

# ENGAGE ALL AGES AT WORK



Top tips for an engaged, productive age-diverse workforce

**Understand that different age groups have different drivers**

Research shows Gen X workers are driven by career development opportunities, such as on-the-job mentoring or short courses, and they value flexible work arrangements that allow for work-life balance. Gen Y workers want meaningful, challenging work that they can see drives change or has an impact on the world around them. Take the time to learn about what drives different team members and feed their passion.

**Check your management style**

One management style does not fit all. Baby Boomers tend to prefer clear goals and guidelines, constructive feedback and dedicated opportunities to discuss work and share their opinions. Gen Y don't like the feeling of being parented at work and rather than criticism over mistakes respond better to being told what to do to improve performance. Make sure management styles take account of these differences.

**Invest some time in building your team**

"Teambuilding" has developed a bad reputation – conjuring up visions of awkward trust exercises – but investing one day in letting the team be together outside the office can pay real dividends for team dynamics. Five star resorts aren't necessary – go to a park, pack a nice morning tea and lunch and talk about the team's goals for the next six months or brainstorm business changes that could deliver better results. Just get the team talking.

**Let everyone know where they fit**

Uncertainty is a confidence killer and it often breeds conflict in teams – especially teams with a mix of generations with different approaches to work. Make sure everyone understands their own role and the role of everyone else in their team. People should understand why each role is important to the success of the organisation.

**Put in place a team charter** Every generation tends to have very clear ideas about acceptable and unacceptable work behaviour – but these ideas don't always fit with the ideas of their colleagues in age-diverse workplaces. A lack of punctuality or using mobile devices in a meeting might indicate a lack of respect to an older worker without even registering as a problem with younger workers. Talk to the team and agree on a short list of standards (no more than three or four) based on respect.

**Don't wait for shouting** Respond quickly when there are signs of conflict. It can be tempting to ignore little undercurrents of office tension in the hope they will go away – but generally they just get bigger and if the disputes are between two different generations there can be some relatively simple fixes. Age-diverse conflict can often be resolved by clarifying team roles, agreeing on team standards, meeting face-to-face to discuss issues with a manager, involving an independent mediator or – worst case – moving a team member before the conflict impacts other colleagues.

**Talking 'bout my Generation...**

- Baby Boomers were born between 1946–1964, are diligent and they value job security and a stable working environment.
- Gen X workers are those typically born between 1965-1980 and are a technology savvy, self-reliant group.
- Gen Y workers also known as Millennials are those born post-1980 and have been raised in a fully technological age.