

Bridging Generational Gaps Starts with Good Collaboration

by Stacey Jerrold, MBA, SPHR, CBC & Mary-Anne Walsh, EdD

In the December issue of *Inside HR/NY*, we spoke about how the subject of Aretha Franklin's trademark song, "R-E-S-P-E-C-T" reinforces the first step in building synergistic organizations. By addressing the questions posed and simply looking beyond our own narrow perspective, HR can help create a foundation for developing a culture of respect that paves the way for recognizing the value of creating a culture of collaboration. Keep in mind that the goal of collaboration is improved results. It requires team work, trust, an atmosphere of open communication, and, of course, respect.

Respecting the talents, orientation, and expertise of our multi-generational colleagues gives us a fresh perspective to consider how to best work together to achieve a greater group performance and gain improved results. The coming of age of Millennials (soon to be 50% of work force by 2020)—who were raised on collaboration and new technology, and expect to work in an environment of collaboration—makes this an imperative.

Why is collaboration so critical to the success of organizations? Good collaboration—that habit of working together and experienc-

ing the thrill of shared achievement if done well—allows us to accomplish more than one very talented employee could ever do. Collaborators know how to gather allies, build teams, and work together to achieve shared goals. Those who are versed in a collaborative style of working are more productive than those who insist on working independently.

A word of caution here: while the genius of collaboration seems a given, careful attention must be paid to getting it right. You need to accurately calibrate the opportunity. Even smart people can get it wrong and, if you think about it, bad collaboration could be worse than no collaboration at all. Knowing when to collaborate and when not to begins by evaluating the value relative to opportunity and collaboration costs. Is there a better use of people's time and effort? Is the extra hassle of time spent working across units worth it?

As an HR manager, how do you foster a collaborative environment within your workplace? By asking yourself the following questions:

- How collaborative is our current workplace environment?
- Is our current organizational culture sup-

portive of collaboration? If not, what are the barriers to collaboration? How can HR address those barriers?

- Which are the teams/divisions with strong collaboration? What are they doing differently? How effective have they been?
- What role can HR play in increasing collaboration within the workforce?

Although collaboration is the buzzword of the moment, remember the goal—results. To collaborate for the sake of collaborating is ineffective. As you begin to think about good collaboration start to look at those informal working relationships among people that cut across formal lines of reporting—your organizational networks—because collaborative companies run on terrific networks.

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