

PAYING IT FORWARD

Leading With Purpose

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SAY WHAT?

After 40 years in the fire service, Chief Randy Bruegman founded The Leadership Crucible Foundation to reshape future leadership with a focus on fostering courage, empathy, and humility in leadership positions.

Say What?

Bridging The Communication Gap Between Generations

During a recent conversation with a group of mid to senior level executives, the discussion revolved around the challenges they continually encounter when attempting to effectively communicate with their respective team members.

Their communication hurdles stem not only from the diverse preferences in communication styles but also from the nuanced differences in their perceptions of work, the world, and their individual roles. It's evident that generational perspectives have historically influenced leadership, management, and communication strategies, but the impact seems more pronounced in today's dynamic and ever-evolving professional landscape.

Today, with more people working past the traditional retirement age and with Gen Zers entering the workforce, we now have up to five generations working alongside each other. Each generation's unique outlook is influenced by their experiences, values, and their use of technology, leading to differences in communication styles at

work and in their personal lives.

Since World War II, the history of communication in the workplace has been characterized by a series of transformative developments. The introduction of technologies such as the telephone, fax machine, email, and, more recently, video conferencing and instant messaging has fundamentally reshaped the way people interact and work together in professional settings over time. These advancements have not only enhanced connectivity and efficiency but have also expanded the global reach of businesses, resulting in significant evolutions of workplace dynamics, where people work, and as experienced, increased productivity in the post-war era.

The impact of social media on communications has been profound, revolutionizing the way

individuals and businesses interact and engage with one another. Social media platforms have facilitated instant and widespread dissemination of information, which has transformed the creation and sharing of content, and has redefined how people connect and communicate across the globe.

Additionally, social media has provided a platform for diverse voices to be heard and has significantly influenced communication patterns in both our professional lives, and has dramatically influenced personal marketing, public relations, and consumer feedback.

As a new employee entering the workforce during the Baby Boomer generation, I encountered a workplace environment dominated by the Traditionalist/Silent generation.



Their adherence to bureaucracy and hierarchical approaches often led to frustrations, from my perspective, due to the perceived slowdown in processes and decision-making. At that time, I never took the time to understand why they thought and managed the way they did. That would have been insightful to understand that, as I could have more effectively managed my approach through those frustrations, and possibly could have achieved the outcomes about which I was complaining.

As I progressed through my career and collaborated with subsequent generations, it became evident that each generation brings its own distinct set of viewpoints, communication styles, and perspectives on the world and work, all significantly influenced by their life experiences, global events, and technological advancements.

Collectively, these elements contribute to shaping generational attitudes towards various issues and the communication methods they find most effective and natural. Today, we have gained a deeper understanding and heightened appreciation for the importance of recognizing these differences.

Effective communication is not only fundamental to human interaction but also essential for the successful operation of an organization. Communication across generations can be challenging due to differing values, beliefs, and communication styles. Yet when done effectively, it allows for the sharing of diverse perspectives and experiences, leading to a more

cohesive team. Much has been written regarding the responsibility of those in leadership and managerial positions to guide that effort in their organizations, and that is true. But we all must take ownership in understanding the perspectives that each of us bring and of those that we work with.

From the youngest employee to the oldest, and no matter what level you find yourself in your or-

ganization, communicating effectively across generations requires a blend of awareness, flexibility, and mutual respect. It is about knowing your audience, understanding their general communication preferences of different generations, but being careful not to assume that everyone you work with will be exactly the same. The best way to determine that is to ask your colleagues what works best for them.



“Effective communication is not only fundamental to human interaction but also essential for the successful operation of an organization.”

Generational Differences In The Workplace

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|--|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Traditionalist Born between 1928-1945</p> <p>Key traits: Dependable Tactful Loyal Straightforward Duty before pleasure</p> | <p>Shaped by:</p> <p>The Great Depression World War II Radios and Movies Patriotism Family</p> | <p>Motivated by:</p> <p>Respect Recognition Providing long-term value to their company</p> | <p>Worldview:</p> <p>Obedience over individualism, Age equals authority Advancing through the hierarchy</p> | <p>Communication Style:</p> <p>The personal touch Handwritten notes or a letter instead of email, Prefer one on one communication</p> |
| <p>Baby Boomers Born between 1946-1964</p> <p>Key traits: Competitive Optimistic Team-Oriented Workaholic</p> | <p>Shaped by:</p> <p>Vietnam War Civil Rights Movement Assassinations Moon Landing Rock and Roll Television</p> | <p>Motivated by:</p> <p>Company loyalty, Teamwork. Personal growth, Involvement, Health and Wellness</p> | <p>Worldview:</p> <p>Achievement comes after paying your dues, High work ethic, Sacrifice for success</p> | <p>Communication Style:</p> <p>Whatever is the most efficient but tend to prefer structured communication methods such as emails and phone calls.</p> |
| <p>Generation X Born between 1965-1980</p> <p>Key traits: Informal Skeptical Flexible Independent Balance</p> | <p>Shaped by:</p> <p>The aids epidemic Single parent homes-latch key kids MTV Dot-Com boom Women's Liberation</p> | <p>Motivated by:</p> <p>Diversity Work-Life Balance Their Interest Rather Than the Company Interest</p> | <p>Worldview:</p> <p>Favor diversity Think globally Will move on if employer is not meeting their needs Resistant to change if it impact their personal life</p> | <p>Communication Style:</p> <p>Whatever is most efficient</p> |
| <p>Millennials Born between 1981-1996</p> <p>Key traits: Civic Open minded Achievement Oriented Competitive</p> | <p>Shaped by:</p> <p>Columbine 911 The internet Personal Computers Challenger explosion Gulf war</p> | <p>Motivated by:</p> <p>Responsibility Unique work experiences The quality of their leader or manager</p> | <p>Worldview:</p> <p>Seek challenges, growth and development A fun work-life balance Likely to leave an organization if they don't like a change(s)</p> | <p>Communication Style:</p> <p>Instant messaging Texts and email Don't Call me</p> |
| <p>Generation Z Born between 1997-2012</p> <p>Key traits: Entrepreneurial Socially Responsible Progressive Global Less focused</p> | <p>Shaped by:</p> <p>Life after 911 Access to technology from a young age Terrorism and war Smartphones The Great Recession Covid-19</p> | <p>Motivated by:</p> <p>Diversity Individuality Creativity Personalization</p> | <p>Worldview:</p> <p>Self-identify as digital device addicts Value independence and individuality Prefer to work with Millennial managers, innovative co-workers and technology</p> | <p>Communication Style:</p> <p>Social media Texts Instant Messaging Also enjoy face to face meetings</p> |



Each generation brings with it a unique set of experiences and perspectives that shape who we are as individuals. It's important to recognize the value in each person's distinct qualities, and to understand that generational stereotypes may not always tell the whole story. It's clear that there are commonalities among people within each generation, but we must also consider the individuality of each person.

As we look to the future, it's understandable to question whether the traditional approach of categorizing the workforce by generations remains relevant. The rapid advancements in technology may bring about a shift in how we understand and relate to different generations in the workforce.

Gina Pell a fashion and tech entrepreneur coined the term 'perennials' which rejects dated age labels and the confines of generational boxes-to be a perennial is to have a spirit of curiosity and a growth mindset. She highlights the need to move beyond demographics and truly connect with people on a meaningful level. She may be on to something.

The 21st century is bringing about significant changes in technology and the way organizations operate, which means that individuals will need to adapt and reinvent themselves throughout their careers. This shift is likely to bridge the gap between generational differences when it comes to work and career outlooks. One of the most crucial factors in effectively

communicating across generational lines is the ability to demonstrate empathy and understanding, as well as the willingness to actively listen and learn from different generational perspectives. Understanding the distinct experiences, values, and communication preferences of each generation, and being open to adjusting one's communication style to ensure mutual understanding and respect, is crucial.

While acknowledging the impact of historical events, technological advancements, and cultural shifts on each generation's worldview is important, it's also essential to develop personal connections to understand how to best communicate with those one leads and works with.

Leaders Are Readers

I believe that to be a good leader, one must be on a continuous quest to gain more knowledge. The leadership benefits of reading are wide-ranging. Evidence suggests that reading can improve intelligence and lead to innovation and insight. To that end, we provide a few suggested titles below for you to consider:

Bridging The Generation Gap, Linda Gravett and Robin Throckmorton

Connecting Generations, Hayem Herring

Leading Across Generations: Bridging the Gap Between Generations for a Stronger Business Culture, Jeremy Graves

Bridging the Gap: Effective Communication in a Multi-Generational Workplace, Penny O'Neil

Leading Out Loud: A Guide for Engaging Others in Creating the Future, Terry Pearce



Chief B's Key Leadership Takeaways



Having the honor of speaking to great leaders in their profession in The Leadership Crucible Podcast, we make notes on the key leadership takeaways that we discussed. We share these personal and leadership takeaways—these insights—with you in hopes it will help you reflect on them personally or from a professional perspective. These may also provide potential talking points that you can discuss with your team or colleagues, which often create great dialogue insights.

- Understanding the generational issues is crucial for effective cross-generational

communication.

- Bridging the generation gap is everyone's responsibility. Understanding and asking your co-workers what works best for them is a great first step.

- Listen actively to understand other's needs and expectations when it comes to communication.

- To navigate through these unique communication styles successfully, it's important to adapt your approach based on the preferences of each generation you interact with.

- Recognizing that both younger and older individuals have valuable insights to offer creates space for collaboration rather than conflict.

- Reverse mentoring, a practice where a young employee mentors a more senior colleague typically in areas of technology is an excellent way to bridge the communication gap.

- Be empathetic. Put yourself in their shoes, so you can better appreciate their perspective and help find the best communication path forward for all involved.