Minding the Gap:
Appreciating Generational Differences

One of the biggest diversity issues facing corporations today is the lack of mutual understanding, appreciation, and collaboration between the four different generations that make up the workforce. Consequently the unique talents and perspectives of each cohort group are rarely utilized. Giving leaders and employees the skills they need to comfortably relate to others who grew up in a different time in history can help an organization combine the energy & ingenuity of younger generations with the wisdom & experience of older generations. An age-inclusive culture can improve every area of corporate life: recruitment, retention, strategic thinking, problem solving, product development, marketing, and customer service.

Introduction

The 'Minding the Gap' workshop challenges individual leaders and employees to take personal responsibility to bridge the generation gap at work. This program will teach participants how to better understand and appreciate people from other age groups and to adjust their own style of relating and communicating to connect more successfully with members of all four generations.

Different History & Social Conditioning

If we are going to value individuals from different generations we must learn something about the different historical events and cultural forces that shaped each generation and the resulting norms, values, priorities, and perspectives that are unique to each cohort group.

Traditionalists (born before 1946)

- Major life-shaping event: World War II
- Technological era: radio
- Defining group norm: loyalty

Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)

- Major life-shaping event: Economic Prosperity
- Technological era: television
- Defining group norm: ambition

Generation X (born 1965-1979)

- Major life-shaping event: Economic Recession
- Technological era: personal computer
- Defining group norm: self-reliance

Millennials (born 1980-1999)

- Major life-shaping event: Globalization
- Technological era: internet
- Defining group norm: tolerance

Different Strengths

Due to the unique cultural surroundings and group norms that each of us grew up with we all tend to have certain characteristics hard-wired into us depending on our generation. These characteristics can be strengths when balanced by the prevailing traits of other generations.

- **Traditionalists** – dependable, sacrificial, dutiful, structured, frugal
- **Boomers** – driven, passionate, optimistic, collaborative, relational
- **Gen X** – resourceful, adaptable, candid, entrepreneurial, confident
- **Millenials** – innovative, dedicated, global, inclusive, techno-savvy

Different Stereotypes

When generational traits are not balanced by other generations; and when they are taken to the extreme they can have a negative effect just like personality types. Consequently, each generation gets stereotyped. It is important for us (whichever generation we are a part of) to be aware of how our tendencies can create negative perceptions.

- **Traditionalists** – old-fashioned, rigid, authoritarian, conservative, slow moving
- **Boomers** – overachievers, workaholics, materialistic, sensitive, self-absorbed
- **Gen X** – cynical, loners, non-conformists, disrespectful, blunt
- **Millenials** – immature, entitled, overly confident, migratory, impatient

Different Needs

It is critical for organizations to understand and accommodate the different needs of each generation if they expect to have success recruiting and retaining talent from all cohort groups. Here are some specific concerns that must be addressed.

- **Traditionalists** – respect, consistency, commitment, straightforward feedback
- **Boomers** – perks, affirmation, challenge, tactful feedback
- **Gen X** – freedom, flexibility, change, frequent feedback
- **Millenials** – empowerment, development, technology, instantaneous feedback

Generations & Corporate Practices

Participants are asked to work in generationally mixed breakout groups to discuss how the following corporate practices need to be tailored to appeal to each generation:

- Recruiting efforts
- Career planning
- Giving & receiving feedback
- Recognition & rewards
- Retention strategies
- Marketing
- Customer Service