

Managing in a Multigenerational Environment [transcript]

Multi-generational management is something that every company is going to have to learn about. If you don't know about it yet, you're a little bit behind, but not too late to catch up. If you're trying to help your ROI, your return on investment, your investment is time, as well as talent.

The story that comes to my mind is, I was doing a conference on CEOs. I'm in a room with 60 CEOs, all of them of a certain generation, so baby boomers, basically. In case you're not sure, we've all heard the terms, but a lot of us don't know exactly what that means. Baby boomers are usually, depending on which study you look at, 1963 or so, so 1947 to about 1963. But it depends, again, on the study. The truth is, when we say generational, remember, it's take it with a grain of salt. We don't have a true word for what we mean. Generations are considered about 17 to 21 years. Someone who is 20 years apart born, they don't have the same experience. Someone who was born in 1980 definitely doesn't have the same experience as someone born in the year 2000. Take it with a grain of salt.

I'll give you an example. I was doing this conference, and there was a baby boomer who was training his son, his youngest son, who is a millennial. His Generation X son worked somewhere else in the company, but he is grooming his youngest son to take over the company business. As we're talking, the baby boomer says, "Today, incidentally, happens to be the day that Neil Armstrong walked on the moon." I'm standing at the front of the class, and I'm talking. I go, "Okay," because I have no idea where to go with that, like cool.

His son, who is on his phone, doesn't look up and says, "You mean Lance?" His father does what I call the baby boomer double-take. His father's standing a little bit to his right. The son says, "You mean Lance?" And his father says, and you could almost hear the horrible horror movie sound effect, and he goes, "No, I don't mean Lance. I mean Neil Armstrong. He walked on the moon." His son goes, "What's that, like Lance's grandpa?" I thought his father was going to have a fit right there. I'm like, "Let's take a break." He goes, "That's the problem with you kids. You're always on your phone, and you're always texting, and you never pay attention." By the way, I did mention that he looked like Colonel Sanders. It all made the entire thing really funny to me, so I go, "Okay, let's take a quick break." We take a break. His son, meanwhile, is sitting there on the phone the entire time.

All of the baby boomers in the room all go to one side of the room, and they're all like, "Neil Armstrong." We come back, and this is something you have to know, if you're working with different generations. Baby boomers, until you tell them, until

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you acknowledge what they say, they have to keep repeating it to make sure that you understand. We come back, and I launched into something else. The CEO says, "Yeah, that's a great question, just like I was saying about Neil Armstrong walking on the moon."

His son says, "Yeah, you know, he was not really the first person on the moon, but okay. And by the way, it wasn't 'One small step for man.' It was 'One small for a man.' His radio cut out." His father goes, "What?" And I said, "Here's the funny thing. You think that he's texting on his phone. He's not. He's checking everything you say. He now knows more about Neil Armstrong than you do. Give me facts." And his son just rattles off facts. The father goes, "Uh." And I go, "Right, welcome to the new world. He was born with this information."

Cross-generational, if you really want to know how to get people to work together cross-generationally, just get to know them, and ask questions. Remember, generalizations are generally right, but not always. Get to know the people, and we'll help you through that transition.