

# Facing the Challenges of Diversity & Generational Differences



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## LEADING IN A DIVERSE ORGANIZATION

Diversity is an important topic for today's leader to understand. To be an effective leader in a multi-cultural environment one must be open, honest and willing to embrace people who are "different" from self.

Divisiveness creates an environment where people are untrusting, uncooperative and less productive. Nothing gets in the way of achieving your goals like division in the ranks.

As demographics shift in terms of gender, color, ethnic, cultural or other differences among people, the leader must stand against prejudice and strive to develop communication skills that unite rather than divide followers.

## INCLUSIVENESS VS. EXCLUSIVENESS

Today, more than ever, organizations are working to become inclusive of diverse peoples rather than exclusive of any one group. Many traditionally white male dominated industries and organizations are reaching out to women, youth and people of color in order to fully staff their operation and to cultivate workers and leaders for the future.

In addition, more and more organizations are doing business globally. It is essential for these organizations to understand the customs and protocol of those lands and peoples they serve.

Edward P. McCabe



## CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS, CHANGING NEEDS

Projections from the U.S. Census show, by the year 2050, the number of females in America will outstrip the number of males by seven million, compared to more recent times when the numbers have been more equal.

The U.S. Census Bureau describes the following groups as part of its survey: African, Asian, Latino, European and Native-American. The non-Hispanic white population (European) is expected to shrink from today's 70% mark to just over 50%. The Hispanic population will double from 13 to 25%, while African-American numbers will grow from 13 to 14% and Asian Americans from 4 to 8%. The Native American population is expected to remain at 1%.

The census figures project America will grow in population from 283 million in the year 2000 to 420 million in 2050. With these changes in mind, it's imperative that organizations find ways to make women and people of color more welcomed and part of the workplace family (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey, 2009).

## STEREOTYPES, ETHNOCENTRISM & PREJUDICE

It's not uncommon for people to stereotype others according to gender, age, color, social class, sexuality, ability and other aspects that make individuals "different" from one another. The following descriptions of stereotyping, ethnocentrism and prejudice are drawn from "Why do so many people get treated so poorly?" by author B. J. Hall (2004).

### Stereotyping

Stereotyping is a form of categorizing. Although categorizing is one important way humans organize their lives, it's helpful to avoid stereotyping that covers up individual differences by assigning certain characteristics to an entire group of people. As a leader today, you can guard against prejudice by monitoring your own stereotypes – and those of your followers – and examining whether those views focus on specific behaviors, or broad, vague images of others or an accurate Sociotype or statistics (2004, p. 195-198).

### Ethnocentrism

An ethnocentric person believes their "group" is the center of the world and everything else revolves around that group. You can keep ethnocentric tendencies in check by constantly examining your concern or indifference towards "others." You might also consider your involvement with or avoidance of those who are "different," and how much you are able to enjoy others vs. being intolerant as measures of your own ethnocentricity (p. 198-201).

### Prejudice

Prejudice is a rigid attitude a person holds towards mem-

bers of other groups that causes the individual to feel, think or act negatively towards those "others." Prejudice rears its head in a variety of ways. Blatant prejudice occurs when one actively denigrates members of another group. Conceit shows up when one thinks their group is better than another group. Symbolic prejudice is at play when one denies their prejudicial feelings but displays antagonism towards others. Tokenism occurs when an individual gives what is less important to others while withholding what is truly important.

Sometimes discrimination is displayed by keeping others at arms length, or by associating with them in one setting but not in another. People find ways to rationalize prejudices, but prejudice is a divisive force between leaders and followers and from follower to follower. While some might use prejudice to make sense of their world, this cheap, easy and flawed knowledge can be replaced by true understanding, respect and appreciation for others (p. 202).

## GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

Generational influence is another diversity factor. It's helpful for leaders to recognize the characteristics of various generational groups in order to improve understanding, communication and cooperation between team members.

Although various researchers identify the generations a little differently, Bruce Tulgan author of several books about generations in the workplace, including *Managing the Generation Mix* (2002) with Carolyn Martin, cites the following birth dates range as a guideline:

- The Silent Generation (1925-1945)
- The Baby Boomers (1946-1964)
- Generation X (1965-1977)
- Generation Y (1978-1990)
- Generation Z (1991 – 1996)

Each generation comes from a different historical reference point that has influenced their ideas about issues such as work ethic, authority, loyalty, free agency and work arrangements.

According to Martin & Tulgan (2002) the Silent Generation is motivated by satisfying work; Baby Boomers derive their identity from being respected for their work; Generation X'ers find security in amassing workplace skills and Generation Y'ers want to make a difference through work. Generation Z, the youngest workers in today's workplace, is already beginning to take shape as a group that is different and divided from Generation Y. Researchers are, no doubt, already collecting valuable information that will influence our practices with this generation in the years to come.

One of the big challenges for today's leader is to get members from all groups communicating on the same page and

collaborating towards results. Key points of tension between generations in the workplace include:

- Work ethic
- How and where we work
- Respect for title, rank, authority and elders
- Keeping older workers happy, trained and motivated
- Finding and keeping younger workers
- Different values, attitudes and beliefs
- Technology in the workplace

From earning your dues to downsizing, job hopping to having it your way, suits and ties to business casual and on to tattoos, nose rings and all types of hair, today's workplace has become diverse on many levels. Since there are a number of good books and seminars on the market, and this topic is a moving target, readers are encouraged to continue educating themselves on generations in the workplace. Bruce Tulgan's books and website, [www.rainmakerthinking.com](http://www.rainmakerthinking.com) is an excellent resource for current research and interesting reading on this subject.

### MORE ABOUT GENERATION Y

With Baby Boomers moving into their retirement years and Generation X now well established in the workplace, Generation Y is the emerging generation of concern for employers. Here are a few particulars for understanding and managing this group.

#### Helicopter Parenting

Helicopter Parenting is a phrase used to describe the parents of Generation Y. Like a helicopter, these parents hover closely overhead, rarely out of reach, whether their children need them or not. With so much hovering, love, support and esteem building it may be that these Baby Boomers parents have created a monster – a generation that is overconfident, overestimating and over-claiming in their abilities (Twenge & Campbell, 2009).

In *The Narcissism Epidemic*, authors Twenge & Campbell suggest that parents of the younger generations must learn to say no and mean it; avoid giving their children too much power; carefully consider what messages are conveyed to them pertaining to competition and winning; and think twice about buying the young person something that announces how great they are (2009, p. 86-89).

#### Narcissism

Many researchers, writers -- and members of the Y group themselves -- have associated narcissism with this generation. Whether discussing someone with true NPD -- Narcissistic Personality Disorder, or the characteristics of narcissism among the gen-

eral population, these behaviors include: excessive self-admiration, inflated self-importance, extreme self-centeredness, overestimation of abilities, excessive need for admiration and a lack of empathy.

Twenge & Campbell write, "In fact, narcissism causes almost all of the things that Americans hoped high self-esteem would prevent, including aggression, materialism, lack of caring for others, and shallow values. In trying to build a society that celebrates high self-esteem, self-expression, and 'loving yourself,' Americans have inadvertently created more narcissism – and a culture that brings out the narcissistic behavior in all of us" (2009, p. 9).

#### Managing Generation Y

In Bruce Tulgan's *Not Everyone Gets a Trophy: How to Manage Generation Y*, he refers to this group of 22 to 34 year olds as the most high maintenance workforce in the history of the world. He writes, "Yes, Generation Y will be more difficult to recruit, retain, motivate, and manage than any other new generation to enter the workforce. But this will also be the most high-performing workforce in history for those who know how to manage them properly" (2009, p. 4). Here are a few points Tulgan makes about managing this emerging generation.

#### Information Technology Imperatives

This age group wants total customization of their information environment allowing for constant connectivity with whomever they want and immediate access to whatever information they want. Along with the communication capability and access to knowledge that comes with this connectivity, these workers also want the ability to collaborate and learn from experts in real time (Tulgan, 2009, p. 50).

#### "In Loco Parentis" Management

Since this generation has been strongly influenced by their parents, especially in regards to their hopes, dreams, esteem and capabilities, Tulgan suggest a few practices for managing "in loco" -- or in place of their parents. These practices include: showing these younger employees you care by spending time getting to know them; giving them structure, boundaries and helping them keep score on their performance; and, as reinforcement for successful behavior, providing special rewards in very small increments. This generation is very transactional in their approach to work and life (p. 57-74).

#### Give Them the Gift of Context

A strength the Silent Generation brought to the workplace was their capacity for providing context to younger workers. Be it historical, industrial, workplace, business, human relations or a host of other areas, Baby Boomers and Gen Xers will now have to carry the torch by providing context for upcoming workers. According to Tulgan, this includes items such as teaching them how to play and work well with others; how to shine and do well in

presentations and meetings; and how to deal with bosses or other big shots in the organization (p. 75-88).

As you can imagine, there is a long list of things one can put under the category of context in the workplace. In a more complex world, what was once common sense is now lost in the competition of information overload.

## PRACTICING WORKPLACE SENSITIVITY

It's only in your best interest to treat current clients well and to treat new prospective customers as if you want their business. This is also true of your employees, vendors and others who touch your business or vice versa. Here is an equation for the customer experience:

### **Expectation + Experience = Evaluation.**

If you want others to give a good evaluation of your service, and spread the news to family, friends and other potential customers, they must have a positive experience based on their initial expectation of your business. It's your job to insure each customer experience meets their expectations. Here are some basic expectations held by employees and clients:

- Professionalism
- Understanding
- Respect
- Appreciation
- Fairness
- Accuracy
- Privacy and Confidentiality

In order to effectively serve your employee or client base, especially if it's diverse, you will want to answer the following:

1. Who is our customer base? Who is our employee base?
2. How do they want to be treated?
3. Are there special considerations or do they have unique needs?
4. How do we accommodate those considerations and needs?

If, for example, you serve a bi-lingual population, it's helpful to have staff that speaks the language of your customers.

Making the effort to accommodate your diverse employees and clients will help reduce incidents of alienation, harassment and discrimination – whether real or perceived.

## SUMMARY

In summary, today's leader must deal with the complexity of a competitive, global, information workplace that keeps its doors open 24-7-365. Managing diversity and generational differences is just one more area of human relations skills needed on the new frontier.

### *Resources*

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