Millennials at the Gates: 5 Tips to facilitate Intergenerational Relationships



The Millennial workforce has a lot to offer an organization but, according to many Baby Boomer colleagues, they also still have a lot to learn. Baby boomers hold a wealth of knowledge and understanding, but, according to many Millennials, they are a little grumpy. Perceptions may not always be accurate but perception fuels reality and in the workplace that can impact productivity and performance.

Millennials are joining the ranks of contributing employees everyday. They are often very willing to work with their Gen X, Y and Baby Boomer colleagues but they do not always know how to approach the situation. Used to teachers or professors who actively invite them into the conversation and listen to and discuss their unformed and unproven ideas, once they hit the workforce they are not always prepared for colleagues who expect to be listened to first and are too busy 'getting it done' to try something new.

5 Ways Millennials Can Build Better Working Relationships With Boomer Colleagues

Here are some tips you can share with your Millennial workforce to help smooth conversations and enhance working relationships.

1) **Show Them The Best Pitching Process:** Millennials do not always share the same vision of the process for making respectful contributions as their older colleagues. Boomers learned to defer to the hierarchy and wait their turn before they speak, offer ideas along the proper channels and they try to avoid going over their 'boss's head' unless they have to. Millennials are used to jumping in and shouting their ideas along all channels of communication. They may think nothing of sending an unformed idea straight up to a manager or higher.

What Can You Do? Share appropriate office communication protocols but, at the same time, create appropriate avenues for Millennials to pitch ideas. Create an employee 'ideas' sessions where everyone gets to pitch an idea, discuss it and then work on it before it is pitched upstairs. Encourage two-way communications of early stage ideas.

2) **Get Them To Try it Before They Fix It**: Millennials can be quick to want to change or update everything. They quickly see new and often technology fuelled ways to do things that improve process, function with potential time and resource savings value. However, they do not always have all full picture of the situation or understand either the process for change or the full impact of change.

What Can You Do? While their new perspective can be useful encourage them to first learn how something works thoroughly, who is impacted and why something has been designed as it has. They are often great at generating ideas and even effective in implementing them but sometimes the steps in between a new idea and the practical realities need more exploration. Suggest that they first speak to colleagues, observe and map out all players and parts before suggestions changes and improvements.

3) **Remind Them to Cross Their T's**: While they may not get the reference to crossing their "T's" or even dotting their "I's" now that cursive is no longer taught in school, attention to early quality control should be established on their radar. Millennials often do well on the 'fly', gathering information, pulling people and ideas together and drafting up suggestions. However, sometimes their idea of a completed plan, proposal or document is not up to the same quality standard expectation as their older colleagues.

What Can You Do? Provide them with a very brief 'Style Guide' that spells out expectations for work product. Include information about acceptable presentation format (such as a .doc, Wikki, Prezi, Powerpoint or more), structure or layout, required information (name of project, date, participants) and to whom it should be shared (and in what order). Additionally remind them that a draft must be error free and proofread.

4) **Teach Them To Ask For Clarity:** Communication misunderstandings often fuel relationship problems and productivity challenges. When Baby Boomers ask for a working draft, a deadline or information what they are expecting may be different then what the Millennial is thinking. Unless details are clarified a meeting of the minds may be a missed meeting of the minds. After years of 'practice' a Boomer may take a few expectations and details for granted. Often it is up to the Millennials to make certain they know the expectations. When a Boomer asks for a document by Friday they may mean Thursday before the end of the day or before the morning begins. The Millennial might think by midnight Friday. Details may be boring but they can be vital.

What Can You Do? Remind Millennials to clarify unspoken details, information such as time, date, process and more. Clarifying the 'W' questions of Who, What, When, Where, and sometimes Why. Suggest that they follow up on meetings and requests with an email (yes email) or other written communications (though probably not a text message) either asking questions for clarity or indicating their understanding of the details.

5) **Facilitate Their Workplace Understanding:** MIllennials are social and collegial generally and if they are recently out of school they will be used to having access to learned experts. They often require insider information and knowledge both related to the industry and their job and/or their role and your organization but they may not know how to go about gathering it.

What Can You Do: If you do not have a mentor-program consider adding one. This provides an opportunity for an experienced member of the workforce to provide workplace navigation tips. These mentors may not need to be in their same role or department, they are not 'training' this Millennial, they are there to help integrate, introduced expectations and prepare for success. The mentor progam need not be formal, but make an effort to introduce and pair them with a knowledgeable employee.

When all generations take the time to consider the perspective of others relationships improve, workplace communications improve and everyone benefits. Give

your workforce a productivity hack by helping to facilitate intergenerational cooperation in your own backyard.