

Employees in Cooperatives with Generational Differences

Using social capital has been an important aspect of cooperatives. We use the term 'social capital' to define employees, directors and members working together to maximize their value to their cooperative. This essay identifies those generational differences that define the intrinsic value and behavior for each generation.

Teamwork across generations can be developed if we better understand the values and behavior of each of our generations. Fostering a work environment where employees from different generations can work in partnership toward the common mission of our cooperatives requires awareness of the unique experiences, values and behavior of the generations.

Here are the generational differences by their birth year:

1925 – 1945 “The Greatest Generation” or “The Traditional Generation”

- ❖ Key experiences: were The Great Depression and World War II
- ❖ Values: conservation, frugal nature, conforming to others, respect was easily given by position of authority.
- ❖ Assets: stable, loyal, hard working
- ❖ Challenges: reluctant to challenge authority, uncomfortable with conflict, silent when they disagree.
- ❖ Behavior: Hierarchical, Hold 75% of the wealth in the United States, Own or Lead most businesses, reluctant to retire.

1946 – 1964 “Baby Boomer Generation” [46% of current workforce]

- ❖ Key Experiences: Vietnam War, Civil Rights Movement, Woman’s Movement, Kennedy Assassination, Woodstock.
- ❖ Values: Willingness to sacrifice for career, desire job security & paying dues to organization, promotion, achievement, salary growth in one organization, generally optimistic, benefited from post war economic growth.
- ❖ Assets: Service oriented, driven, willing to give extra effort/overtime, desire to please, good team players.
- ❖ Challenges: not naturally “budget minded,” reluctant to go against peers, may put process ahead of results, sensitive to feedback, self-centered.
- ❖ Behavior: Workaholic tendencies, “live to work” not “work to live,” greater work-family conflict, Idealistic, caring for parents & children at the same time

1965 – 1983 “Generation X”

- ❖ Key Experiences: Challenger Disaster viewed live, AIDS epidemic, one-parent family, or dual career family
- ❖ Values: Independent, “latch key children,” self reliant, want immediate feedback, Autonomous
- ❖ Assets: adaptable, technoliterate, independent, unintimidated by authority, creative
- ❖ Challenges: impatient, poor people skills, inexperienced, cynical
- ❖ Behavior: Technically competent, less loyal to organization, concerned about work-family balance, “work to live” not “live to work.”

1984 – 1994 “Generation Y”

- ❖ Key Experiences: 9/11 viewed live, Persian Gulf War, Internet Age, Asian Tsunami.
- ❖ Values: most socially active since 1960's, strong desire for choice & comfort, continual learning, self directed learning, strong desire to contribute immediately, seek instant answers.
- ❖ Assets: Self directed, optimism, tenacity, multitasking capabilities, technologically savvy, high achieving, Opinionated.
- ❖ Challenges: need for supervision & structure, inexperienced, Opinionated
- ❖ Behavior: Desire instant answer expectations, instant messaging, high expectations, under a great deal of pressure, no automatic fear or respect for authority, willing to offer opinion, expect view to be heard, globally savvy.

Perspective:

Each generation must understand the behavior of the generation they are working with. Once individuals from the various generations understand each other, they can discuss those differences openly, identify strengths and weaknesses. Then establish a plan for achieving the cooperatives goal.

When “The Greatest Generation” and “Boomers” take time to understand Xers and Yers and the younger generations appreciate the wisdom & experiences of the older generations, greater achievement can be obtained.

Each generation has its own work ethic, different perspective, values & behavior. The fact that they are valued differently with different strengths and weaknesses does not make one ‘right’ or ‘wrong.’ It gives your cooperative a unique, diverse texture of experience. This can be helpful if they understand the generational values & behavior.

5 tips for workplace retention across generations by Misti Burmeister

1. Educate yourself. Generational differences are real and, if not well understood can cause clash, which slows productivity. That said locate three professionals or a different generations and ask them to share about themselves; what’s important to them, how they got to where they are and to gain an understand for their differences and commonalities.
2. Generate a Clear Vision. If you are in a leadership position, it is your responsibility to create a clear vision for your team. While your organization may have its own mission/vision statement, it is incredibly valuable to create one for your team. The leader creates the vision, which gives the long-term goal of where you, the team and the organization are headed.
3. Generate a Clear Mission. A mission is a statement of purpose put together by a team of people, which creates clarity, focus, teamwork, personal accountability and inspiration. It gives direction as to how the vision will be achieved. Bringing key people together to strategize on your mission naturally creates synergy, teamwork and collaboration.
4. Get to know your team. Consider what you will gain by knowing what motivates your team members. It is possible that either you are in a position that plays against your strengths or you have people on your team who are in positions that are not in alignment with their natural talents. Getting to know yourself and/or your team will aid you greatly in getting the most out of each person, yourself included.
5. Acknowledge your team consistently. Identify ways to publicly and privately acknowledge your teammates for their hard work. Give them the credit they desire and deserve. A Sr Vice

President once said, "I know I have an excellent Sales Manager when I compliment him/her on their work and they quickly ensure I know it's their team doing all the heavy lifting."

Remember . . . If you don't know yourself and your team, you'll never get the most out of them. Take time to learn about yourself and your team members. Capitalize on playing to your strengths.

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