

Advice for Leading Multiple Generations

For the first time in US history, four generations with distinctly different sets of values are in the workplace. What are the management and leadership implications for this?

For “veterans” now nearing retirement age, Tom DeCoster says, executive director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Leadership Institute, managers should reinforce organizational rules and provide a clear sense of direction.

- To lead baby boomers, managers need to make decisions through consensus and offer socialization opportunities.
- Generation Xers prefer to work independently and are skeptical of management and their motives.
- Those in Generation Y—today’s youngest workers—need supervision and structure. The most critical message for transportation managers dealing with Gen Y, is that this generation seeks a higher purpose in their work life.

Overall, DeCoster advises, managers should not expect generational values to change over time. No one has better values—they only have different values. And finally, he says, “no generation is genetically impeded from being productive.”



	Veterans (born 1922-46)	Boomers (born 1946-64)	Gen X (born 1964-80)	Gen Y (born 1980-2000)
Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value chain of command, structure, discipline. • Polite, respectful. • Appreciate tradition, history. • Believe in logic, not magic. • Uncomfortable in team meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like fair and level playing field, seniority. • Geared toward securing promotions. • Teamwork orientated. • See themselves as “stars.” • Put careers first, family second. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self reliant and skeptical. • Lifestyle balance is critical. • Nontraditional orientation to time and work location. • Prefer informality in work location. • Technologically savvy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive expectations and work and life. • Comfortable with diversity. • Can do whatever you want to. • Comfortable with team process. • Technologically sophisticated.
On the Job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No news is good news. • Hardworking on all assignments. • Reluctant to challenge management. • Work first, pleasure later. • Like the personal touch and respect. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money, title, corner office. • Experienced with chain of command. • Very sensitive to performance feedback. • Ignore personal conflict. • Believe in magic of leadership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer to work independently. • Suspicious of management. • Attach little value to networking. • Impatient with non-performers and lack of progress. • Prefer projects over recurring work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimistic. • Comfortable with multitasking. • Need supervision and structure. • Avoid “difficult people” work environments. • Life a “you can be a hero” work environment.

Source:
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