

Supervisor Communication for Multigenerational Teams



Seven generations coexist for the first time, and most now share workplaces, navigating company culture through different lenses while adapting to economic, technological, and organizational change that propels the workforce forward.

As each generation strives for success, their unique communication is often overlooked, which may lead to clashes. Organizations fostering cross-generational collaboration are more likely to thrive, and this success must be ushered in by supervisors.

However, many supervisors are unequipped to handle one of the most difficult aspects of their role: resolving interpersonal conflicts arising from generational differences. Supervisors must adapt their leadership style to meet the distinct needs of the multigenerational workforce.

Thriving Together: Supervisor Communication for Multigenerational Teams equips leaders to bridge these gaps.

Thriving
TOGETHER



Generational intelligence (GQ), awareness of how different generations work together and how they may clash, is key for effective leadership.

Supervisor Knowledge: About Working Generations

Supervisors must be savvy to generational preferences and be equipped to lead all, while recognizing individual traits, personalities, and habits will outweigh generational norms.

Generational preferences may cause miscommunication and spur interpersonal conflict. While conflict at work is normal, many supervisors aren't trained to handle it.

According to an Express Employment Professionals-Harris Poll survey:

- ♦ 39% of U.S. and 41% of Canadian supervisor job seekers say resolving conflict is the biggest challenge supervisors face
- ♦ Yet only 31% of U.S. and 26% of Canadian supervisor job seekers report receiving training in this area

The first step in managing conflict rooted in miscommunication is to understand the communication styles involved.



How We Talk, What We Value

Generational characteristics offer helpful context, but every individual is unique and may not identify with those traits. Understanding each generation's communication style is crucial to collaboration. However, be mindful not to make assumptions.

Silent Generation: 1925–1945

- ♦ Prefer handwritten notes over email, appreciate a personal approach

Boomers: 1945–1964

- ♦ Choose the most efficient means, including phone calls or in-person

Gen X: 1965–1979

- ♦ Choose the most efficient means, including phone calls or in-person

Millennials: 1980–1994

- ♦ Online messaging, text, email

Gen Z: 1995–2009

- ♦ Social media, text, online messaging

Gen Alpha: 2010–2024

- ♦ Still emerging, but predicted to be even more tech savvy than previous generations

Gen Beta: began in 2025

- ♦ Yet to be defined, but influences are expected to include advanced technologies and automation



There's no match for developing professional relationships with your team to learn how they work best.

Speak Their Language

Technology is an integral part of life and is critical to success in most workplaces. Older generations watched it evolve; younger ones grew up digitally literate. Each generation has preferred communication methods but face-to-face remains the most valued when communicating with colleagues, according to McCrindle, a market research company with a specialty in demographics.

Top Three Communication Preferences			
Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
Face-to-Face: 59%	Face-to-Face: 63%	Face-to-Face: 73%	Face-to-Face: 87%
Email: 44%	Email: 45%	Email: 43%	Phone: 28%
Phone call: 41%	Online Messaging: 40%	Phone call: 30%	Email: 27%

Common communication tools include:

- ♦ **Email:** Good for documentation and detailed messages
- ♦ **Online messaging:** Ideal for quick, informal chats and real-time collaboration
- ♦ **Video calls:** Help build rapport and read non-verbal cues
- ♦ **Text messages:** Useful for brief updates or urgent notes
- ♦ **Social media:** May be appropriate for brainstorming or informal communication
- ♦ **Phone calls:** Add a personal touch, good for sensitive topics
- ♦ **In-person:** Enables real-time, distraction-free communication





Supervisor Knowledge: Adapt to Connect

Collaborative communication depends on everyone's willingness to adapt. This responsibility doesn't depend on one generation or supervisor; every team member plays a role. Flexibility in communication creates connection, eliminates confusion, builds collaboration, and shows commitment to the team. Set expectations for your team's communication with a plan.

Create a Communication Plan

- ♦ Establish acceptable communication methods
- ♦ Respect individual preferences when possible
- ♦ Set expectations for using key platforms
- ♦ Be transparent about how and when to contact each other
- ♦ Plan for conflict with a process to address issues as they arise

As a leader in the multigenerational workforce, you have a unique opportunity to bridge the generational divide. Foster communication by:

- ♦ **Modeling flexibility:** Use the communication style that resonates with the team member you're contacting
- ♦ **Emphasizing empathy:** Remind your team that everyone's preferences vary and that's okay
- ♦ **Focusing on connection:** Make time for real conversations and personal updates

As the workplace continues to evolve, supervisors are uniquely positioned to lead the charge in fostering inclusive, collaborative work environments. By embracing GQ and adapting communication styles, leaders can transform conflict into connection. With the right tools and mindset, supervisors won't just manage multigenerational teams but will lead them to thrive.



Thriving TOGETHER

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The Job Seeker Report survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals, Nov. 21–Dec. 10, 2024, among 1,039 U.S. job seekers, and online within Canada, Nov. 21–Dec. 6, 2024, among 505 job seekers.





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