

Communicating Across Generations

Start with understanding what they value.

As generations gather to travel and work together, sometimes they don't understand each other. The next two columns are dedicated to communicating across generations and include a few stories and tips. Here are the first two tips:

- Learn to acknowledge and appreciate differences.
- Consider the ways different generations see value and where they place importance.

Acknowledge and appreciate differences (but stop stereotyping)

Let's face it, we do things differently than our parents, our kids, our parents' parents and so on. Times change, but we often behave as though that doesn't apply to us. It can be easy to fall back on stereotypes when working across generations, which makes it particularly difficult to correct. However, in these situations, we must pause and try to avoid limiting biases. We are all influenced by, and are products of when we were born, raised, became adults and gained our experiences.

These experiences define who we are as individuals and are deeply ingrained in our personalities.

It's less a matter of changing these intrinsic aspects of ourselves and more about accepting and respecting those differences in others. Do not try to change generational attributes. Instead, I work with individuals to identify the specific value each person adds to the group. Respect each person's contribution and role, regardless of their generation.

Understand value differences

"Because it's always been done that way," doesn't resonate as a legitimate reason with anyone, especially not people who are new to the business. While different generations may naturally value and prioritize different things, it's valuable to have open discussions about the reasoning behind why things are done a certain way. Everyone may even agree things might benefit from an update. Effective communication relies on this dialogue and openness to change. Think of it this way: if someone

younger questions "why," and you can't immediately explain it, then it is probably worth questioning.

Consider the story of a young cattle producer, Brock. I met Brock at a conference, and he was feeling frustrated being back at the farm. While he didn't regret the decision to leave his corporate sales representative role, he was wondering, just a little, if he and his wife, Kristi, had made the right choice. Still, feeling frustrated and admitting that to his dad were two very different things.

"There is always a lot to do, so it's not like I'm bored," he said. "Actually, it's more like underwhelmed." Brock shared that before he returned to run cows, being a sales rep filled his cup with things to shoot for — goals, targets and opportunities for rollouts. He also knew what the objectives were and had input on setting his own metrics. But, back working with Dad, he didn't get much feedback — even when he asked. It was difficult for him to approach his dad about where their ranching business was headed.

Brock needed something to work toward coupled with directed feedback. Without these elements, he felt adrift. It's not uncommon for high-achieving people, call them strivers, to need a measuring stick of some sort — something to work toward. Without expectations, performance inevitably suffers, even from the best of the best. You see, his value was feedback and acknowledgement along with the necessary hard work. Having gone without it for too long, he was concerned his efforts didn't matter or have a direct impact.

As you approach conversations across generations, consider what matters to the other generation. It doesn't mean you have to agree but seeking to understand "how they are wired" can bring more fun and success to your operation. **HW**

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