

Making the Most of Multi-Generational Workplaces

By Annemarie Shrouder

According to a recent monster.ca survey, Canadian workplaces now employ up to four generations. Is your workplace ready to have twenty-somethings and post-retirees in the same space? Have you considered what this means for you as an employer, and what you can do to make the most of it?

Workplace dynamics can be challenging. Adding more age diversity to the mix ups the ante. Older employees can provide the benefit of experience in the field. Younger co-workers can bring enthusiasm and often a different perspective precisely because they *don't* have a lot of experience. Both of these are beneficial to the workplace. But if the environment isn't conducive to dialogue and your employees aren't aware of the barriers we unconsciously create, intergenerational workplaces could be a minefield for misunderstandings and inefficiency. As an employer, bringing awareness to the issue and clarifying your expectations is crucial to getting the most of the age span in your office.

Everyone brings a mixture of identities and therefore perspectives and practices to work with them every day. Age, for example, is influential in determining values and beliefs. It also impacts the experiences we have - which impacts what we do and how we do it. Age can also inform what someone knows or doesn't know – but not necessarily. Our assumptions tell us what *we think* someone's age contributes to their knowledge, their capabilities, and the validity of their ideas. Relying on our assumptions about age can negatively impact productivity and relationships in the office. Often our assumptions, not the diversity on which they are based, are the culprit in workplace disharmony.

A multi-generational environment *that works* provides the opportunity to uncover rich perspectives that, in whole or in part, can move an idea, a project, or an entire organization forward. Being aware of how age impacts perspective (and how *their* age impacts *their* perspective) allows employees to really hear other suggestions and points of view. An environment that can combine the old and the new has the potential to see and appreciate the benefit of both experience and innovation.

Awareness is crucial in creating this balance and inspiring success.

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