



Are You Prepared for the Multigenerational Workplace?

Your organization's success depends on taking true advantage of all that each generation offers.

By Frances Kunreuther

How do you find room for four generations in your workplace and boardroom?

ing power dynamics in place.

To look at the roles generations play in your organization, do a simple inventory. Ask yourself who occupies positions of power in your organization, including your board. Examine the results by generation and other factors (often race is another indicator of getting diverse ideas into leadership).

Some organizations are using leadership models that spread decision-making across generations so that power is more distributed. For example, an older leader of a local Goodwill Industries has begun to share responsibility with a younger management team, letting go of his previous management style where all important decisions came to him. His second tier leaders now have both internal and external authority. This has allowed the organization to grow and has improved performance.

3. Acknowledge the Differences between Generations

People in different life stages don't have the same needs. Boomers are more worried about their health care than their paycheck. Millennials are looking for leadership development opportunities. Generation Xers seek solid benefits and reasonable work hours.

You need to find different ways to reward employees based on what motivates them to do their best work. This requires more internal

Only two years ago, the buzz about nonprofit leadership centered on the baby boom generation's imminent departure. Studies set off alarms when their findings indicated that the nonprofit sector was on the verge of a serious crisis: The boomers were leaving, and there weren't enough skilled, younger leaders to take their place.

But what a difference a few years make. The mass exodus of boomers—born between 1946 and 1964—has been put on permanent hold. The financial crisis has meant that many in this and older generations are rethinking their future. But even before the recession, it was clear that boomers weren't like previous generations. They were going to stay longer in their jobs or find other ways to make a difference. In fact, many boomers are leaving for-profit companies and seeking "encore careers" in social sector organizations.

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Now nonprofits are facing a different sort of crisis: How do they find room for four generations? Generation Xers (born between 1965 and 1979) are still waiting in the wings for their turn to lead, eager to put their experience to use. They're followed by the millennials, born between 1980 and 2000, who are heading back to school and delay-

ing entry into the workforce as they wait for the economy to pick up and make room for their contributions.

A sector once worried about the exodus of older leaders now is looking for ways to include all the people who want to have an impact. But what makes a good multigenerational workplace? How do you manage the skills and needs of people in these different age groups? How do you take advantage of this age-diverse workforce? Here are four keys you can use to tap the best potential of all the generations:

1. Facilitate Leadership

With up to four generations in the workforce, you need to find room for leadership across position and age. For example, if experience is an important element for a job, most organizations retain those who have done the job for a period of time. But there is often no system in place to pass on that knowledge to newer employees. This makes the organization vulnerable to the departure of key staffers. In addition, many younger leaders lack the chance to try out new ideas when they work with older cohorts.

One executive director describes how her organization integrates leadership. All staffers, from the receptionist to the senior program manager, are seen as leaders who may someday run the organization. By fully valuing every employee's contribution, the organization has become a leader in its field.

2. Rethink Leadership Structures

Many organizations have older leaders in top positions, while those in younger generations come and go. This pattern offers younger people experience but keeps the exist-

flexibility, often a challenge for organizations looking for consistency.

In one nonprofit, a highly valued Gen Xer asked to work for one month from home. She had always received excellent reviews and didn't need to be on site for her job. The organization—fearful of setting a precedent—refused. A few months later the employee left for another nonprofit where not only does she work at home, but she works longer and harder.

4. Embrace Change

The pace of change has accelerated in ways that are natural for the young and vexing for those who are older. A multigenerational workplace means that older leaders must rethink the systems they've taken for granted. The current economic crisis might be an opportunity to change operations. You can take a cue from some for-profits that are deliberately putting together cross-generational teams where people learn to work and think together. Older generations offer a depth of experience and younger ones an eye to the future.

To look at the roles generations play in your organizations, do a simple inventory.

Each generation seeks respect, acknowledgment, and recognition from the others. There is much you can do to affirm the contributions that all generations are making. The future is now. ■

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How Can You Attract the New Generation of Leaders?

If you're a seasoned professional, there are many ways you can attract young people to your staff and board. When you do so, you'll be amazed at the energy and new ideas they add. Here are keys to welcoming the new leaders into your organization:

- **Give** young staff and board members opportunities to practice and hone their leadership skills. Whenever possible, have them represent the organization in meetings and as presenters. Give them a chance to be the "experts."
- **Pair** each young person with an older mentor. Be sure they're part of a team that includes people from all generations.

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- **Seek** new talent aggressively by looking in places where up-and-coming nonprofit leaders congregate (virtually *and* face-to-face). For ideas, see "Who Are the Young Leaders?" on page 10.
- **Understand** that young people aren't looking for jobs for life but, instead, want to create a portfolio of positions with increasing responsibility over time.
- **Play** to the strengths and unique talents young people bring to the table. They're great multitaskers and networkers who are technologically savvy, good team players, and comfortable with diversity. They're eager to make a difference in the world, so make it clear to them how their work contributes to the greater good.
- **Recognize** their need for flexible working conditions and a healthy balance between their work and home lives.
- **Provide** plenty of training and development for young workers. Give them the benefit of your knowledge without being patronizing. Offer frequent, constructive feedback and coaching.
- **Be sure** to give young people access to real power and responsibility. Include them in making decisions.

Create teams that include people from all generations.

- **Respect** the new ways they communicate. Let them lead the way in embracing social media and diversity within your workplace and boardroom. Use networking devices such as Twitter and Facebook whenever you plan meetings, share information, or invite younger people to events.
- **Consider** creating a co-leadership position in which people from two different generations share responsibility.
- **Create** a program in which young people interview older leaders to glean their wisdom and keep a record of what they learn.

—adapted from "Trading Power," www.2164.net

Make it clear how their work contributes to the greater good.

