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INSIDE OUT

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**HAT ARE THE
IMPACTS OF A
MULTI-GENERA-
TIONAL WORK-
FORCE?**

Martini: It has an indelible impact on all businesses, many of which can be positive. Multiple generations can have varying ideas about how to problem solve and to approach issues, as well as having distinct points of view.

It also brings a new, fresh energy into the environment that can help spark creativity. While working styles may not align if people learned the ropes in eras where tasks may have been done differently due to available resources and technology at the time, these differences can be leveraged into figuring out the optimal ways to get things done that incorporate both the old and the new. Having different generations in the workplace also presents a form of diversity which is critically important to the health of an organization.

Susler: Today's workplace, overall, consists of people from five distinct generations, which sometimes may yield some friction. Three of the greatest impacts of allowing generation gaps to persist are (1) a lack of fresh ideas; (2) a lack of innovation; and (3) irrelevancy. We all know the world is constantly changing and in today's connected world, it is changing faster than ever.

We need multi-generational workforces not only to keep pace but to excel. Generational gaps, whether from generations not communicating well with each other or because certain generations are missing in your workplace, can bring about these issues. Having multiple generations working is an important form of diversity that helps organizations succeed; allowing gaps to persist can tip the scale away from positive change and growth.

How do you best bridge and leverage generational differences in the workplace?

Martini: The only way to truly address and get past those issues and to leverage the positive aspects of the differences is to acknowledge when the tension exists and figure out where the heart of the discord lies. Usually, it signals the need for improved communication among workforce members, and to create an environment in which people are not speaking freely about their views and concerns, but they are also doing a lot of listening as well so that they can understand where others are coming from and their approach to things. It is essential leadership foster a collaborative environment with patience and transparency as a



BRIDGING THE GENERATION GAP

True value in having young and old working together

By **CHRISTINA L. MARTINI** and **DAVID G. SUSLER**

foundation, which will then foster breakthroughs.

Susler: There are many ways to bridge the gap. For example, ensure that your workplace employs people from multiple generations and work together in teams, not in isolation. If that is not possible, then work with people from generations different from your own workforce. Solicit ideas and contributions from those of other generations, not just your own. Teambuilding and training exercises, especially with a trained moderator, can help tremendously. Learn the different needs and work styles of different generations, and build ways to bridge them. HR can lead a workshop in personality types and then discuss what those different ways of communication mean.

Generation Y is known for desiring frequent feedback and valuing mentorship. Develop systems to provide feedback and mentoring for all of your employees, and at the same time educate older generations who may not have been exposed to such feedback and mentoring.

What are some lessons learned?

Martini: It is important to maintain a positive mental attitude when trying to bridge differences. There is much to learn and teach when there are different generations represented in the workplace, as well as opportunities to pay it forward that otherwise may not exist. Just remember

these issues have been around since time immemorial, but it may not seem that way because our frame of reference on these issues evolves as we get older. There can be adverse consequences in not having different generations represented, including the potential for it to negatively impact your ability to recruit and retain top talent.

Susler: Discard preconceived notions that your way is necessarily the right way, and listen to new ideas, be open to new approaches. Embrace change — "that's how we've always done it" is not a valid reason to refuse to try a new approach.

Mentoring is an important concept in today's business world. Understand that mentoring is not a one way, age-based hierarchical concept. Older people can mentor younger people, but younger people can also mentor older people. It benefits all generations to mentor "up and down." [CL](#)

Christina L. Martini is a practicing attorney, author and columnist. She is a partner with McDermott Will & Emery and focuses her practice on domestic and international trademark, copyright, domain name, internet, advertising and unfair competition law.

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To submit a question, e-mail questions.insideout@gmail.com