

How To: Manage Across Generations

Resource Type: Articles

Topic: HR Risk and Employment Practices

For the first time in modern history, five generations are in the workplace at the same time. This presents both opportunities and challenges. Here are some tips for how to tap into the diversity of perspectives that come from managing multiple generations, and navigating cross-generational conflicts that may arise.

Remember that your employees are whole people. Many factors beyond age affect a person's perceptions, including family upbringing, gender, ethnicity, cultural background, religious or spiritual beliefs, and more. Make no assumptions, except that any group of people will include a variety of perspectives. The best way to find out what matters to any individual or group in their work is to ask, and listen to the answers.

Share your preferred methods of communication and encourage your team members to do the same. This helps people get to know each other and avoid falling into stereotypes ("millennials only respond to texts.") Spell-out group communication expectations.

Encourage discussion, manage conflict

Respect boundaries and differing opinions. Topics that might not have been discussed at work 15 years ago—sexual orientation, gender fluidity, mental health—surface frequently now. Spell out values that are non-negotiable for your organization: for example, your nonprofit values the diversity of its employees and clients, and requires employees to treat others with utmost respect even if they don't share their views.

Solicit a wide variety of viewpoints across generations and other differences in meetings. Everyone wants to be heard, whether they're at the beginning of their career or 40 years in. Make sure all your team members get that opportunity.

Acknowledge conflict when it arises. Solicit diverse views on how to move forward. Explain how and why you made your decision.

Tap into [appreciative inquiry](#) to manage conflict. Appreciative inquiry focuses on strengths rather than weaknesses. The approach recognizes that people who have very different perspectives and experiences across generations can collaborate effectively, and all of them bring something different to the table.

Be flexible, open-minded and supportive

Offer as much flexibility as possible in work schedule and location. Employees consistently rank flexibility as one of the most important aspects of a workplace, and flexibility benefits people at all stages of life. So don't assume that staff from one generation value greater flexibility than others.

Communicate changes clearly. Make sure employees know when and how they can come to you with questions or feedback about changes.

Provide professional development opportunities across all levels of your organization. Employees across generations want to learn and grow in their work. If your team sees those opportunities get distributed evenly, it will increase their trust.

Foster cross-generational mentoring. Take advantage of the amazing opportunities having five generations in the workforce at once presents. Seek ways employees can team up to teach each other things they're great at. This will help build camaraderie and respect.

Check your own biases. Do you make assumptions about how age shapes an employee's work style or opinions? When you assign work, focus on how well employees execute tasks. Don't let intangibles guide your decisions on project management or promotion. You'll not only avoid the risk of illegal age discrimination, you'll also make better decisions for your team.

Resources:

- [How To Manage A Multigenerational Team – Harvard Business Review](#)
- [How To Manage Intergenerational Conflict In The Workplace – Society for Human Resource Management](#)
- [The Secret To Leading Effectively – Center For Creative Leadership](#)