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Age diversity makes for better workplaces

Throughout my career, it has never occurred to me to expect my superiors to be older than I am, and those that I manage to be younger. Apparently, I'm unique in that regard because many people expect the workplace hierarchy to reflect years of hard-won seniority, with the eldest



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staff members in top positions and their younger counterparts furiously climbing the corporate ladder beneath them.

I've been in my current position for nearly three years, working alongside (and managing) employees who are older than I am. We work well together — despite the fact that they are all more than a decade my senior. It just doesn't occur to me that this is exceptional because I've always been in positions where employees are older and it just never seemed to matter.

We're seeing that more and more nowadays, with a workplace that looks a lot different than workplaces of yore. In many companies, you'll see up to four different generations on the clock at the same time.

When I was 21 and managing a loan department and investment programs for a credit union, I had to learn that age shouldn't matter — and really it doesn't. When you sit in front of a woman in her 50s and tell her she's denied a loan, you quickly learn the art of corporate finesse. Business is person to person, not one age over another.

Over time, I've learned the most important workplace lesson: how to deal with people, understanding their needs in the business world and what they require from their work. I've also learned that workplace needs don't overshadow personal desires, and that the art of managing others comes from seeing the whole person and bringing the appropriate compassion to the task at hand.

It's never about coming in and telling people what to do. I don't care what age you are, or what position, you'll never be successful if that's your approach.

I was never intimidated by the fact that my entire team is older than I am. And I hope the team doesn't see immaturity in my younger age. How we perform on the job has more to do with who we are as people than what age we project.

Throughout many different leadership and management experiences, I've learned that the manager's top job is realizing what somebody's talents are, what they're good at, and having the right people in the right seats, regardless of age.

It's also imperative to learn about what's important to each generation. They're all different, and so are the mentalities shaped by what people have lived through.

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Those in today's younger generation bring to the workplace a perspective that they want what they do every day to mean something to them. They don't want to go to work and punch a clock and stay at a desk for eight hours and not care what they're doing all day. They want to make

an impact.

One of the biggest myths is that people in this generation doesn't respect generations that came before them. Actually, they hunger

for the wisdom they can get from colleagues and superiors. They want knowledge; they want mentors. Yes, they may bring advanced technological skills and wisdom, but they are eager to learn and want to bridge any per-

ceived generational gaps.

Our workplaces today are a mix of generations, with more retirees realizing they might want to start a new career or may have to stay in the workplace longer than planned. Generations are going to

overlap, and we must encourage all ages to cross paths in the workplace, share skill sets and appreciate what each generation offers, rather than butting heads just because we do things differently.

All the skills and talents and years of experience we bring to each position can truly be for everyone's benefit — and boost the bottom line. Let's capitalize on the strengths of this new working paradigm, for the sake of corporate America and so we can build a better economic future for all.

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