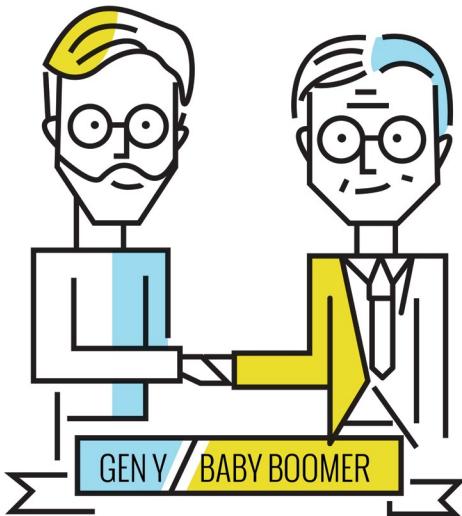


Safety is a TEAM SPORT

Safety matters



Harnessing the Untapped Power of Teams for Safety in a Multi-Generational Environment.

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Over the past few months, we've discussed the important role of teams to create a sustainable safety culture. In the June issue, we explored the concept of groupthink and how the strength that teams can have when they share values and experiences.

Groupthink can lead to a strong safety culture, yet leaders must be aware of this condition and exercise diligence to leverage the power of a team that has strong opinions about safety. We identified one of the most significant negatives of groupthink is the tendency to alienate those who are not part of the group. An aspect of the workplace that is related to groupthink is multiple generations. Multi-Generational workplaces are the norm in workplaces. Most workplaces have four generations present (baby boomers, including people from the following groups:

- Baby Boomers, 1946-1964
- Gen X, 1965 – 1979
- Gen Y (Millennials), 1980 – 2010
- Generation Z, 1996 – 2010

Some workplaces may include Traditionalists (those born prior to 1946), making FIVE generations at work! Each generation has differences and similarities that create the need for leadership awareness. There's a lot of research on generations in the workplace that you can get your hands on and I encourage you to do so. I want to devote the rest of this educational newsletter to some

important points about generations that impact safety that come from my observation in my consulting work with numerous clients.

I've learned that people in every generation are strong contributors yet there are some distinct differences with regard to authority. There seems to be an invisible continuum from Traditionalists to Generation Z with older, more seasoned, workers not being as comfortable with authority as younger workers. One study showed that traditionalists respect authority because of position and Generation Z

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believes respect must be earned – and once earned they will honor authority. Workers in the Gen X, Y, and Z are more comfortable interacting with, even challenging, authority than are Traditionalists and Boomers. Combine this with the notion that Traditionalists and Boomers tend to lean on their experience and Gen X, Y, and Z workers rely on education over experience. This can make some lively debates in safety meetings and maybe even lead to workers ‘choosing up sides’ based on generational demographics. Sometimes these “sides” can feel like blockades if you are responsible for rolling out a new rule or work practice.

There is hope. We’ve talked over the last few months about how to build an elite safety force through building teams. The information applies to situations where you have multiple generations. The primary piece of advice I have to share on this topic is to LISTEN and encourage listening. Multiple generation workforces can be extremely powerful when experience meets education and

vice versa. Along with listening comes learning. One way to foster listening and learning is through conducting discussion groups and peer-to-peer discussions. Research shows that the desire to communicate in these two types of interactions is a commonality among all the generations. (if you need help establishing or learning more about these types of communications, let me know.)

Make it a point to model your openness and willingness to listen and learn from those of all generations. You will find others following your example. The constraints of this newsletter don’t allow deep or adequate explanation and discussion of the impact generations, their unique characteristics, differences and similarities, and relation to safety. I hope you will do some digging on your own to learn more about generations. Some recommended books on the topic are: Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Boomers, Gen Xers, and Gen Yers in the Workplace and Sticking Points: How to Get 4 Generations Working Together in the 12 Places They Come Apart. As with

any good read, you will find things you agree with and others you don’t, but you can always learn something new that applies to your environment.

As a developing leader, model these behaviors:

- Demonstrate that you are willing to listen to people from each generation and to learn from them
- Make it a practice to incorporate diversity of generations in major projects, leading safety meetings, developing new safety rules and training
- Be intentional and your likelihood of success will increase exponentially

You will also find that the combination of experience and education of various generations can lead to safety improvements that will make it difficult to get hurt at work.

Be Safe! *Carl Potter, CSP*



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