



Managing the Generational Differences in the Workplace

Today's workforce is changing. The recreation industry, like all others, is experiencing a new dynamic as four distinct generations — Radio Babies, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials — find themselves interacting on the job. Shaped by political events, the prevailing socioeconomic climate and advances in technology, each generation comes to the workplace with different values, attitudes, strengths and weaknesses — potentially creating a breeding ground for dysfunction, conflict and diminished productivity. As managers begin to more frequently oversee multigenerational staffs, the need to understand and embrace demographic differences has never been greater. Here are five strategies for creating a harmonious and productive work environment:

- 1 Hire the right staff and learn how to retain them.** Companies and organizations should update existing job descriptions to reflect the current market demographics, and revise hiring policies, salaries, work conditions and benefits to meet the expectations of each generation. For example, the youngest members of the workforce typically want to know such specifics as number of hours expected, working conditions and advancement possibilities. Older employees look for a company whose values match their own, so four-day workweeks, flexible hours and family benefits may suit them. Providing quality training and development is vital to retaining staff members, regardless of age.
- 2 Understand how your employees act, react and interact.** Familiarizing yourself with the lifestyle and workplace characteristics of each generation will help you better understand their actions and behaviours on the job. Equally important is getting to know your employees as individuals.
- 3 Look at conflict from each generation's point of view.** Differences or misunderstandings between generations — stemming from diverging work ethics, a demand for flexible work hours, the desire for more family time or requests to work remotely — can be a source of conflict in the workplace. Managers must acknowledge these differences and not make decisions based on their own "back in my day" experiences.
- 4 Use common bonds to resolve conflict and bridge the generation gap.** Align values throughout the company by embracing diversity. Providing constructive feedback works well for all generations, so avoid provocation and personal attacks. Turn conflict into collaboration by identifying the problem and encouraging those involved to resolve it together.
- 5 Communicate effectively.** Managers must use each generation's preferred means of communication (social media, text messages, e-mails, phone calls, face-to-face contact) to avoid confrontations and misunderstandings. Utilizing an accommodating approach will create dialogue between staff, and encourage rich conversation filled with differing viewpoints and perspectives. Above all, practice active listening.