

Member's Quarterly

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President's Message

Learning from Young People

Bridging the young-old divide



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The modern workplace can be a difficult landscape to navigate. With Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, Millennials and Gen Zers all together under one roof (or the digital equivalent), things are bound to get messy. Each group brings value and a unique set of experiences to the table, but there can be tension when it comes to bridging the young-old divide.

It is traditionally understood that those newer to their positions stand to learn something from those who have been around the block a few times. Although this certainly remains the case, there is an ever-increasing skill set that older workers can learn from new hires. I like to think of it as a two-way street. While we have a lot to offer, veteran business executives can also benefit from the knowledge of younger professionals.

The most obvious and arguably the most important is the younger employees' naturally advanced understanding of new technology. Even better, they're not afraid of it! The times we live in require a willingness to embrace change as it happens. Those work veterans stubbornly clinging to old operating systems or methods of collaboration will soon find themselves left behind if they haven't already been. When it comes to the new technology, younger workers either know how to use it or are comfortable learning it. In addition, like most people with a skill, they're typically happy to pass it on. We'd be foolish not to take advantage of this.

Young people also intuitively understand how to nurture a diverse workplace. Say what you will about 'woke culture', but the fact of the matter is that the world and workforce are evolving. It's time we sat up and listened to the many voices and opinions that have been ignored for too long. The broader perspectives held by young people can help open older workers' eyes to the times that are definitely changing.

Finally, young people are overwhelmingly willing to take risks and think outside of the box. They weren't given any clear-cut path to success in the same way that older generations were, which has caused them to be entrepreneurial and experimental in their thinking. As a result, they are eager to distinguish themselves from their peers and expand their skill set in new and exciting ways. Likewise, they might not have the same degree of respect for existing corporate hierarchies and processes. But then again, if you ask me—that might not be such a bad thing.

Brian Pascal is President of IPM [Institute of Professional Management].