



MANAGING THE MULTI-GENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

*Professor Cherrie Wilkerson, Assistant Dean for Young Professional Programs at Owen Graduate School of Management, Vanderbilt University, offers **five action points** to help you manage your own multi-generational workforce – and ensure different generations can collaborate effectively at work:*



ENCOURAGE DIVERSITY

To stay competitive most companies strive to increase diversity whether it be; gender, age, race, education, or functional background. Generational diversity has the potential to increase the strength and longevity of any company. See 'How Diversity Makes Us Smarter' by Katherine W. Phillips, which she sub-titles 'Being around people who are different from us makes us more creative, more diligent and harder-working'. In the seminal article by Mannix & Neale (2006), 'What Differences Make a Difference: The Promise and Reality of Diverse Teams in Organizations', the authors argue that diversity can have a positive effect within organizations but only if the leaders understand how to manage and leverage those differences.



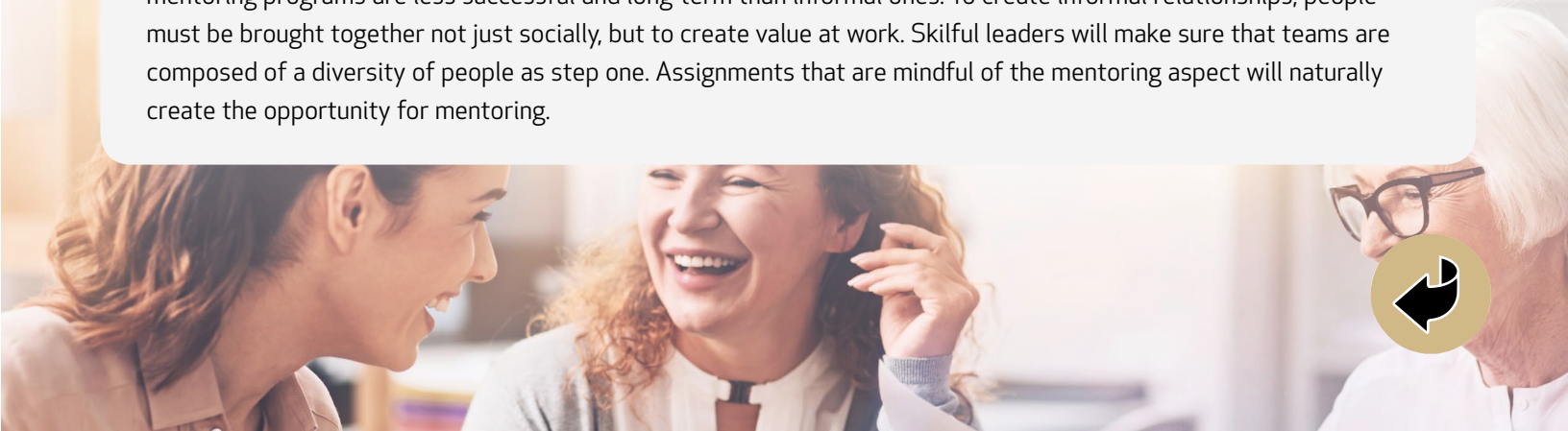
BREAK DOWN SILOS

The best way to break down silos among people is through understanding. We must carefully strip away the stereotypes to get at the underlying similarities and differences. The multiple generations in the workforce should understand what makes each generation unique so that the business solutions created are the most robust. Once we have understanding, we're able to engage in meaningful interaction. Connection with others who might be different from us helps us appreciate those differences while also valuing people as individuals.



FOSTER MUTUAL MENTORING

The generations have much to share with each other that can improve performance at work. In my experience, formal mentoring programs are less successful and long-term than informal ones. To create informal relationships, people must be brought together not just socially, but to create value at work. Skilful leaders will make sure that teams are composed of a diversity of people as step one. Assignments that are mindful of the mentoring aspect will naturally create the opportunity for mentoring.





UNDERSTAND INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

There is much focus on what Millennials need, as the current largest generation in the workforce. The needs of Gen X and Boomers are equally important. For example, Millennials value meaning and purpose at work. Who doesn't want a job with meaning and purpose? It is the human condition. However, what 'meaning and purpose' looks like to a Millennial may be very different for a Boomer as they wind down their career. Great leadership understands the needs of individuals and weaves them together to create value. People who are at the midpoint of their careers and beyond have a psychological need to pass on their wisdom. They want to have an impact that will live on after they leave the company. When companies encourage the passing on of this knowledge, everyone benefits.



EASE INTER-GENERATIONAL DYNAMICS

Millennials increasingly find themselves managing Boomers and Xers, potentially a tricky situation. Millennial managers can be short and impatient when the older generations aren't producing the results that are expected at the speed that is wanted. To improve outcomes, Millennials might try to understand what it's like for Boomers and Xers. The older workers may have had a successful career but now things are constantly changing and they are not able to keep up as easily. This can create fear and insecurity which, in turn, leads to more mistakes. Millennials can increase the chances that the feedback they give is acted upon if they show a bit of deference and respect. When their attitude is "I want to help you become more effective," trust will be created and the feedback will more likely be heeded.



TIME FOR YOU TO REFLECT

Note down some concrete steps your organization might take to break down generational silos and encourage collaboration:

Cherrie mentions setting 'assignments' that are mindful of mentoring in order to encourage mutual-mentoring. What might these look like in practice: