

TOP 10

WAYS TO COMMUNICATE ACROSS GENERATIONS

List compiled by: Ashley Runge, Student Dietitian (Millennial) and Kristin Klinefelter, MS, RDN (Generation X)

Before delving into a conversation about communicating across generations, it makes sense to provide a brief definition of the generations at hand. Today, it is not uncommon for three – and maybe even four – generations to share a workplace. For simplicity's sake, let's restrict this conversation to communicating between the:

BABY BOOMERS
(1943-1961)

GENERATION X
(1962-1982)

MILLENNIALS / GENERATION Y
(1982-2004)

As far as communication goes, you will likely see differences between these groups' preferences, formality, and motivations. Management plays a key role in navigating the multi-generational workplace, and with some simple tips and tricks, you can turn this situation into a benefit rather than a roadblock.

1. FORMALITY FIRST



Clearly state your expectations for the level of formality in workplace communications. Younger generations tend to be more informal in business conversations, which can come off as unprofessional or disrespectful to others.

6. CHANGE: WHO, ME?



Know who your change agents are and who might be resistant to that new policy. The Millennial may embrace change and be more flexible in moving from the steam table to the coffee bar for this shift while the Baby Boomer may prefer to stay where they feel comfortable.

2. MIX UP YOUR MODE!



While Boomers tend to rely on face-to-face and phone conversations to send and receive messages, most folks in younger generations prefer instant communication via e-mail and text. Be comfortable using all these formats, and more importantly, know your audience.

7. WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?



What incentives make your employees work harder? Do they simply expect an on-time paycheck, or do they need health insurance and that occasional department celebration ice cream social?

3. ACKNOWLEDGE THE ATMOSPHERE



Don't ignore the elephant in the room; embrace the multi-generational workplace! We all have different life experiences and valuable insights to offer, and much good can come from having employees with different perspectives. This type of work environment also presents a perfect opportunity to dispel stereotypes around one's generation, so take advantage of it! Millennials are often assumed to be inherently lazy, while Baby Boomers and Gen Xers are labeled as non-team players in the workplace.

8. APPEARANCE ACTION



Have you updated your policies on grooming and uniforms? Remember that this is often in compliance with state and federal health codes. However, you will still need to communicate with the Millennial that nose rings must be covered or their stylish beard may need a beard guard. The older generations will be more likely to keep their personal style expressions reserved for home life and expect the uniform that is practical and nice in appearance.

4. TEACH AND BE TAUGHT



Always be willing to learn new modes of communication, and to teach others. Younger generations offer great insight for social media and technology trends, while older generations have a wealth of experience to draw from.

9. NO DRAMA LLAMA



A simple interaction between "whose turn it is to do tray delivery" may escalate into something personal if between two different generations. Clearly communicate with all your staff on basic, simple courtesy and manners.

5. MOTIVATION MATTERS



Understand what motivates people in different generations. Typically, Baby Boomers and Gen Xers desire clear, direct language. Motivate them by acknowledging their expertise. Millennials enjoy quick, direct conversations. Motivate them by giving frequent feedback and recognizing the worth of their unique perspective.

10. WHAT'S THE LINGO?



When a Millennial says "that's sick" it actually means it is super cool! A Baby Boomer may be offended by a younger person expressing their voice with trendy terms. Limit the use of slang and lingo in the workplace.

