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**“US vs. THEM”**

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**keynote follow-up**

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# Major Takeaways

1. **There are only two generations in the workplace: people younger (or less-experienced) than you are; and people older (or more-experienced) than you are.** That's the way it's been for the entirety of human history. Our current four-generational model has made things seem more complicated than they really are.
2. **Advancement is a process.** Technology has accelerated the rate at which we do everything except for the rate at which we develop proficiency at things – instruments, sports, relationships, careers, etc. There is no technological substitute for practice. You will get better at your career slowly and over time, because that is the only way it happens.
3. **Advancement is a process that never stops.** As a parent, you will continue to learn new things 20 and 30 and 40 years after the birth of your children. And as a professional, you should expect to keep learning new skills, new technologies, and new approaches in the last five years of your career just like you did in the first five years of your career.
4. **Your company's current practices and processes exist for extremely good reasons.** To date, those practices and processes are the best that anyone who has ever worked at your company has ever come up with. That doesn't mean they can't be improved, but it definitely means that they shouldn't be completely discounted either.
5. **Don't interpret the ideas of others as an implicit attack on your own ideas or authority.** Some of your current practices and processes are outdated or could be improved. That fact should not be viewed as a weakness; it is simply a function of the fact that things change.



6. **The world is changing at different rates for different people.** If you grew up before the Internet really took off, then for you the world is changing faster now than it used to. If you grew up after the Internet had established itself, then the world is changing at exactly the same speed it always has. That difference should help you understand why different people approach change in different ways.
7. **Some new ideas are bad ideas.** Just ask all those people who invested in Beanie Babies in the mid-90s. Some ideas are wildly popular for a minute and then disappear, and others are truly good but don't manage to capture the market's attention. The reason many of your older colleagues aren't immediately excited about every new idea is because they don't want to repeat the mistakes of the past.
8. **Some new ideas are good ideas.** Cars, electricity, the Internet – I could go on. Every business is constantly trying to decide which existing practices to keep, and which ones to exchange for a new and better way. But without a doubt, some new ideas are going to become industry standard. That's been happening your entire career, and it will continue to happen for the next million years or so.
9. **Some things move slower than you wish they would.** Namely, career advancement.
10. **Some things move faster than you wish they would.** Technology, anyone?
11. **No matter what generation you consider yourself to be a part of, you do not know everything there is to know.** Every generation needs the other, because no one group of people has a monopoly on knowledge. You need your older colleagues to learn how they've done what they've done and to help guide you so that you don't have to constantly reinvent the wheel; and you need your younger colleagues to help you continuously look at your business from a new perspective.



# Generational Statistics

Today's  
young  
workers

25-34  
years old

are actually staying in their jobs longer than at any time since 1963. That means today's Millennials are actually more loyal to their employers than Baby Boomers were at their age.

(Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics)

71%

OF

FORTUNE 500  
COMPANIES

have mentoring programs, and various studies have shown that employees who receive formal mentorship move forward in their careers faster than those who don't

(Source: Wharton – University of Pennsylvania)

1950  
16.5 workers

2011  
2.7 workers

supporting every Social Security recipient.

(Source: Social Security Administration)

# Generational Strategies - Colleagues

Interested in working more effectively with your younger or older colleagues? Here are some things you can do right now:

- 1. Invite your newest employees to deliver a presentation to the rest of your team on a topic they already know something about.** It will convince your newest team members that you value their knowledge, and it should also convince your older team members that your new hires have something valuable to offer.
- 2. When discussing a potential change, invite everyone to debate the pros and cons of adoption.** You probably won't get 100% buy-in once the final decision is made, any more than you'll get 100% buy-in from anything. But you will be certain that you're making your decision with all the available information, and everyone will know the potential risks to watch out for as well as the potential rewards for moving forward.
- 3. Create teams of varying age ranges.** Studies have shown that diverse groups that communicate well with each other are consistently more productive than homogenous teams.
- 4. Invite your older employees to share some of the failures they've experienced in their career.** This will temper the enthusiasm of your youngest workers to rush forward on a new idea without having thought everything through, and it will also remind your older workers that some of those failures were ultimately very valuable learning experiences.
- 5. Use analogies to instruments, sports, and relationships as often as possible.** Every one of your employees will have experience in one or more of those three fields, and they can be very useful analogies when it comes time to discuss the pace of advancement, the need to continually work toward improvement, and other issues of motivation and proficiency.



# Generational Strategies - Customers

Generational differences don't just happen between colleagues; there can also be challenges in dealing with customers from a different generation than your own. Here are some things you can do to develop stronger and more productive relationships with them:

## When Interacting with Older Customers

- 1. Be patient** – Some Older customers may not be familiar with technologies that you've been using for years. Others may not move as quickly as you'd like them to. These are not faults by any means, but rather functions of being older. So don't hold it against them. Someday you'll be the Old one in the group, and you wouldn't want Young people to get frustrated with you for not knowing everything they do.
- 2. Remind them of changes they've adopted (and maybe even like!)** – You will almost certainly hear an Older customer complain someday because 'that's not how we used to do it.' It's a common complaint, but not an accurate one, because there is no fixed way that things used to be done. So when possible, try to point out changes they've happily adopted. We didn't use to have smartphones, for example, and your Older customers probably enjoy the abilities their smartphones provide them. So maybe they'll come to enjoy whatever new thing you're suggesting to them as well.
- 3. Focus on experience over age** – Occasionally Older customers believe that their age has made them an expert in everything, including things they have no real experience in. But that isn't true. For example, a 30-year old with 5 years' experience managing a restaurant knows more about restaurant management than a 70-year old who's been going out to eat for several decades. By drawing attention to your experience, you can help Older customers realize that your age is not necessarily a reflection of your skill or ability.





## When Interacting With Younger Customers

- 1. Be prepared to explain the limits of technology** – Young people have been raised and trained to believe that there is a technological solution for just about everything. But sometimes the “old-fashioned” approach really is the best one. Case in point – a phone call is more effective at getting someone’s undivided attention than a text message is. So if a Young customer expects you to solve their every issue with an app, showing them the limitations of a technology-based approach to problem-solving can open their minds to new possibilities.
- 2. Focus on experience over age** – Young people generally don’t react well to anything that sounds like, “I’m older, so I’m right.” Instead, focus on your superior experience. “In my 30 years in this industry, here’s what I’ve learned” is far more likely to earn the respect and attention of a Young customer than an age-based approach.
- 3. Use examples to illustrate the need for patience** – Young people are often impatient. That’s partially a function of our increased dependence on technology, but it’s also a function of age. So remind them that sometimes, good things take time. You can get a tattoo in 5 minutes, but it won’t look as nice as one that takes 5 hours. That example should be enough, but I’m sure you can find 463 others to use if you need to.

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