

BRIDGING GENERATIONAL COMMUNICATION GAPS IN THE NONPROFIT WORLD

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About Me :

I'm Kate Viana, a NANOE-certified nonprofit consultant with a global communications background. Over 12 years in the nonprofit sector, I've evolved from a volunteer to a consultant, working in diverse locations like Ukraine, Turkey, and Peru. Armed with an MA in Integrated Global Communication and a BA in International Studies from Berry College, my passion lies in healing cultural toxicity within organizations.



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LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Examine the trends in each generation's communication style, preferences, and perceptions.
- Uncover the most common sources of friction in multigenerational communication - and how you can decisively address them.
- Learn how to leverage the unique communication strengths of each generation to advance the mission and bring in more donors and supporters.
- Understand how to be a more effective leader of multigenerational teams - regardless of title.

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What Does Your Generation (Often) Do Best?



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STRENGTHS - THE SILENT GENERATION

- Shaped by (and in many cases, having participated in) earth-shaking events like World War II, the Silent Generation very often highly values duty, tradition, and consistency.
- They can be an excellent source of perspective, especially when considering whether to jump onto the newest trend or expand the mission.
- Occasionally loyal to a fault, the Silent Generation is unlikely to jump ship or cut short their service without a truly egregious betrayal of trust.



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STRENGTHS - THE BABY BOOMER GENERATION:

- Thanks to their parents' emphasis on strong relationships, Baby Boomers are often pros at networking. They excel at one-on-one interactions, especially face to face, and are exponentially more comfortable than their younger counterparts with phone calls.
- As they rose through the ranks, Boomers developed a flair for collaboration and engaging their colleagues.
- With the rapid advancement of communications-related technology, Boomers are frequently big fans of continuing education and can be a valuable source of support when introducing new tools.

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STRENGTHS - GENERATION X:

- Not called “the latchkey generation” for nothing, Gen X’ers are known for their resourcefulness, self-sufficiency, and independence.
- Gen X saw their parents’ workaholism and rejected it, opting for a much healthier work-life balance; however, they are typically hard, conscientious workers for whom high standards are important.
- Likely the most adaptable and flexible generation, Gen X’ers are well accustomed to change and diversity. Their quiet tolerance is particularly helpful in organizations with significant intergenerational tension.



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STRENGTHS - MILLENNIALS:

- Outspoken when they believe necessary, Millennials are unlikely to “go with the flow” if they disagree with their organization’s direction. They’ll speak up - or leave.
- Millennials see tremendous value in workplace diversity and are proactive about considering other points of view.
- Many Millennials watched a parent submit to bullying bosses for the sake of keeping the peace (and a job). As a result, they are not afraid to challenge superiors and look for greener pastures.
- Millennials remember the analog world somewhat fondly, but they love living in a digital world and how technology has improved their lives.

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STRENGTHS - GENERATION Z:

- The most vocal and digitally empowered generation so far, Gen Z has seen in real time how consensus can create incredible momentum.
- Gen Z'ers tend to be entrepreneurial, collaborative, innovative, and open-minded. They also highly value emotional intelligence and empathy in the workplace.
- Gen Z's insistence on flexibility and control over their own lives has forced many workplaces to evolve - and they probably won't stop with just working from home.
- It's been said that "Gen Z will throw a grenade at the riot police but are too afraid to make a phone call." They are passionate social activists and will not tolerate injustice or discrimination.

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POLL: FROM WHICH OF THESE STRENGTHS DO YOU BELIEVE YOUR ORGANIZATION COULD BENEFIT MOST?

- A. Affinity for collaboration
- B. Better work-life balance
- C. Flexibility/adaptability
- D. Excellent interpersonal skills
- E. Loyalty to leadership and/or the mission

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The 2022 Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Global Market Report showed that companies who prioritized inclusivity were 35% more productive and reported 2.5 times higher cash flow per employee.

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SOURCES OF FRICTION: AGE-RELATED STEREOTYPES

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SOURCES OF FRICTION: MANAGEMENT STYLES


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SOURCES OF FRICTION: **FEAR & DISTRUST**

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SOURCES OF FRICTION: WORK-LIFE BALANCE EXPECTATIONS

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A modern office environment with people working at desks. In the foreground, a man on the left is writing on a notepad, and a woman on the right is looking at a tablet. In the background, another woman is standing and talking to a man who is sitting at a desk. The scene is overlaid with three large, semi-transparent circles in shades of green and teal.

SOURCES OF FRICTION: **LACK OF RESPECT**

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SOURCES OF FRICTION: COMMUNICATION STYLES

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POLL: Which of these has caused the most harm at your organization?

1. Generational Stereotypes
2. Clashing Management Styles
3. Fear & Distrust
4. Work-Life Balance Expectations
5. Lack of Respect
6. Disparate Communication Styles

Breakout #1

The Meeting

You've gathered here today to hear a presentation on an extremely important topic: why the mountains are a better vacation destination than the beach. (You can also choose a different, non-political topic if you like, such as Coke vs. Pepsi.)

As a group, identify someone for each role: a leader to moderate the presentation and discussion; the presenter; a skeptic; a supporter; and a neutral observer. Play your roles throughout the presentation and be ready to report on your experience.

Duration: 12 minutes

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Breakout #1

Recap

- Who played the different roles?
- Why did you choose your role?
- Did you find it natural or unnatural to play your role?
- What emotions did you experience as you listened to the presentation and others' reactions?

Duration: 12 minutes

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Leveraging Each Generation's Strengths

*How to Make Differences in Communication
Styles Work FOR Your Organization*

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Know Your Teammates



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Prioritize Authenticity



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Find Meaningful Space for Everyone



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Keep the Lines Open



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Keep Learning



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POLL: Which of these in your opinion is most important to being a nonprofit leader?

1. Knowing Your Team
2. Modeling Authenticity
3. Finding Ways for All to Contribute
4. Keeping Communication Lines Open
5. Continuing to Learn

Steering the Intergenerational Ship: What is a Leader's Role in Ensuring Smooth Sailing?

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WHAT YOU
ALLOW IS WHAT
WILL CONTINUE

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WHAT YOU PRIORITIZE
IS WHAT WILL TAKE
PRECEDENCE

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WHAT YOU VALUE
IS WHAT STAFF
WILL VALUE

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WHAT YOU SAY IS
WHAT THE
ORGANIZATION “SAYS”

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WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW (ABOUT YOUR TEAM) CAN HURT YOU

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Breakout #2

Employee Profiles

Create a basic “profile” of individuals in your group. Each group member should take about one minute to describe their work-related needs and preferences. Here are some items to help get you started:

- I work best with a supervisor who...
- One thing that I can't stand from a coworker is...
- It's important to me that my peers and superiors know that...
- I feel respected and valued at work when...
- My ideal work environment is...
- I prefer to communicate _____. (via text, on a phone call, in person, etc.)

Take notes on each group member and be ready to “introduce” them.

Duration: 10 minutes

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Breakout #2

Recap: Introduce one of your group members.

- Was it easy or hard for you to articulate your own needs and preferences?
- Did you feel like group members were listening when you were speaking?
- Did any group members surprise you with their own needs and preferences?
For example, did you expect someone who loves texting to prefer face-to-face?
- How well are your needs and preferences accommodated in your current role?
- As a leader, do you feel confident in how you accommodate others?

Duration: 10 minutes

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What Can You Do Right Now?

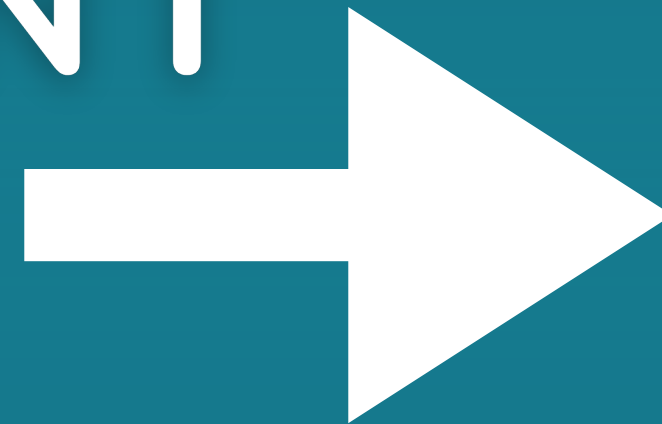
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A large, stylized white number '5' with thick green brushstroke outlines, positioned on the left side of the image.

STRATEGIES
YOU CAN
IMPLEMENT
TODAY



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Get to Know Your Staff/Team

- Do your employees' strengths match the organization's mission?
- Do the job descriptions match the organization's reality?
- Are there opportunities for knowledge building you're not capitalizing on?

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Tailor your communication style.

- Are you meeting your employees where they are, or forcing them to come to you?
- Are you providing the best possible environment for staff to perform at a high level?
- Are you listening enough?

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Let go of the idea that you are The Boss.™

- Are you leading? Or refereeing, dictating, or even *being* led?
- Are you consciously building consensus or assuming everyone is on board?
- Do you have the emotional intelligence to know when to step forward or back?

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Walk the walk.

- Are you actively building trust and credibility among all staff with your words and behavior?
- Are you holding others accountable for their part in shaping culture?
- Are you finding or creating opportunities for learning, inclusion, and equity?

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Recognize that we all want the same things at work.

- Are you modeling active listening and helping staff better listen to one another?
- Are you finding ways to showcase meaningful contributions - even if they're not "flashy?"
- Are you consciously demonstrating to your team that you recognize not just their talents and skills, but also their needs and preferences?

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POLL: Which of these steps do you think you or your supervisor will find most difficult?

Getting to know your staff; tailoring your communication style; letting go of the “I’m the boss” mentality; walking the walk; recognizing common ground

- A. None! I feel awesome about integrating all of these.
- B. Getting to know my staff. It feels weird to have these conversations.
- C. Tailoring my communication style. I don’t have time to be a different supervisor for everyone!
- D. Being less of “the boss.” I’m in charge, so I *am* the boss.
- E. Walking the walk. Lots of things sound good in theory, but it’s unrealistic to hold staff and leadership to the same standards.
- F. Recognizing common ground. This all sounds like I’m supposed to be hand-holding, and there’s no place for that at work.

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“People leave bosses, not jobs.”

- 96% of employees report that empathetic management would make them want to stay with the organization.
- 79% of employees have quit a job due to a lack of recognition.
- 49% of employees refrain from offering new ideas simply because they are not asked.
- Only 33% of employees feel engaged.
- 82% of employees see their managers as “uninspiring.”

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Your staff will not work optimally as a team until they are known and valued as individuals.
- Healthy culture depends heavily on leaders to lead - not just direct and manage.
- Opportunities to learn, grow, and support are literally everywhere.
- Open communication and active listening are critical for ensuring everyone feels heard. It's your job as a leader to model what you want to see from staff in their daily interactions.

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