

Q How can Baby Boomers and younger employees work together in harmony?

A: Question stereotypes, share experiences and leverage each other's strengths. "Gen X and Gen Y employees don't have a solid work ethic." "Baby Boomers are slow to change." "The younger generation is one of entitlement." "The older generation values money over a quality work environment."

Sign up for the free Web seminar "How to Help Boomers and the Younger Generation Work Effectively Today" from Noon to 1 p.m. **June 4.** by visiting www.missionfacilitators.com.

YOU'VE HEARD THESE COMMENTS. You may have even made them. Whether they are true or not, Baby Boomers and younger workers are having trouble embracing one another.

At the last Arizona Leadership Forum, we invited Baby Boomers and college students to tackle the issue of how these two groups can work effectively together.

First, we wanted to find out the issues unique to Boomers and younger workers. Next, we wanted to know what issues arose historically when older and younger workers were paired. Here are some examples of generational misperceptions.

■ A college student said he wants a job free from rigid rules. Boomers remembered wanting the same thing when they started their careers. (And still do.)

■ A 50-year-old business leader said younger workers expect high-paying leadership roles before they've proven themselves. Every generation has an economic downturn, and this current one may have reset expectations.

What is unique about these two groups is the unprecedented size and influence of the Baby Boomer generation and the role technology is playing in shaping perceptions and skills in today's

younger workers. Both want what the other has: The younger workers want the influence enjoyed by the Baby Boomers, and the older workers want the innovative and collaborative potential found with tech-savvy younger workers.

BABY BOOMERS HAVE:

Experience, work ethic.
Ability to take ownership of results.
A big-picture perspective.
Ease with following proven, traditional practices.

WHAT OUR COLLEGE STUDENTS WANT IN A JOB IS:

Excellent and ongoing training.
The ability to pursue individual interests.
A good work-and-life balance.
The ability to contribute immediately.
A voice in the company's direction and vision.

Before the strengths from one group can be leveraged with the desires of the other, stereotypes and perceptions must be discussed. Many younger workers blame the

Boomers for what is wrong in business and the world. Boomers don't feel younger workers respect or understand them or what they do.
So what can be done?

BOOMERS NEED TO SUPPORT YOUNGER WORKS BY:

Listening to their ideas.
Creating opportunities for them to work collaboratively.
Providing training and mentorship.
Allowing them to work independently and creatively.

YOUNGER WORKERS NEED TO SUPPORT BOOMERS BY:

Seeing and validating their work experience.
Proving to them they can get results.
Adding value to current projects.
Adopting a flexible communication style.

Instead of seeing the other as a barrier, Boomers and younger workers need to openly discuss stereotypes, encourage new ideas, respect proven practices and collaborate with one another. ■



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