

The Strength of Each Generation will Build the Businesses of the Future

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In today's workplace, you'll find up to four generations working together. Never before have we experienced such a diverse and multi-generational workforce. With it comes the fundamental challenge to find a harmonious balance between the work ethics, values, ideas and expectations of each generation.

Recognizing that we are different based on the times in which we grew up is simply not enough. Both as employers and employees, the real question is, **how can we acknowledge and incorporate the many values, perspectives and ideas of our generations to create a healthy workplace and positively affect the bottom line?** In other words, **how can we make our differences work for us?**

To answer that question, we must first have an understanding of the characteristics of each of the four groups.

The **Silent/traditionalist Generation (born before 1945)** are people who may be accustomed to doing what they are told. It is important for them to understand due process and the reasoning behind decisions. Ask them to be part of performance review, or ask them to mentor others. As they bring many years of experience to the workplace, it may be good practice to create flexible or part-time positions to let them to share their knowledge, experiences and skills with younger generations before they retire.

Baby Boomers (born between 1946-1964) can be the type who do more than is expected and have grown up in a large and competitive market. They tend to be workaholics and enjoy challenging projects to keep a competitive edge. As they grew up in a time of economic growth, they were coined the 'me' generation and worked long hours to obtain a certain lifestyle. As boomers mature, they are focusing more on taking care of family and sometimes aging parents. They will continue to put in long hours but have come to value a flexible schedule to meet this new sense of family and self.

Encourage them to mentor younger generations by sharing their skills and opening them up to the value of a different perspective.

Generation X (born between 1965-1980) are people who seem to have a need to build skills and have a real impact. They are loyal to their team and take employability seriously.

This generation feels the need for security, because they saw their parents' working careers affected by down-sizing and layoffs. One way to retain these employees and offer security is through training and educational programs that help build their résumé.

Encourage their input with cross-mentorship with all generations. This generation were labeled 'latchkey kids', and they are self-reliant and do not like to be micro-managed. Generation X individuals tend to be very tolerant and work well in multi-cultural settings.

Millennials (GenY) (born after 1980) are people who are often not afraid to speak up. Don't be put off by their boldness. Teach them the basics of tactful communication through mentorship with the other generations. Their strength is in their energy and technical savvy. Utilize their assertiveness and encourage goal setting based on results. This is an innovative generation that can multi-task and enjoys variety. They will excel in a fast-paced, changing environment given the tools. They are serious about community and the state of our world.

A company or organization could benefit from this generation by participating in community and charitable events which let millennials work in a team environment, have fun and at the same time create a community-minded company that they are proud to be working with. As they have grown up in an era of constant and immediate recognition, they tend to prefer regular feedback and rewards.

Here are two ways to make working with multi-generations as productive and successful as possible:

1. Build an environment conducive to open communication.

The key to building a positive and productive workplace is open communication. It is important to understand how generational differences can affect daily relationships. Focus on building awareness of how each generation approaches work and the workplace. Also, encourage the development of ‘people skills’, so that each generation can feel secure in expressing and working out their generational, cultural, attitudinal and emotional differences in a safe and supportive environment.

2. Encourage all the generations to work together for the common good.

When people share a common interest, goal and passion for the work they do, they will also share in the sense of accomplishment and pride of a job well done. This creates a workplace climate that empowers people of all generations. It takes a village to raise a child, and indeed it takes a diverse team to create and sustain a profitable business. When differences are encouraged, creativity and productivity will rise.

As an employee, seek to understand others and where they are coming from. Each generation has valuable lessons to share and it is never too late to learn! If every generation tries to understand and be flexible towards each other, there will be less conflict and more cooperation and productivity in the workplace.

As an employer, acknowledge and find ways to make the most of the strengths that each generation brings to the table. Making decisions that reflect the many perspectives in your workforce will also reflect the diverse needs of your customers and clients. Communicate your company goals, show them the future, and ask for feedback. The result will be an engaged, dedicated and loyal workforce. Wouldn't that be a great addition to your 'brand'?

The Marrek Group works in partnership with **Mohawk College** and is proud to present our workshop, **Multi-Generational Workplace – Making it Work** as part of the **Tools for Business Series**. (www.mohawkcollege.ca/trainingsolutions)

To find out where you can attend our **Multi-Generational Workplace – Making it Work** workshop contact Audie McCarthy at 905 662 3407 or by e mail at audie@marrek.com

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