

From Boomers to Gen Z: Leveraging Generational Strengths in Construction Leadership

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In my work as a succession planning professional, the topic of generations in the workplace comes up A LOT. Everybody has an opinion and a story to share. It's sometimes a hurdle to get older generations, who definitely followed a stricter protocol when "coming up" in business, to appreciate the differences and value that younger generations can add.

However, understanding and leveraging these diverse generational perspectives can be a powerful tool for construction company owners and executives who want to foster collaboration, drive innovation, and improve overall productivity.

Here are some suggestions for utilizing generational differences positively.

Why do they behave like this?!

Each generation has been molded by socio-economic and technological landscapes during their formative years. Baby Boomers grew up in a post-war era which resulted in a strong work ethic and loyalty to their employers. Gen X was more likely to go to college and have a "white collar" job than the Boomers, but they were the first generation to have employers who were not loyal to them, causing them to be more independent and put their own interest first.

Millennials came of age during the internet boom so "desk jobs" were a more likely choice for employment; they were also the first generation to have numerous after-school activities and participated on sports teams – making them



great at collaboration. And Gen Z, our youngest generation in the workplace right now, was born into a world dominated by smartphones and social media, giving them a "world-view" that colors their interactions and values such as of diversity, inclusivity, and real-time information sharing. Also, thanks to technological advances, there are many diverse ways for them to make money, so the concept of a "job" is very different for this generation.

When you pause to look at these differences objectively, you can start to see how to maximize their value.

Here are some examples:

Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

Generational backgrounds will influence how employees tackle

challenges.

For instance, Gen Xers often prefer to work alone, relying on their resourcefulness and experience to solve problems. In contrast, Gen Z tends to favor collaborative approaches and will leverage digital tools to generate ideas and solutions (what some older generations might call “cheating”).

As a leader, you can harness these differences by creating hybrid teams. For instance, strategic decisions might benefit from older generation’s years of experience, while project innovation might thrive under the collaborative brainstorming typical of younger teams. Blending independent thinkers (Gen X) with collective creativity (Gen Z) can lead to better outcomes and, more importantly, ownership of the decision by all.

Bridging the Communication Gap

Communication preferences vary significantly across generations. Baby Boomers lean towards face-to-face meetings or phone calls, valuing personal interaction. Gen X is comfortable with emails and prefers concise, direct communication. Millennials and Gen Z, accustomed to the immediacy of instant messaging and collaborative platforms, often expect quick responses and real-time feedback.

Regular check-ins, combined with digital tools, can satisfy all parties.

For example, having a morning “huddle” (in person or virtual) in which the manager asks everyone what their assignments are for the day, and where/when they might need assistance, ensures everyone understands the department or company goals as a whole. Then, allowing for more immediate contact via text or Slack ensures work continues smoothly throughout the day.

Personally, I have one employee that I speak with over the phone every day at 7:30 a.m. We review both our schedules so we know what each is doing, what each is expecting of the other, and what we might need to collaborate on. On most days that’s our only contact – we’re just ensuring all the wheels are moving in the same direction; BUT we also have “permission” to send a quick “you there?” to the other via text or WhatsApp for issues we need answers to now.


Work-Life Balance and Flexibility

The concept of work-life balance has evolved significantly among the generations. Baby Boomers often viewed long hours as a badge of honor, while Gen X introduced the idea of balancing career and personal life. Millennials and Gen Z have pushed this further, advocating for flexible schedules, remote work options, and mental health days.

While the nature of construction work often requires onsite presence, there are still opportunities to introduce flexibility. Rotational schedules, mental health support programs, and incorporating technology to streamline workflows can enhance employee satisfaction without compromising project deadlines. Your best bet is to ask your employees, “What can we do to meet your needs as well as achieve our milestones?” You don’t have to come up with all the answers on your own.

Building a Stronger Future Together

Understanding and leveraging generational diversity is not just about avoiding conflict; it’s about creating a richer, more dynamic workplace. Program and construction management companies that embrace these differences can improve employee engagement, drive innovation, and enhance their competitive edge.

By fostering a culture that values every generation’s strengths, construction leaders can build resilient, forward-thinking organizations ready to meet the challenges of the future, because all the wheels are moving in the same direction. 



About the Author

Dr. Nanette Miner is a leadership development and workplace-learning strategy consultant. Through her firm, [The Training Doctor](#), she has revolutionized the way that individuals are prepared for leadership roles in their organizations. Rather than a chosen few, her process is aimed at ensuring everyone in the company has the skills and business acumen of a leader. This approach ensures both immediate and long-term return-on-investment (ROI) for an organization.

She has written articles for Chief Learning Office magazine, Forbes, and MBA World and is a frequent guest on workplace training and career podcasts and talk radio such as Inc. Radio and America's Workforce Radio.

Nanette regularly speaks at industry conferences and corporate learning events on how to integrate leadership capabilities throughout an organization. An author of eight books, her most recent is Future-Proofing Your Organization.

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