

5 Tips on Leading in a Diverse Workplace

Last year I spent an extended period working with a large non-profit organisation. It was the most diverse workplace I have ever had the pleasure of working in, with a wide range of age groups, ethnicities, education levels, and backgrounds represented. Management did an exceptional job in hiring the right people to create a solid working team, and the environment fostered collaboration and teamwork.

Unfortunately, this is not the norm. As workplaces become more and more diverse, organisations are having a hard time motivating and connecting with their employees from different groups. This can be a challenge, as not all of your employees will be viewing the world of work or their

experience with your organisation through the same lens.

With this in mind, here are five tips on leading in a diverse workplace:

1 Respect Generational Differences

Managers today need to recognise that Baby Boomers (those born between 1943-1960) have a different perspective than Gen Xers (born 1961-1981), who see the world in a different way than Millennials (born 1981-2004). Recognising these differences means that you can create an approach to get the best out of your staff in an efficient manner that will keep them happy and you from banging your head against the wall in frustration! Much has been written on these generational differences,

but the key thing for managers to remember is that each generation approaches work from a completely different perspective.

Be patient, and try to find value in the differing viewpoints of your staff. Know that your Millennials may be needy for feedback and reassurance, but bring with them a global worldview and are the most comfortable with new technologies and forms of communication. Gen Xers make up the largest group of management staff in Asia as of this writing. They are hard working, tend to be very entrepreneurial, good problem solvers, and love to continue their development, both personally and professionally. The final group,



the Baby Boomers, will be most likely to come to work early, take nothing for granted, and work hard. They have decades of experience, excel in face-to-face communications, building relationships, and are more technologically capable than some people give them credit for.

Managers who want to get the most out of their teams will understand the need to find the motivational drivers that will move each group to become engaged. Leading groups who have different views and motivations with a single approach is a recipe for failure.

2 Bring Generational Groups Together

Creating workgroups that bring different generations together can be a way to bridge the gap between age groups. Many Boomers and Gen Xers see Millennials as entitled, or even lazy, but when given the opportunity to work closely with them that attitude often changes. Work habits differ from age group to age group, and bringing people together is a way to enhance understanding that all groups are capable of getting excellent results – they just do it in different ways.

Reciprocal mentorship is another way to create mutual respect across generations. Boomers and Gen Xers may have a wealth of experience to share with younger workers, so creating an opportunity for this sharing of information will yield rewards in the end. Millennials offer fresh viewpoints and out of the box thinking, adding value to the relationship for their mentors. Mentorship creates both personal and professional opportunities for learning and a stronger team bond than would otherwise exist in the office.

3 Spend Time With Your Staff

Technology is great when it comes to communicating with people quickly and efficiently, but e-mail can't replace the personal touch. When it comes to understanding your staff and finding out what is important to them, spending one-to-one time with them goes a long way.

This might mean sitting down with a staff member for a five minute chat or a more formal scheduled meeting. However you choose to do it, the key is to make the time. One of the biggest motivational drivers for staff is that they feel valued, and that their input is making a difference. Sitting down with them face-to-face on a regular basis means employees will feel a connection to their team leaders, and that they are being heard. Do not assume that because everything "seems fine" with your people, that it is. Go out of your way to sit down with each team member on a personal level, and you will be amazed with what you learn. For leaders hoping to build strong teams, giving your staff one of your most valuable commodities – your time – is well worth the investment.

4 Be Creative

The day-to-day routine of coming in to work can become stale. Many Boomers grew up with the belief that work itself was motivation enough to show up and do a good job, but many Millennials, and to a lesser degree Gen Xers, grew up in an environment where being constantly challenged and engaged with creative pursuits was the norm.

Keep employees engaged by finding unique ways to motivate them. Change up routines, keep your people moving forward, find common


goals everyone can share, and don't be afraid to try something new.

5 Lead By Example

In almost every organisation I have worked with I have recognised that staff mirror their leaders to some degree. I worked for one major multi-national where the district manager was extremely tense, and didn't enjoy his work. As a result, neither did his staff – they were always on edge around him. Regardless of ethnicity, age, or background, if your leader is instilling fear or unease with the staff, the odds of having teams working to their potential are slim.

One of the finest leaders I worked with was a CEO who enjoyed her work, took time with people, and exemplified professionalism. She worked hard to hire people with the right attitude, and treated all team members with respect. As a result, we had a productive, positive team that did exceptional work and was unafraid to put forward new ideas.

She allowed each staff member to play to their strengths and welcomed feedback on how to improve things. From the custodial staff all the way through to senior management, she took a genuine interest in every person she came into contact with. This broke down barriers and allowed her to connect with, and get the best from, her very diverse staff.

Working with diverse groups can be a challenge, but if you respect generational differences, bring generations together, spend time with your staff, be creative, and lead by example, you will be moving your team in the right direction! 

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