

Communication that Brings out the Best in All of Us:

The Local Government Multi-Generation Remix Edition

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Learning Goals

1. Gain understanding about generations and workplace styles, values and communication preferences of different generations.
2. Consider strategies for multi-generational workplace and communication “remixing.”
3. Reflect on some strategies you might implement in your own workplace.

A Multi-Generational Workforce

Generation	Born	Size	% WF	Commonly-Cited Characteristics
Traditionalists	1928-1945	47 m	~2%	Loyal, cautious, formal, proud
Baby Boomers	1946-1964	76 m	~25%	Self-focused, competitive, optimistic, “forever young” mentality
Generation X	1965-1980	55 m	~33%	Independent, cautious, skeptical, tech pioneers
Millennials (Gen Y)	1981-1996	62 m	~35%	Self-expressive, group oriented, purpose-driven, tech dependent
Generation Z	1997-2012	69 m	~5%	Cautious, diverse, technologically advanced

Why This is Important

- Local governments in CT (and beyond) are facing a challenge in recruiting the next generation of public servants.
- The younger generations increasingly want to have meaningful work that makes a difference:
 - 41% of Millennials said they found working in local government very appealing
 - 62% of Gen Zs said they have had a positive experience with local government

(Center for Generational Kinetics)

Reflecting on Generations

Have you said or thought any of the following in the past few weeks or months?

- Why is [generation] so resistant to change?
- What can't [generation] get up to speed more quickly on the latest tech?
- Why does [generation] change jobs so frequently?
- Why is [generation] seem so entitled, and self absorbed?
- When I was new to the job, I would never...

Reflecting on Generations

What if these typecasts could be turned on their head to focus instead on:

1. The strengths of individuals within each generation
2. Creating local govt workplaces that build on these strengths
3. How catered communication can increase connection

Instead of trying to “fix” those [generations], we try to understand and change systems to bring out the best in ALL staff

Discuss at Your Tables

Briefly introduce yourself, and then discuss:

- What generation do you identify with, if any?
- How would you characterize your workplace style and values?
- What are your communication (mode) preference(s)?

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Baby Boomers

Context:

- Social Change: resource scarcity to expansion of educational/economic/social programs
- Came of age with TV and mass marketing
- Largest generation = more camaraderie & competition

Workplace style/values:

- Inherited traditionalist structures with top-down hierarchy; worker/workplace “loyalty”
- Work-centric, independent, self-assertive, goal-oriented and career-focused, competitive, and self-actualized

Communication preferences:

- In-person face-to-face interactions and getting together to discuss something, and/or talking on the phone

Generation X

Context:

- Experienced downturn in economy, increase in divorce/single parenting - “latchkey kids”
- Came of age with TV, video games, & eventually access to personal computers
- Self-reliant & independent

Workplace style/values:

- Less emphasis on loyalty to one employer; less deference to authority
- Independence and self-sufficiency, healthy work-life balancing, flexibility and informality, and technological creativity

Communication preferences:

- Visual communication
- Asynchronous email chains until a face-to-face or phone meeting is necessary; **efficiency over form**



Millennials / Gen Y

Context:

- Grew up amidst economic disparities, school shootings, etc. = less trusting, desire authenticity
- Parenting emphasized personal attention and coaching; not command and control
- Came of age alongside rise of Internet & social media

Workplace styles/values:

- Loyalty to mission over organization; expect mentoring, supportive leaders
- Diversity and inclusion, flexibility and remote options, teamwork, professional growth, and professional development (emphasis on learning new skills.)

Communication preferences:

- Personalized, frequent, authentic communication
- Multifaceted - visual, auditory, and kinesthetic



Generation Z

Context:

- Experienced Great Recession, school shootings, opioid epidemic & COVID = more risk adverse
- Highly educated & raised with smart tech, social media, 24-hour streaming
- Diverse – ~50% identify as racially or ethnically non-white (compared to ~18% of Baby Boomers)

Workplace style/values:

- “Pre-Service”, less full-time work experience to compare/contrast
- Meaningful work, diverse and inclusive culture, balance, mental health prioritization, stability
- Open and honest communication, access to professional development, autonomy and flexibility (emphasis on remote work options)

Communication preferences:

- Digital Natives
- Blend of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic info – want the “why”
- More frequent and less structured communications, recognition; quick responses, instant feedback



Snapshot: Gen Z Values at Work



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**Expectation of
Regular Change**

Pragmatism

**Making A
Difference**

Collaboration

**Guided by
Consensus**

**Mental Health
& Balance**

**Shifting Views of
Loyalty**

**Searching for
Authenticity**

(Stanford University / Stanford Report)

How might this influence communication within your organization?

Snapshot: Gen Z Values at Work

Gen Z's perspective on the workforce

97% of Gen Zers want to show their personality in work communication

75% of Gen Zers check out employers' societal impact before applying for a job

70% of Gen Zs expect to be promoted within their first 18 months of employment

60% of Gen Zers would like managers to care about their well-being

Leaders' perspective on Gen Z

75% of managers do not understand what Gen Z needs in the workplace

70% of managers think Gen Z lacks work ethic and communication skills

45% of hiring managers say Gen Z is the most challenging generation to work with

40% of leaders think Gen Z graduates are not prepared for the workforce

How might you see these contrasts play out in your office?

What other cross-generation contrasts are likely to exist?

What to Pursue Vs. AVOID

Pursue:

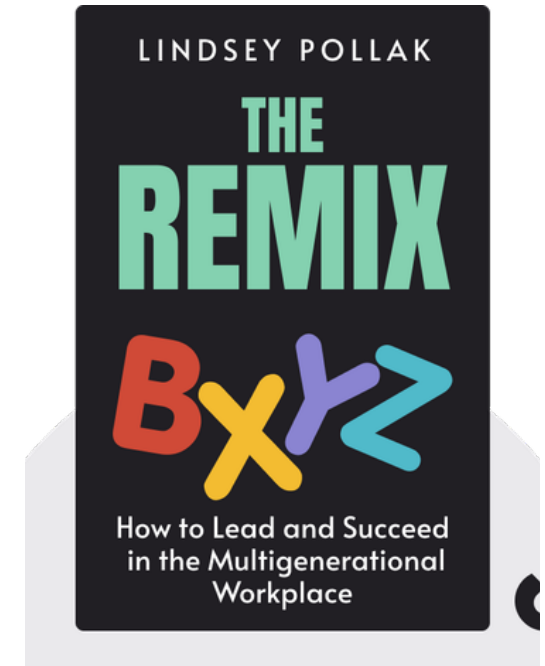
- Authenticity & Empathy
- Flexibility on non-core functions
- Customizing communication
- Modeling Behaviors

Avoid:

- “Cheat Sheets”
- Overly rigid status quo and “how we’ve always done things”
- Reinforcing bias

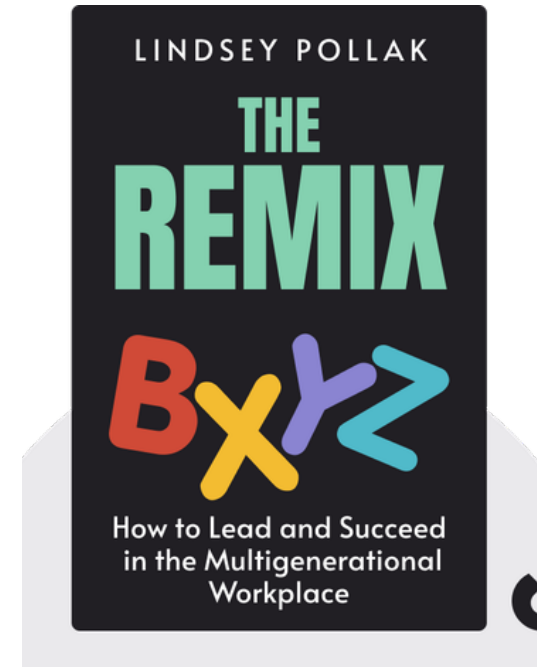
Strategies for a Multi-Generational Workplace Communication Remix

1. Stop generational shaming (including self-shaming)
2. Create opportunities to build empathy across generations
 - Talk about it at work to signal its value
 - Develop listening skills
 - Spend time connecting on a personal level
3. Remember common sense is not so common
 - Avoid making assumptions
 - Clarify expectations and preferences
 - Clarify what is core or required; be flexible with what isn't, and give options



Strategies for a Multi-Generational Communication Remix

4. Assume the best intentions & ask why
5. Communicate early & often
 - COPE = Create Once, Publish Everywhere
 - Customize to the individual and group – ASK
 - ***Anecdote: Cold Calls as a 22 y/o Millennial***
 - Be more transparent - explain the why of decisions
 - Provide regular feedback & acknowledge/praise
6. Connect to purpose



Questions to Consider at Your Table

1. What are ways you could create more empathy among & across generations at your workplace?
2. What are some non-core things you might change to support cross-generation work styles and communication preferences?
3. How can you do more to connect folks to the “**why**” of what you do in local government?

Resources

UConn

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- **Creating Full Community Connections: How Local Governments Can Best Reach, Serve, and Engage Different Generations, From Gen Z to Boomers**, Tyler Technologies, <https://www.tylertech.com/resources/resource-downloads/How-Local-Governments-Can-Reach-Each-Generation>
- **Effective Communication for Local Government**, ICMA podcast, <https://icma.org/podcast/2024/effective-communication-local-government>
- **Managing Multi-Generational Communication in the Workplace**, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/flagships/all-things-work/managing-multi-generational-communication-workplace>
- **The Changing Generational Values**, Johns Hopkins University: <https://imagine.jhu.edu/blog/2022/11/17/the-changing-generational-values/>
- ***The Remix: How to Lead and Succeed in the Multigenerational Workplace***, Lindsey Pollak (2019).
- **Gen Z Workforce Stats**: <https://cake.com/empowered-team/gen-z-workforce-statistics/>