

How You Can Initiate Compelling Conversations Each Generation Wants (and Needs) to Have with Each Other

From my experience over many years of working with several generations, there is a hunger for comfortable, safe, effective and profitable intergenerational communication and collaboration at work. Yet people are held back by fears of reaching out beyond their comfort zone. They feel uncomfortable associating with people who don't share similar beliefs, likes and rituals – at least on the surface. Most connections are superficial, and social media has magnified that superficiality with easy information overwhelm and a new definition of “friends.” Often people just don't know how to initiate and establish deeper conversations and relationships.

I've observed that people seem to be able to converse and connect very well in times of crisis like a terrorist attack, severe weather or power outages. But we don't want to wait or look for crises as a solution to achieve behavior change. We need both motivation and ability to connect authentically and on a deeper level. If people have lost or never learned the art of real conversation, we need to motivate and train them to make it happen. Organizations will benefit from the engagement of our whole selves.

So, one of the things I aim for is to get people curious about each other in a non-threatening environment. It starts and is maintained by establishing empathy and trust. Next is the desire to understand perspectives and typical motivations of other generations.

Below are seven samples among conversations I have found each generation wants - and needs - to have with each other in our Cross-Generational Conversation Day and other forums in which I've participated. **Here are some questions to use to lubricate the discussion:**

- Help me understand your perspective on work and the marketplace outside of our organization. What factors influenced your worldview, attitudes and behaviors you bring to your work and interactions with colleagues?
- What would you like to see changed about how (our) work is done, and how can you help to make it more effective?
 - How important is hierarchy to you?
 - When is years of experience in your role very important, and when are other factors equally or more important?
- What would you like to discuss to get to know better how my peers and I think, what our expectations are, and how I can benefit from our differences and diversity?
 - What would you say are your core values?
 - Do you think they are significantly different from my generation's core values?
 - How can we jointly overcome intergenerational tensions?
- What can we jointly present to our organization's decision-makers that will improve (select one or more) recruiting, sales, client/customer experiences and relationships, etc.?

- What strategies for impact and influence at work can I learn from you and you from me?
- What is getting in the way of a more productive and satisfying working relationship?
- Would you like to know how best to work with the styles and preferences of your colleagues and they with yours? (Request Practice Development Counsel's "How I Can Best Work With You" (Owner's Manual) tool for starting this discussion at pwhaserot@pdcounsel.com)

Source: "*You Can't Google It!* – The Compelling Case for Cross-Generational Conversation at Work" by Phyllis Weiss Haserot (Morgan James Publishing, 2018)

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