates people from different generations, what experiences they might have had, and what their working styles are likely to be. The table above can help you.

2. Be Flexible and Accommodating

When you understand what makes other generations "tick," being able to accommodate their needs and preferences, where practical, can help to prevent division and conflict.

Each generation has its wants and needs, and values different ways of working. Older generations often have fewer responsibilities and costs at home and they appreciate the opportunity to work part-time or reduced hours, so that they can enjoy the benefits and rewards of a lifetime's work. But an increasing number of Generation Xers are part of the "sandwich generation," responsible for caring for both elders and children alongside their work. And for members of Generation Y, a sociable life outside of work is often just as important as their career.

3. Avoid Stereotyping

It's easy to stereotype different groups. For example, if you're a Baby Boomer, you may think of Millennials as tech-obsessed and lacking in people skills. To Generation Z, Boomers may seem to be stubborn and inflexible.

Everyone is unique so, instead of assuming the worst, fight your unconscious bias. Add to My Personal Learning Plan and accept individuals based on their merits, rather than as "typical" members of particular generations. Remember, chances are, somebody may be stereotyping you! You can change their perceptions and attitude by demonstrating a willingness to listen to new ideas or suggestions, and, as we explore below, by sharing your knowledge and expertise.

4. Learn From One Another

The different generations have a wealth of knowledge and experience that they can share. Our article, Knowledge Management Add to My Personal Learning Plan, explores in detail how companies can retain, share, store, and organize its intellectual assets.

The Boomers in your team, for example, can pass on the knowledge, information, useful contacts, and perspectives that they have developed during their years at work. In return, a Generation Y colleague can help them to get to grips with recent innovations, such as the latest developments in social media and viral marketing. Our article, Reverse Mentoring Add to My Personal Learning Plan, explores ways that you, as a manager, can encourage this type of knowledge-sharing relationship.

Successful multi-generational teams identify, value and build on one another's skills and experiences. This focus on individual strengths, rather than on generational differences, is a key part of thriving in the modern workplace.

5. Tailor Your Communication Style

The generations often have their preferred methods of communication. Silents and Boomers tend to use one-on-one, telephone or written communication, whereas Generations X and Y tend to like emails and texts. Generation Z generally prefers the collaborative interaction of social media.

Generations differ in the degree of formality they use, too. Older team members tend to be more formal, whereas their younger colleagues will more likely use colloquialisms, abbreviations and "emojis" - small digital images and icons that are used in messages to represent ideas or emotions. This is more suited to personal or less important messages or communications. Serious or important messages are probably not the best times to use smiley face emojis!

Sticking rigidly to your own favored means and style of communication Add to My Personal Learning Plan can alienate others, so, although it might not feel natural, try to tailor your communication to suit the recipient whenever it's appropriate.

6. Don't Overlook the Similarities

Focus on the things that unite you with colleagues of all generations, rather than dwelling on the differences.

You might struggle at first to find similarities between yourself and older or younger team members. But, however stark the differences might appear to be, research suggests that there are more similarities than differences across the generations. After all, most people like to feel engaged with their work, to receive fair pay, to achieve, to build a better quality of life, to be happy and respected, and so on. Likewise, many of us share the same grumbles, such as feeling overworked and underpaid!

Key Points

Multi-generational workplaces can host as many as five generations. Having people who were born between the 1920s and the 1990s work together creates the potential for creativity and innovation, but also for conflict and misunderstanding.

You can avoid these pitfalls and thrive through:

- **Staying respectful, flexible and understanding.**
- **Avoiding stereotypes.**
- **Being open to learning from others, and helping them to learn from you.**
- **Adapting your communication style.**
- **Focusing on similarities between individuals, rather than on generational differences.**

Source: <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/multigenerational-workplace.htm>