

Housecalls at Work

Answers from Dr. Insite

Dr. Insite is an ongoing column to address people-related issues in nonprofit organizations. For answers to your workplace issues, please e-mail your questions to DrInsite@coreinsites.com. All responses will be handled confidentially.

BY SHEILA L. MARGOLIS
AND AVA S. WILENSKY



Dear Dr. Insite:

I'm in my mid-30s, but I work with people who are much older. Sometimes it seems that we are not communicating well. People talk about generational differences all the time, and I understand some of the differences between the Baby Boomers and Generation X. But no one seems to offer tips on resolving some of those differences so that we can enjoy a pleasant and productive workplace. Can you help?

Dear GenXer:

Communicating across generations can be challenging. The workforce is comprised of distinct groups, each with unique perspectives about work and how it is best accomplished.

- **The Baby Boomers:** Growing up with 80 million peers has given Baby Boomers (born mid 1940s to early/mid 1960s) the belief that they can change the world and the competitive spirit to do so. This generation is self-focused and seeks personal recognition. Communicating with Boomers requires a straightforward approach, rich with detail and minus manipulative or controlling agendas. Leaders are required to be flexible and open to question.
- **Generation X:** GenXers (born early/mid 1960s to late 1970s) are the children of the technological revolution. Entrepreneurial and independent thinkers, GenXers multi-

task to produce more in less time, to get out and get on with life's fun. Communication with GenXers should be to the point, short and factual. Leaders need to be open and share information in an informal style.

- **Generation Y (or Millennials):** Just entering the workforce, Millennials (born 1980s to 1990s) have had the world literally in their pockets since birth. This generation sees no boundaries. They dislike corporate politics, enjoy working virtually and are confident that they can find a way to do everything better and faster. Leaders are considered as peers to this generation, so guard against talking down to them. They will resent it.

Be aware of these patterns when communicating across the generations. And remember that the most powerful communication tool a leader can use is to listen. ●

Sheila L. Margolis and Ava S. Wilensky hold doctoral degrees in Human Resource Development. As the principals of CORE InSites® Inc., they are well-known organizational development experts specializing in organizational strategy, the strategic use of human resources and program evaluation. Additionally, Margolis and Wilensky are part-time professors at Georgia State University. Call them at (404) 255-4007 or visit online at www.coreinsites.com.