

HUFFPOST BUSINESS

The Value of Multigenerational Teams

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Do you currently work with someone as a peer, manager, direct report or other colleague that was born in a different generation than your own? Chances are high that your answer is yes. Today's market place has four generations in the workforce at the same time and slowly creeping up to five. This enhances our outlook and creativity tremendously offering a depth of perspective we would not otherwise experience. It also can present challenges that require us to push our thinking and our practices in new and different ways.

There are many opportunities to having a multigenerational team. The range of experiences, beliefs, assets, values, motivations and relationships within these generations can't be underscored. In fact, they can add tremendous value to how we do our work, how we collaborate and how we enhance productivity. Of course, with opportunity, there are always challenges and potential conflicts. If we embrace the conflicts as inevitable and work to manage them strategically, the benefits highly outweigh the challenges.

How do we take advantage of these opportunities?

- First, it's important to understand and appreciate our differences. Recognizing that each generation has been exposed to influences that mold our thinking in unique ways can open new possibilities. For example, millennials (those born between 1980 - 2000) grew up with computers from the time they were in elementary school whereas for boomers (born between 1943-1960), television was a new technology when they were growing up. Allowing our millennial teammates to teach us their efficiencies with technology can heighten our awareness and expand our thinking. If we can step back and acknowledge these influences, we can try to learn more from each other and tap into the range of knowledge that exists while pushing our comfort level in exciting directions.

- Second, listen to each other. Ask probing questions that broaden our information base. Be open and curious to learning from each other and seeing the differences as a view from a new lens. Sure, we may not agree or even understand at first but that's the beauty of differences - it forces us to open our minds in ways that stretch our thinking. For example, traditionalists (born between 1922-1943) may have a strong belief of being respectful of authority whereas generation Xers (born between 1961-1980) may be less impressed with authority causing viewpoints that could translate to a mix of opposing behaviors within the team dynamic and beyond. Having an open and transparent dialogue could reveal some of these different viewpoints and result in a respectful exchange that enlightens each other to see the value of both perspectives.
- Third, learn to communicate across generations in a manner that resonates with one another rather than alienating one another. When communicating with traditionalists, be sure to be clear and specific with some focus on the long term outlook, not just the short-term and be sure to be respectful with some formality. When communicating with baby boomers, take the time to talk to them, listen to their ideas and give them plenty of opportunity to make connections while recognizing their contributions. When communicating with generation Xers, keep it simple, crisp and practical with emphasis on the bottom line and be sure to integrate technology. When communicating with millennials, make the time to engage in several short interactions using a variety of modes, specifically with technology, and explain the overall big picture and how they fit into that picture individually.

As we look forward, taking the time to build strong relationships across all generations makes us more valuable as individuals, teams, departments, and organizations. What we can learn from each other can only help push us in new ways and grow to be more effective professionals. Embrace these differences and see them as a valuable asset and strength. Doing so will result in higher performance, productivity, and competitive advantage.

Rita Balian Allen is the president of Rita B. Allen Associates, a career management firm specializing in executive coaching, leadership development, management training and career development. She is a lecturer at Boston-area universities, a sought-after speaker and presenter, the author of numerous articles, blogs and the book, *"Personal Branding and Marketing Yourself: The Three Ps Marketing Technique as a Guide to Career Empowerment"*. Rita was voted one of the top ten executive coaches by the Boston Women's Business Journal .