

Generational Diversity Training Point Issues in Management #4

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Introduction for Trainers

This program is designed to highlight key features of workforce age groups, or 'generations', and the issues that this creates for managers and those involved in recruiting, developing and retaining staff.

Different ages working together is not new, but the phenomenon of the three 'generations' – Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y, all wanting their slice of the action - is unique to this period. Each generation wants, and feels they deserve, the breaks, the key roles, the nice rewards – and they all have valid reasons:

- Those workers who are currently teenagers and in their twenties (Gen Ys) have grown up in a time of peace and plenty, not needing to wait for the good things in life; these were already there. In the workplace, they do not see any reason to serve their time, like those now in their forties, fifties and sixties had to do.
- The older generation of Baby Boomers, having been in the workforce for decades, will no longer do as they are told without question, and they want a good income to finance their current and future lifestyle needs as they head towards retirement.
- Those in the middle, the Gen Xers, have demonstrated their commitment to the workplace and also believe it is time they were reaping the benefits. It is not hard to figure out there is a whole lot of resentment – the Baby Boomers are still hanging on to their positions, and the younger ones are already demanding the best roles.

These are all generalisations, and therefore useful only up to a point. Regardless of someone's age, the first step in effective staff management is in understanding staff motivations and expectations; what they want from their employment, and the recognition that they want. Ignoring these is not an option. The employment contract is a two-way street; if this becomes too one-sided staff will fail to perform, become disruptive, or leave, all of which takes its toll on productivity and the level to which a company can attract and retain talent.

Therefore, understanding does not mean learning a few simple 'traits' for each generation. Stereotypes (such as the 'loyal' Baby Boomer, the 'catastrophising' Gen Xer, and the 'it's all about me' Gen Yer) can be dangerous rather than useful if applied across the board. This DVD and supporting materials highlight some key generational characteristics as well as presenting the three central characters as individuals with their own drives and values. This can become a useful management tool in beginning to identifying difference, and in developing a range of strategies in making the best use of the different attributes, needs and drives of all staff members.

The central story in the DVD is about a 'team' of reporters who work together on a project: Angie (Baby Boomer), Chris (Gen X) and Jaden (Gen Y). While completing their assignment, we learn about what drives them, what they want out of their job, and the ways in which they contribute to the team. We observe positive interactions between the generations as well as the differences in the way they work, their attitudes to the work and their reasons for working. As a backdrop to the central story, Andy their boss defends his choice of team members to the unconvinced and slightly cynical Chief Editor.

The leader's guide, workbook and DVD combine to create an interactive investigation into 'generation basics' from which participants can begin to build higher level awareness and develop some strategies to improve relationships in their workplace, tap into expertise that they might previously have ignored, and retain talent – which will benefit the organisation in many ways, but especially the bottom line.

Who Will Benefit from the Program?

This program will be beneficial across many levels of an organisation, including:

- Business owners and those wanting to start a business
- People managers and aspiring managers
- Human Resource Practitioners responsible for recruiting, developing and retaining staff
- Marketing Managers involved in designing company branding and positioning
- Those across the organisation who are making strategic decisions about future directions, skill sets and succession planning
- Team members working in cross-generational teams
- Team leaders
- Staff trainers
- Anyone who needs to interact with others in the business world, whether they are currently in the workforce or not

DVD Timeline

00.00	Introduction
05.11	Summary
06.20	Conclusion
06.54	Credits
08.28	End program

Background Information – The Generations

Despite the fact that people of all ages are in the paid workforce (from 16 to well past the old retirement age of 65), many workplaces fail to account for generational and individual differences. In fact, strategies are often put in place, usually without conscious thought, which sidestep the issues, such as only hiring people within a particular age range, or segregating them into different functional areas. This can limit issues that might arise between generations, because the generations rarely need to interact, but it does little to create a dynamic workforce and diminishes its overall capability to achieve the organisation's goals. There is still a fairly widespread practice of allocating certain generations to specific roles (such as the young person just appointed becoming the receptionist, the manager being selected from a pool of forty-somethings) under the misguided belief that tasks are best done by a particular type of person. At the other extreme, teams put together without much thought or preparation often fail, only to reinforce the myth that 'you just can't mix older and younger workers'.

In today's lean, competitive world, employers must harness the wealth of experience, talents and drive that exists across the generations, by recognising the differences between groups and working positively to make the most of them, while at the same time minimizing the possibility for negative impact.

We have all heard about the Generation Gap, but what does this mean? It does not mean that from a given point in time all people were born with a particular set of characteristics. As individuals everyone is unique, with their own personalities, interests, ambitions and goals. Generations come about because of a particular set of circumstances that existed in the world at the time of their birth, in their growing up years and when they entered the workforce. This flavours their attitude to work, life, and themselves; it colours their expectations from society and the contribution they need and want to make to the world. It is easy to see why we have so many environmentally-conscious Gen Ys and so many selfmade Gen Xers. It also explains why so many Baby Boomers are still in the workforce, assisting both their parents and children to stay afloat financially, or else just keeping up with their own lifestyle needs.

It is important to keep in mind though that nothing in the workplace is static, and neither are people. As each generation gets older and their needs and expectations change, they are not going to want the same things as they did when they first entered the workforce.

Let's take a closer look at the Generations.

Baby Boomers were born between 1946 and 1965, and make up about 30% of the current workforce in Australia. For this cohort, work and personal sacrifice have been seen as the pathway to financial security.

When Baby Boomers started out in the workforce no one could have predicted the massive changes in the labour market over the following forty years; they expected to work for the same employer throughout their working life, and this made them loyal and hardworking, clocking on and off at the same time each day, with the expectation that their employer would look after them (and if not, the union would!) They didn't care too much that individuality in dress and appearance was discouraged. As they proved themselves at each level they climbed the career ladder, rung by rung, winning increasingly responsible roles on a seniority basis. They did not have to prove they could do a higher level job before getting the role. If their employer did the wrong thing by them, the union intervened.

As times got tougher in the late 1980s and 1990s, Baby Boomers lost their lifelong jobs, working life became more chaotic as they were required to take on weekend work, and spend

more hours on the job each day. They complied, because if they didn't the new kids on the block, the hungry and competitive Gen Xers would negotiate their way into their jobs; the unions were losing power in the workplace and everything was up for grabs.

Today the Baby Boomers are still working, still contributing, learning and developing, and still wanting their portion of financial and other benefits, but are hankering for some work-life balance. Treat Baby Boomers well, respect their knowledge and experience, acknowledge their dedication, and they will continue to reward you with the good work they are capable of.

Generation X, making up 50% of today's Australian workforce, consists of people born between 1965 and 1980. Coming into a world that was characterised by revolutions (anti-war, Women's Lib, etc.), they were starting work in a world full of uncertainty. No wonder they were cynical about the way their parents' generation had handled things up till then. This group of young workers found themselves competing for jobs that often did not last, so there was no way to develop loyalty; instead they developed their own goals and set about getting the skills and knowledge they needed to get there. They worked hard for long hours, shunning a personal life while focusing on establishing a career that had no identifiable progression points – the middle management roles had all but disappeared.

Generation X knew they had to get the 'runs on the board', but the goals were always changing. Getting a promotion was more arbitrary – seniority was out the window; in the meantime output was just as important as quality. Corporate image became more peer-driven as people fought to look better, sound better and prove themselves more worthy than the others. Today Gen Xers are slightly more wary and, yes, on the whole, more cynical, but they are movers and shakers who can cope with highly challenging environments. They will give time and a certain level of loyalty to an organisation as long as it helps them to achieve their goals and as long as they feel valued for who they are and what they have achieved.

Generation Y, born between 1981 and 1995 and making up around 20% of the workforce (this figure is growing each year) is confident and self-aware. Often called the 'me' generation, they were born at a time when their parents were realising that loyalty to an employer had not been to their advantage, and that self-reliance was the key to success and security. Focused on self improvement options, Generation Y workers prefer working in companies that provide constant learning opportunities, and a work environment that fits with their personal values (whether these be lifestyle, the environment, or with a humanitarian focus). They enjoy travel, variety, change, and achieving desirable outcomes. They like to be consulted about anything and everything in the workplace, and to be part of the decision-making process (but not necessarily hold the tag of manager, as this is often seen as an empty title). They will stay in the job as long as it is fun, interesting and provides sufficient challenge.

These brief snapshots show that old management techniques will simply not work – for anyone. By embracing generational diversity, starting with an understanding of each generation and their unique contributions to the workplace, then actively recruiting across the age span and providing opportunities for the strengths of each generation to be leveraged by the others, your organisation will be fit and ready to meet your present and future challenges head on.

Program Outline

The program outlined is two hours duration*. It is possible to tailor a shorter program by selecting one or more phases, depending on the time you have available. Phase 3 is the only mandatory phase, and includes the DVD which is 10 minutes in duration.

Phase 1: Session starter (30 mins)

Activity: Take a Chance!

Discussion

Workbook

Phase 2: Aspects of age diversity (10 mins)

Discussion

Workbook

Phase 3: The generations on the job (20 mins)

DVD

Discussion

Workbook

Phase 4: Age diversity – Workplace effectiveness (30 mins)

Workbook

Reflection

Phase 5: Creating an age diverse workplace – Strategies (30 minutes)

Discussion

Workbook

*Times indicated for each activity are a guide only; these can be lengthened or shortened depending on the class makeup and needs.

This is a sample only.

To preview Leader's Guide and Workbook in full, phone 1800 141 510.