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How to Manage a Multigenerational Workforce

In any company where a wide range of experience exists, chances are you also have a multigenerational workforce. Your finance department likely has baby boomer controllers, Gen X tax managers, Gen Y financial analysts and Gen Z payroll specialists. They may have a lot in common, however being formed by the decade in which they came of age, they also have varying outlooks, values, communication preferences and work styles.

If you're the manager of this disparate group — and depending on which generation you fall in — you may wonder about how to lead such a wide range of ages. Here are four tips on how to lead a multigenerational workforce.

1. Understand the various generations

To manage a multigenerational workforce, you have to know what makes them tick. The four generations in today's workforce have unique preferences, from general behavior to decision-making processes.

- **Baby boomers** (born 1946–1964) are work-centric, independent, tend to challenge the rules and have a somewhat guarded communication style.
- **Gen X** (born 1965–1977) grew up in the boomers' shadows. They're a little cynical, a lot individualistic and are highly adaptable to change.
- **Gen Y** (born 1978–1989) came of age as internet technology emerged and dominated their world. They tend to prioritize family, friends and teamwork.
- **Gen Z** (born 1990–1999) are tech natives. They have never known a world without the internet, are constant communicators and, having seen their parents weather the Great Recession, desire stability.

Of course, not every member of these generations can be neatly categorized; there's a wide range of behaviors within each group. These are general tendencies that can provide business leaders with useful insights about how to manage a multigenerational workforce.

2. Promote a mutually respectful workplace

For millennials (a term that refers to both Gen Y and Gen Z combined) to work well with older generations, they have to get to know each other on more than just a superficial level. According to [Get Ready for Generation Z](#), a white paper from Robert Half and Enactus, 45 percent of Gen Zers expect working with baby boomers to be difficult. They're concerned they will be seen as "kids" and won't be taken seriously. Similarly, boomers may be puzzled by the communication preferences and work ethics of the youngest working generation, and are afraid they will be seen as old-fashioned or irrelevant.

As a manager of an accounting or finance group, one of your roles is to strengthen work relationships and promote camaraderie. Help the generations mix, mingle and learn about each other with [team-building](#) activities. Promote the mindset that each generation has much to offer the team. Be generous with your acknowledgement of different cohorts' contributions. Your employees reflect senior management's values, so make sure you're setting a good example.

3. Provide professional development throughout the organization

Your Gen Z workers are eager to learn and rapidly advance their careers. In fact, our research shows that 56 percent of Gen Z respondents want to be working their way up the corporate ladder or managing employees within five years of graduating from college. This go-getting generation of accountants will need some help getting there. Set them up for success by giving them plenty of opportunities and resources to develop their communication skills, [office etiquette](#), customer service abilities and aptitude for leadership.

Gen Z isn't the only generation that can benefit from continuing professional education and development. Seminars and workshops are effective ways to provide team-wide training. They keep *everyone* up to speed on the newest developments in the accounting and finance fields. Most survey respondents cited in [The People Puzzle](#), a report from Robert Half and the American Institute for CPAs, said they prefer in-person training opportunities such as on-site workshops (28 percent) and off-site conferences or seminars (23 percent). Encouraging staff to attain [professional certifications](#) helps your department gain a deeper knowledge base.

4. Establish mentoring programs

Mentoring is an excellent means of solidifying the bonds of a multigenerational workforce. A recent Robert Half [survey](#) found that while 86 percent of CFOs interviewed say it's important to have a mentor, only 26 percent of workers have one.

If your accounting firm or finance department doesn't have a [mentoring program](#), start one. If you have one but it's inactive, it's time to resurrect it. You should also encourage reverse mentorships, where Gen Yers and Gen Zers teach senior staff a thing or two about areas where they have expertise, such as [social media](#) best practices.

Helping members of a multigenerational workforce interact smoothly and productively is a must-do for managers today. Understanding that all employees — from boomer to Gen Z — have much to offer a company will allow you to make the best use of everyone's talents.

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