

Member Communication Experience

How to Encourage Cross-Generational Collaboration in Construction

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Today's workforce is more complex than ever. For the first time in history, the workforce consists of employees from four very different age groups: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. With these groups, it's possible to have a more than 50-year age gap between employees. The construction industry – like many other industries – is no stranger to this multigenerational workforce.

It's no surprise these diverse groups hold varying values, work styles, and communication preferences, which can create both challenges and opportunities for employers. Because of these differences, managing a multigenerational workforce can prove difficult for even the most seasoned leaders. According to the 2020 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends, only 6% of survey respondents strongly agreed that their leaders are equipped to lead such a workforce effectively. The other 94% of leaders must quickly adapt to not only accommodate, but lead and learn from, the multiple generations present within organizations today.

Within the construction industry, many employees are often outside of a traditional office environment – whether at jobsites or other project locations – which can make it even more difficult to connect and engage with them. While it may be a bigger challenge, it's possible to unlock the industry's full potential to build a successful construction workforce.

Lauren Weinbaum, President and Founder of Weinbaum Management Group (WMG), has worked in the construction industry for over two decades. During that time, she's both worked with and led people of all ages, and at WMG, each of the four generations are represented on staff. Based on her



experience as both employee and owner, Weinbaum shares several ways she has bridged the generational gap to lead well, motivate, and manage employees at the office, on jobsites, and beyond.

Think Outside the Box

No generation is the same, with each holding a different perspective on things like leadership, work ethic, and accountability. Because of these differences, a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't exist. Motivating and managing different generations requires specific approaches to align with each group's values and preferences. For example, baby boomers often prefer defined roles and structure, while millennials value work-life balance, growth opportunities, and flexibility. By understanding these differences, construction leaders can tailor their management strategies to address each group's unique needs.

Because different ages and phases of life bring about different goals, it's important to maintain regular check-ins with employees. Every team member should be asked to define both their short and long-term goals during the annual review process. Instead of using these goals as benchmarks to measure against, go above the conventional review process and determine how the company can help make those goals happen – in or outside the organization. Whether it's a dream to retire soon, expand responsibilities, or grow towards a new role, support each team members' dream and tailor growth plans and company strategy to better assist and support every person's future.

Unleash Success Through Company Culture

Although culture has become a buzzword over the last decade, it's a main driver of overall growth and success. Culture plays a significant role in shaping the environment, employee satisfaction, productivity, and long-term success of an organization. A poor company culture can be a detriment to retention and the organization's future.

Lauren encourages an open-door policy and for employees to come to her and other senior leaders with any questions or concerns. Accessibility matters, especially in an organization where many employees are visiting jobsites or working remotely and may not be available in the same space at the same time. No matter their age or background, employees feel comfortable speaking up and walk away feeling heard, not just by leadership, but by each other. An inclusive culture allows all employees of all generations to feel valued and respected, and fosters diversity of thought and collaboration.

It is important for senior leadership to consistently communicate a shared sense of purpose to the team, highlighting the importance of the work they do and the difference they all can make. This creates a shared experience for all, as the team acknowledges they're creating spaces and places that will live on for generations to come. This shared sense of purpose is talked about at every team meeting, creating a lasting bond amongst team members.

Overall, a company's culture drives teams forward (or backward). Leaders must create a culture that values diversity,

inclusivity, and collaboration, regardless of age. By fostering an inclusive environment, employees feel empowered to bring their unique perspectives, experiences, and ideas to the table, and collaborate effectively with colleagues, which often unlocks comprehensive and innovative solutions and creates stronger relationships and increased productivity across the organization.

Implement Innovative, Flexible Initiatives

If society has learned anything over the last few years, it's that flexibility is key. The organizations that remain flexible are those that flourish, regardless of how many generations are represented on the team roster. Workplace culture has evolved post-pandemic, especially as Gen Z entered the workforce. Younger employees can teach quite a bit about technology and their need for interconnectedness and flexibility, which can push senior employees to implement new tools into the day-to-day operations.

Overall, a senior leadership team should openly embrace a work-life balance and operate under the idea that not everyone is motivated by the same thing. While a Baby Boomer may value a large, monetary bonus to stash away for retirement, a Millennial may appreciate more vacation days or time off to unplug. Every employee must be encouraged and feel comfortable to share what matters to them.


At the end of the day, companies must be open to change and allow employees to share what's most important and motivating to them. Initiatives don't need to impact all four generations, but there should be initiatives to acknowledge and support the different needs of each one.

Be Willing to Learn From All Generations

Mentorship can be informal, but companies may also consider a mentorship program that pairs employees from different generations to learn from each other. Younger employees learn to value those with more experience and knowledge, and the senior employees learn new technology and the importance of balance and boundaries from Gen Z members and Millennials.

Regardless of age, every individual possesses unique wisdom

and insights, and leaders must be willing to learn from any generation. A humble spirit and genuine curiosity go a long way. Leaders who value the institutional knowledge, wisdom, and both the financial and relationship management skills of older generations, along with the tech-savvy and productivity expertise of the younger ones, create a culture of respect and collaboration that often trickles down from senior leadership to the youngest employees.

Cross-generational collaboration helps bridge the generational gap and creates a cohesive work environment, which is crucial for building a successful workforce. The solutions are as unique as each employee, and leaders must be willing to learn from those both young and old. By embracing diversity and tapping into each of the generations' skill sets and expertise, leaders can bridge the generational divide and pave the way for a brighter future in the construction industry. 



About the Author

Lauren Weinbaum is the President and Founder of [Weinbaum Management Group](#). She has spent nearly two decades in the construction industry and experienced both the talent shift in the industry and the impact of those leaving the construction field. Her business is a leading owner's representation and construction management firm based in Los Angeles.

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