

How to Manage Generational Gaps on the Jobsite

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IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN AGE-DIVERSE TEAMS

As one of the oldest and most established trades, the construction industry employs a large and diverse workforce. You can find contractors from nearly any age group on the jobsite.

While construction companies greatly benefit from the different skills and experiences a multigenerational staff brings to the table, it can be difficult to effectively meet their unique needs and expectations. As Forbes Business Council member and CEO Carl Hung writes, "One of the toughest forms of diversity to manage within a company, and one that is often neglected, is age diversity."

Despite the challenges, there are several strategies that can help companies better serve employees on the jobsite at any stage of their careers. These tips and techniques improve communications between age-diverse teams and promote employee retention.

Standardize Field Communications

On site, good communications are critical. But while not every employee in a certain age group will have the same preferences, there are often commonalities in the ways they share and consume information that differ from the next generation.



Accurate, timely jobsite data is crucial to keeping projects on track, and companies need to provide tools that help employees with different communication styles collect and share progress updates efficiently. For communication-heavy processes like daily reporting, consider investing in technology that prioritizes simplicity and ease-of-use.

For example, pen-and-paper reporting is still widely used in the construction industry. But because they are time-consuming and lead to frequent communication errors, handwritten reports frustrate younger workers. Many of them use technology to effortlessly exchange information with friends and family on a daily basis, and they don't want to waste work hours on pen-and-paper reporting.

Likewise, some daily reporting software is incredibly detailed and complex, requiring significant training. The learning

curve to utilize it may be too steep for the members of older generations who do not use technology as frequently as younger workers in their personal lives. They may be reluctant to try this kind of software, or they may not take full advantage of it.

Look for technology that is designed for easy adoption, more efficient than pen and paper, and not overly complex. Ideally, any communication-enhancing software you implement should have the following features:

- » **Intuitive interface** – The best software is intuitively designed. It should have a clean, clear interface with easy access to its most important functionalities. Field crews should be able to pick up software and instinctively understand how to use it with minimal training.
- » **Standardized formats** – Good daily reporting software will offer templates and checklists that take the guesswork out of what information to collect and how to present it. Field crews can capture information in a standardized format that is universal.
- » **Automated data sharing** – Your reporting system should allow field crews to automatically share information with the rest of their team without needing to turn in a physical report or manually attach it to a message or email. Software that utilizes cloud storage takes the burden of communications off your multigenerational staff by making reports available to access as soon as they are submitted with automatic notifications.
- » **Photo and video capture** – Visual data like photos and videos clearly communicate what's happening on the jobsite with little room for misinterpretation.

By standardizing field communications and giving teams a way to consistently share information, you'll remove a major roadblock for your multigenerational workforce.

Encourage Mentorship

Employees of different age groups who work together will often exchange ideas and experiences. Encourage this behavior by assembling age-diverse crews and establishing a formal mentorship program.

- » **Assembling age-diverse crews** – You may be tempted to divide employees by age when creating work schedules, hoping to avoid conflict. However, if younger and older employees rarely interact on the job, everyone – including the company – loses out on major opportunities for growth. **Age-diverse crews are more balanced with their blend of skills and experience levels.** When there are generational gaps in the field, employees will naturally learn from each other and diversify their skill sets. This informal mentorship makes crews stronger and helps them apply a wide variety of knowledge to their work.
- » **Establishing a formal program** – A formal mentorship program provides structure and helps employees feel comfortable adding time for teaching and learning into their work schedules. Managers can define how many hours should be spent mentoring each week and provide subject matter guidelines or criteria for program completion. **Remember that mentorship goes both ways:** Younger employees can be taught new skills by older workers and vice versa. Offer incentives for employees of all ages to share their skills with their coworkers. Not only will employees grow professionally through mentorship, but they'll also gain new perspectives that promote good working relationships.

Provide Training Opportunities

Providing formal diversity training will help your age-diverse workforce better relate to their coworkers. Many educational programs are available online or in person.

Training teaches employees skills to evaluate their own behavior and appropriately resolve any conflicts that arise from age-related differences.

Team-Building Exercises

Hosting team-building exercises is a great way to increase camaraderie and help employees of different generations get to know each other better. Hiring professionals at Indeed suggest quick, simple team-building activities that can be conducted on-site.

Or, if budgets and schedules allow, you can schedule an off-site activity like paintball, miniature golf, or volunteering. The best team-building exercises allow your employees to work together on a common goal outside of their normal job responsibilities. The point of team building is to give your crews an opportunity to interact in new ways. Getting out of work mode helps them see things from a different perspective.

Conduct Employee Surveys


The best method to improve the way you manage field employees is to ask them for feedback. Conduct surveys, collect questionnaires, or provide a suggestion box that encourages them to freely express their opinions on various workplace issues.

Seek feedback on communication styles, channels, and frequency. Ask about pain points and gather opinions on your company processes. Some feedback may surprise you.

You should thoroughly review all feedback and apply it when possible. Even when suggestions aren't feasible, address them and explain why.

Knowing that they were heard, and the company cared to provide a transparent explanation why their requests were denied goes a long way in making employees feel valued.

If, through surveys and other feedback-gathering methods, you find that your field employees have vastly different expectations for management, you may need to consider taking different approaches with employees from various age groups.

For example, if you find Generation Z wants in-person meetings to discuss company strategy while millennials would prefer similar announcements to be sent via email, you may wish to use both methods. 



About the Author

Brian Poage, a former [Raken](#) customer, was so impressed with the easy-to-use construction management app, he joined the company full-time. His background as a superintendent and project manager helps him connect meaningfully with customers and identify ways they can benefit from Raken's real-time production insights.

About the Article

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