

# Ask the Career Coach: Managing Across the Generations

How do you manage a team of workers that is multi-generational?

By [Lisa Chenofsky Singer](#)

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Dear Career Coach Lisa,

I have a job where I am managing a broad range of staff with very distinct styles. They are at various levels of experience—from 25+ years to new grads. How do I motivate them?

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In today's workforce, it is possible to identify four identifiable work styles that are largely generational. Attitudes about work and life are the result of different values based on events and experiences that have shaped each generation's world view. These differences affect recruitment, development, management and communications in dealing with employees. Organizing teams, dealing with change and maximizing productivity depend on understanding personal differences.

How do you communicate more effectively among the team? Do you get everyone together in face to face meetings, over the phone, webcasts, emails, texting, or teleconferencing?

Generational differences influence but do not determine adult interactions. Another influence may be intercultural differences. Since you referenced the various years of experiences, I will focus on the generational influences. These generational labels—Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Xers and Millennials—are not meant to stereotype but rather help foster an understanding as there is diversity within each generational label.

Traditionalists tend to follow the "chain of command" while Baby Boomers embrace the "change of command." Mix these styles with Xers who are "self command" driven and Millennials who say "don't command, but collaborate" and it may seem like everyone at the table wants a different meal.

Most organizations speak to diversity without creating the environments to encourage communication and learning. The need to communicate and respect one another's perspective and learn from each other is critical in preventing these generational styles from colliding.

One way to gain cooperation is to build a *learning community* within your team. The desire to learn crosses generational differences and makes it possible to share the values that each person can bring to their overall group. A learning community can be as simple as getting staff together on topical book discussions or presenting potential challenges and letting the team work through brainstorming potential solutions. The solutions can be presented at staff meetings with awards given for selective categories such as most creative or innovative or cost effective. It can be very instrumental in increasing awareness, leveraging members' knowledge and creating an understanding of work styles, and enhancing the overall team's goals.

There are many ways to motivate teams. Think about how you can partner staff to cross pollinate knowledge and gain mutual understanding.

Today's leaders need to be aware of generational and multicultural styles in the workplace. As the global workforce continues to evolve, creating communities where members can embrace their differences and work together as a collegial team is important. Personal relationships are the key to

this goal, but keep in mind that each group has a different definition or value proposition of a relationship.

*"Ask the Career Coach" is a column dedicated to those who may be in transition or wrestling with a career dilemma by providing a forum for advice. We welcome your questions. Please send them to [CareerCoachLisa@gmail.com](mailto:CareerCoachLisa@gmail.com).*

*Lisa Chenofsky Singer is a Millburn-Short Hills resident and the founder of Chenofsky Singer & Associates LLC. She offers Executive and Career Management Coaching and Human Resources Consulting, writes and speaks on job search and career-related topics. Her web site is [www.ChenofskySinger.com](http://www.ChenofskySinger.com).*