

# Bridging Generational Gaps Starts with RESPECT

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In today's competitive workplace, four generations bringing different expectations, attitudes and values sit side by side. Your organization's success depends upon how well these groups collaborate. We are learning that the gaps created when their paths cross are significant. The way these differences are managed will have consequences for all of us. As HR practitioners, we can make an impact by taking a commanding role to navigate the generational minefields of our corporate backyards by bridging these gaps. What if we helped each generation learn how to tap into the synergies created when these groups work together? What is a first step? The answer is quite simple if we listen to The Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin: "R-E-S-P-E-C-T, Find out what it means to me, R-E-S-P-E-C-T."

Consider respect as an on-going behavior pattern that promotes accepting and valuing others. As a concept, respect is simple yet complicated to institutionalize. We demonstrate respect not only through words, but also through actions and attitudes toward oneself and others.

Developing a culture of respect among the four generations can be a source of competitive advantage in the workplace. Simply put, work is solving a series of problems in a joint collaborative effort among groups of people. To do that, respect and trust must be in place. When people respect each other information is shared openly and employees work in agreement toward a common goal. Conflicts are minimized, goals achieved and bottom-line results impacted.

All too often, managers think that bringing the generations together to share a common goal is sufficient. It is not. All human beings have egos; add to that the universal need to belong plus the desire to influence each other in a group. Stir all that together and the recipe for conflict is optimized.

Learning to value or respect others is central to creating synergies between generations at work. Accepting that there are differences between the generations and that these differences do matter is a begin-

ning. These variations influence how individuals see their tasks and one another, how they relate and how they perform. As an HR manager how do you gather this information? By asking these questions of your employees.

1. What is my definition of respect?
2. How does my definition agree or differ from other group members?
3. How will I honor and show respect to others?
4. How well do we all relate to one another?
5. What do I/we need to do to overcome any generational-related obstacles?

How do these answers begin to develop a culture of respect? Where are the synergies? Where can departments and individuals leverage the skills and knowledge across the generations to turn untapped potential into performance, for both the individual and the corporation? Once an understanding, appreciation, and respect for the skills of individuals and/or teams are realized, trust is the next element that starts to accumulate within your organization. Who would not want to be in an environment where there is mutual respect and trust with multiple benefits?

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