

A group of business professionals in an office setting. A man in a suit and tie is on the left, gesturing with his hands. A woman in a grey blazer is in the center, holding a smartphone. Another person is on the right, partially visible. They are gathered around a table with a tablet, a smartphone, and coffee cups. The text "Let's Talk About It: Building Better Workplaces Through Intergenerational Dialogue" is overlaid in the center.

**Let's Talk About It:
Building Better Workplaces Through
Intergenerational Dialogue**

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- 20 Years of Nonprofit Experience
- 10 Years Nonprofit Civil Legal Law Firm
- Human Services & Higher education
- Expertise spans program expansion, grant administration, executive leadership, and fund development
- Believe in the Value of Diverse Workplaces



M. Suzanne Hartness

- Business Consultant and Executive Recruiter
- 25 years in the professional services and document management industries
- Chief Operating Officer in the legal industry for 6 years
- Expertise spans Operations, Management, Business Development, Strategic Planning, and Critical Problem-Solving Initiatives
- Believes in team-based environment for employees





Identify	Identify common generational communication gaps
Discuss	Discuss their impact on workplace culture
Shift	Shift from generational stereotypes to a strengths-based understanding
Build	Build a more inclusive, collaborative, and high-functioning workplace

The one that's always
tired



malinxxxix_reddxxxix



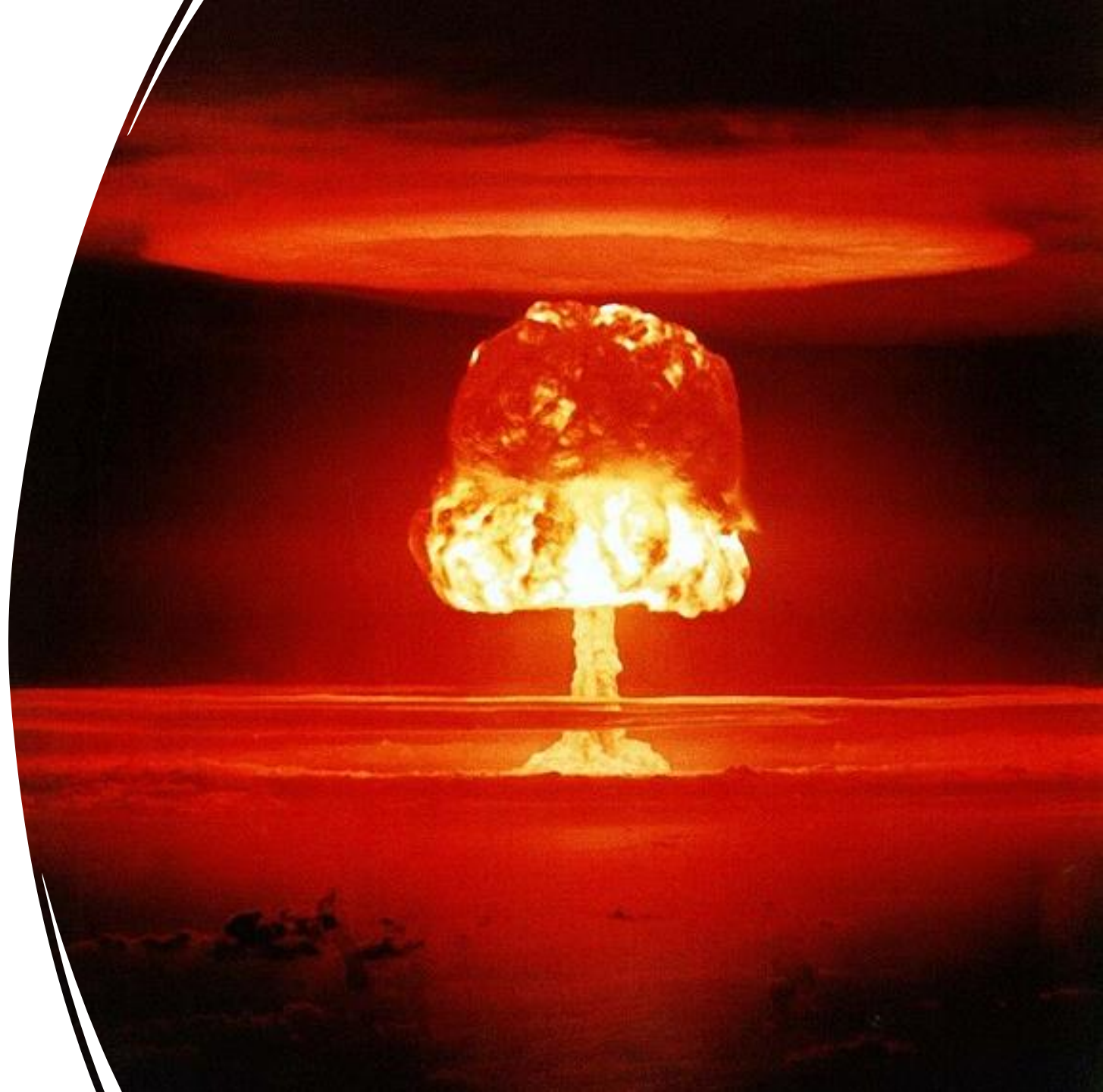
📺 GEN X 📺
GOING TO WORK

A photograph of a group of people in a meeting or workshop, with their hands raised in the air. The image is slightly blurred and has a dark, muted color palette. The text "Why does this topic matter?" is overlaid in the center in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

Why does this topic matter?

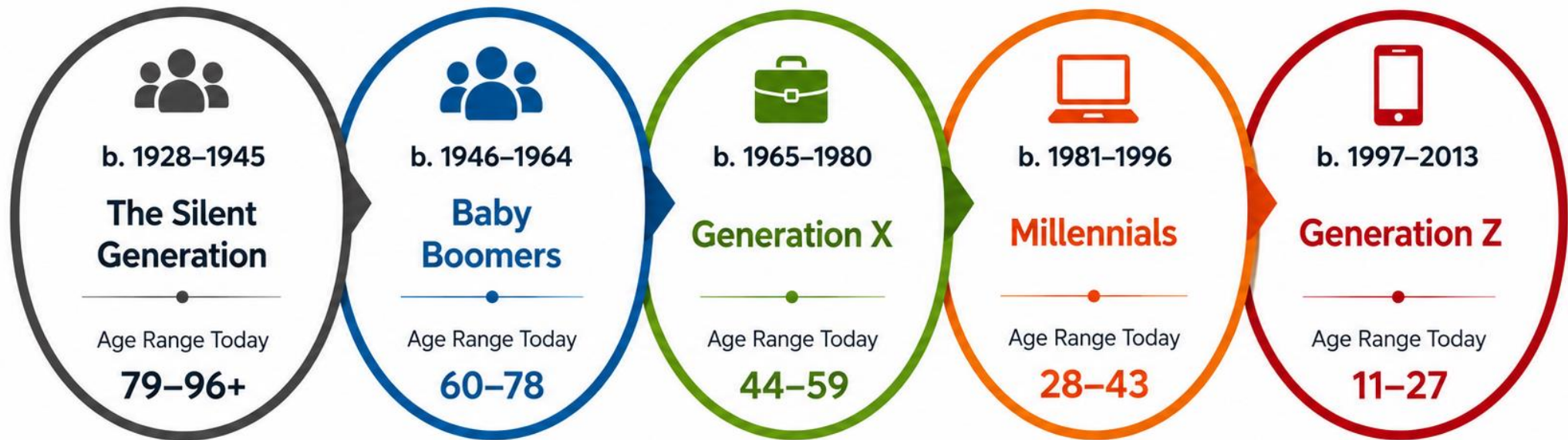
The Workplace

- Generations
- Personalities
- Frames of References
- Values
- Cultures
- Expectations
- Various Commitment levels



Recognizing the Multigenerational Workforce

The Multigenerational Workforce



**Age ranges reflect approximate ages as of 2025.*

Factors Shaping the Generations

Historic Events

**Technology
Advancements**

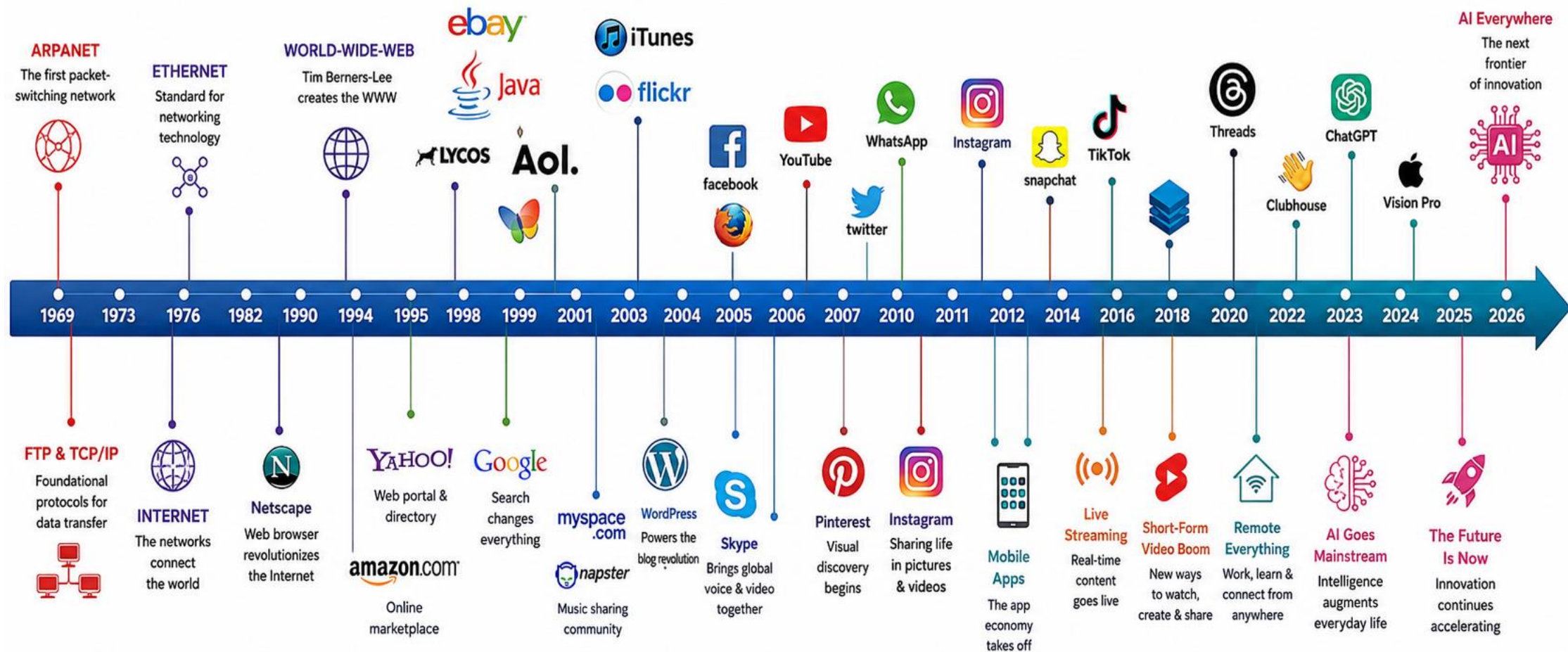
Social/Cultural

Communications

THE ADVENT OF INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA

KEY TECHNOLOGIES, PLATFORMS & MILESTONES THAT CONNECT THE WORLD

● EARLY NETWORKS ● WEB & INFRASTRUCTURE ● SEARCH & PORTALS ● SOCIAL MEDIA ● MEDIA & CONTENT ● MOBILE & APPS ● AI & EMERGING TECH



Communication Preferences Across Generations

Different experiences. Shared goals. Better conversations.

	 Baby Boomers 1946–1964	 Generation X 1965–1980	 Millennials 1981–1996	 Generation Z 1997–2012
 Preferred Communication	 Face-to-face	 Email	 Instant messaging	 Text/chat/video
 Communication Approach	 Phone calls	 Independent communication	 Collaborative communication	 Short, visual communication
 Communication Style	 Formal communication	 Efficient communication	 Frequent feedback	 Immediate feedback



Remember: These are general tendencies, not rules. Communicate with curiosity, respect, and flexibility—focus on the individual, not the generation.



Challenges Faced and Their Impact on Teams



Communication Barriers

Different styles and assumptions cause misunderstandings and break trust.



Work Styles & Expectations

Different approaches and priorities can lead to confusion and friction.



Unconscious Bias

Hidden biases create unequal opportunities and erode team performance.



Stereotypes

Overgeneralizations lead to unfair assumptions and limit potential.



Technological Proficiency

Different comfort levels with technology impact speed and adaptability.

Understanding Workplace Dynamics

A thick, hand-drawn style orange line that underlines the word "Dynamics". It starts under the first letter and extends to the right, ending under the last letter.

Workplace Dynamics Survey

- **Ernst & Young LLP Surveyed 5,000 full-time workers in white – collar jobs to understand workplace dynamics across generations.**
- **The survey aimed to understand the leadership landscape and how leaders could better respond staff needs.**
- **Although different approaches to work all generations agree on a few things.**
- **All generation have different needs and expectations.**



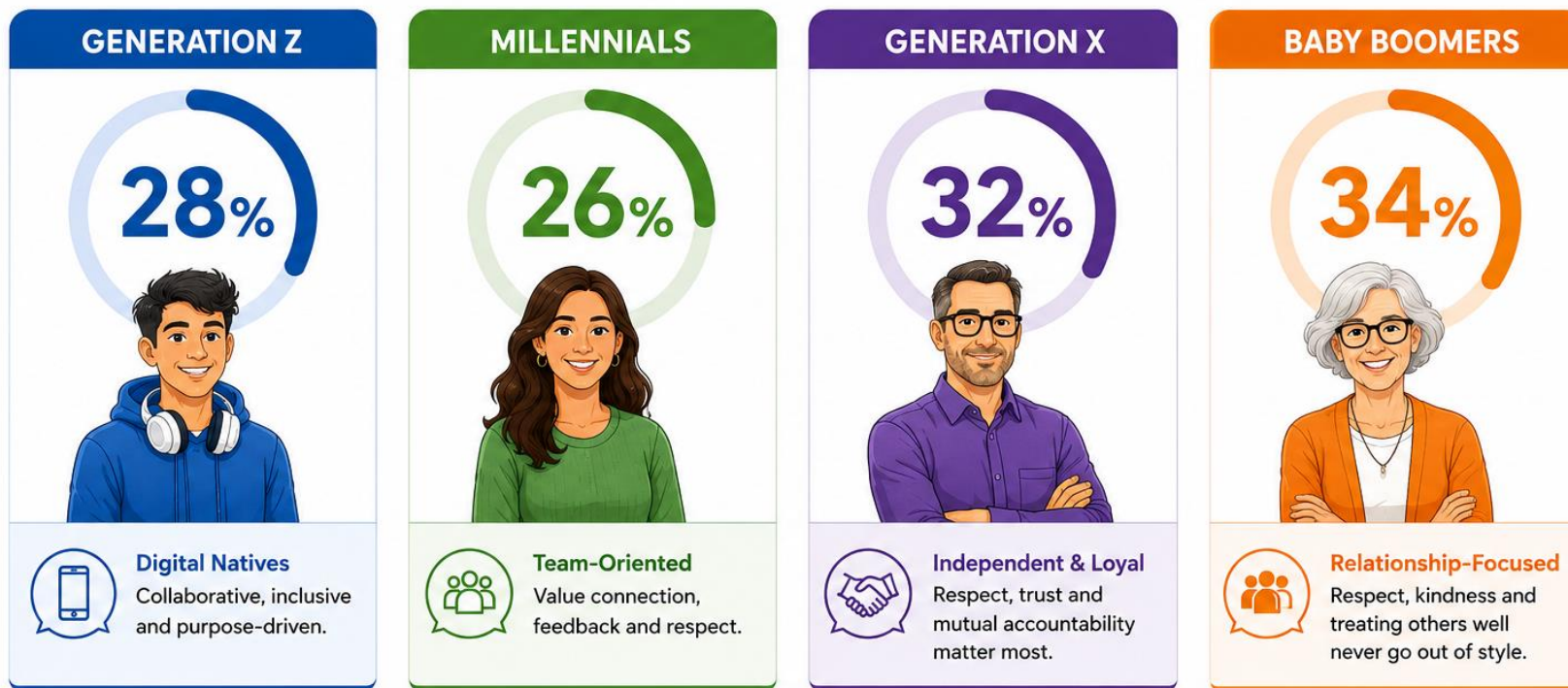
#1 Workplace Culture

- **The single most unifying factor for employee across generations, is culture.**
- **94% say workplace culture impacts their decision to stay with a company.**
- **Six in 10 report the culture influences their decision to stay “A great deal” or “A lot”.**



What Matters Most in the Workplace: How People Treat Each Other.

Percentage of respondents who selected this as a top workplace priority



Across every generation, respect and kindness
are the foundation of a thriving workplace.



Other Dynamics

#2 - Misaligned values are a deal breaker for Gen Z and Millennials

#3 - Gen Z, growth is the new currency

#4 - When it comes to flexibility, one size does not fit all



HOW EACH GENERATION DEFINES WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY

Different perspectives. One goal: balance that works.

GENERATION Z



**GETTING TO TAKE
PERSONAL DAYS OR
TIME OFF**
without having
negative
consequences.

MILLENNIALS



**FLEXIBLE
WORKING HOURS.**

GENERATION X



**BEING ABLE TO
SCHEDULE TIME
FOR PERSONAL
OR FAMILY
MATTERS.**

BABY BOOMERS



**AUTONOMY IN
HOW THEY
ORGANIZE AND
PRIORITIZE WORK.**



Understanding what flexibility means to each generation helps leaders build
stronger teams, foster trust, and create a more inclusive workplace.





Updated with New Approaches for Today's Communication Challenges
OVER 5 MILLION COPIES SOLD

crucial conversations

— THIRD EDITION —



**TOOLS FOR TALKING WHEN
STAKES ARE HIGH**

JOSEPH GRENNY • KERRY PATTERSON • RON McMILLAN
AL SWITZLER • EMILY GREGORY

Generational tension can become productive dialogue

A conversation becomes crucial when opinions differ, stakes are high, and emotions are strong.

01

Opinions differ

02

Stakes are high

03

Emotions are strong

COMMON WORKPLACE FRICTION

EMAIL

“Why won’t they answer emails?”

TEXT

“Why do they only text?”

TIME

“They’re always late.”

PLACE

“Why can’t we work from home?”

VOICE

“They don’t seem engaged.”

THE GOAL

Don’t win the conversation. Improve the relationship.

Replace assumptions with curiosity

Five skills help people discuss what happened without turning generational differences into judgments.



Share Facts

Begin with what you observed.

"The report arrived after the deadline."



Tell Your Story

Explain your interpretation.

"I'm concerned because the project was delayed."



Ask for Their Path

Get curious about their view.

"Can you help me understand what happened?"



Talk Tentatively

Leave room for another view.

"Could there be a perspective I'm missing?"



Encourage Testing

Invite honest disagreement.

"How do you see it?"

KEY TAKEAWAY

Curiosity reduces conflict. Judgment increases it.

Change the question—and change the conversation

Move from labeling a generation to learning what the person needs to succeed.

✗ Instead of this...

- “They’re lazy.”
- “They’re stuck in their ways.”
- “They don’t respect authority.”
- “They’re too sensitive.”
- “They don’t communicate.”

✓ Try this...

- + “What does success look like to you?”
- + “How do you prefer feedback?”
- + “What communication works best?”
- + “What barriers are you experiencing?”
- + “How can we work together?”

BEFORE A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION, ASK:

HEART

What do I really want?

LISTEN

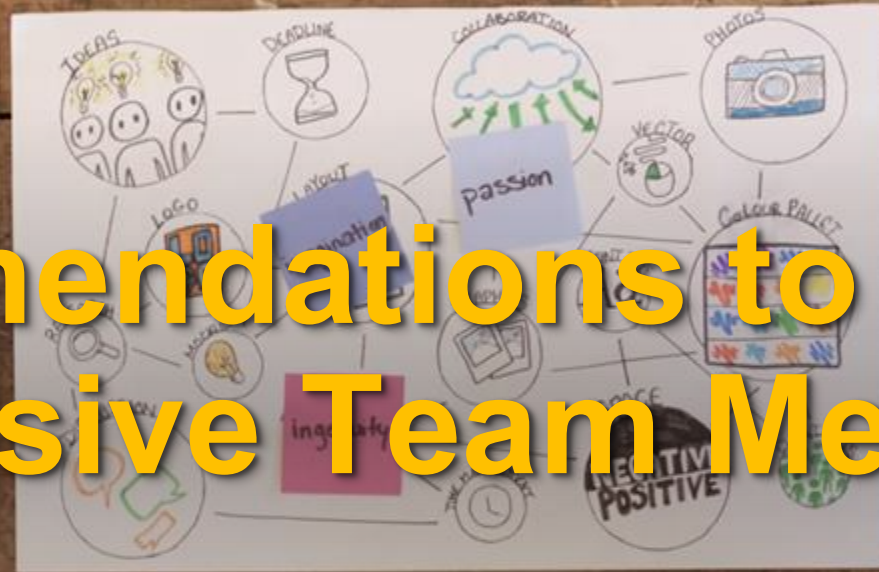
What might they be experiencing?

RESPECT

How can we both leave feeling respected?

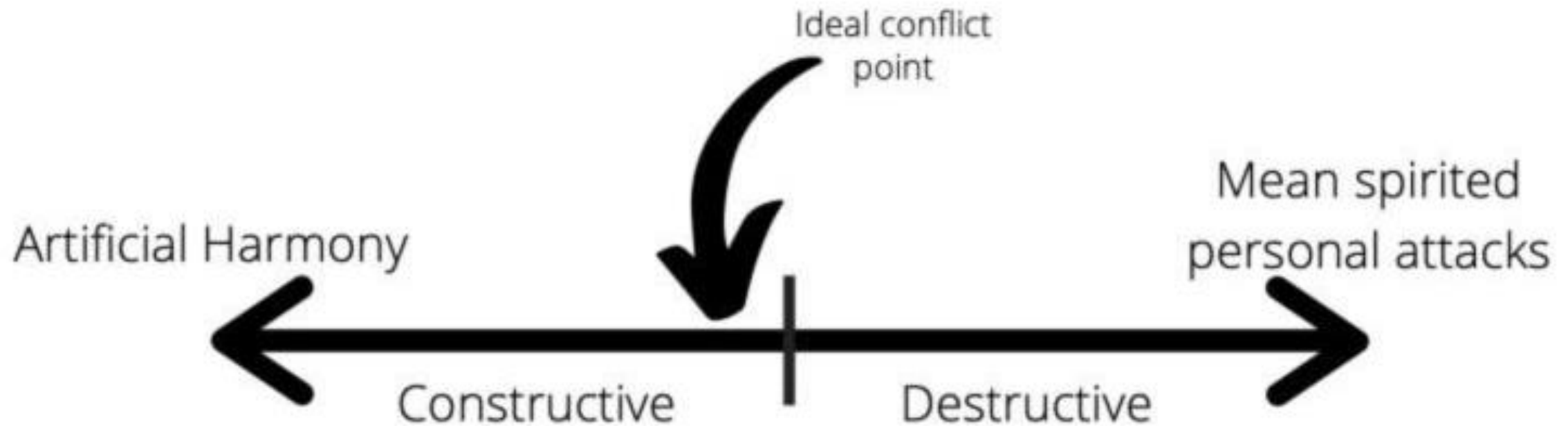
“People don’t become difficult because they’re different. They become difficult when they don’t feel heard.”

Recommendations to Facilitate Cohesive Team Meetings



CONFLICT

CONTINUUM



Patrick Lencioni – The Advantage

Inclusive Facilitation



Direct invites/Bringing In: Call on quiet people gently by name, asking for their specific thoughts.



Open space: Pause for five seconds after a question to let people think and speak up.



Value balance: Stop dominant speakers politely by thanking them and asking for another view.



Active Listening

Reflective feedback: Restate what a speaker said in your own words to prove you heard them.

Body language: Nod, smile, and keep your eyes on the person who is talking.

No judging: Accept all ideas first before you judge or grade them.



Structure and Time Control



CLEAR GOALS: SET A STRICT AGENDA WITH TIME LIMITS FOR EACH TOPIC BEFORE YOU START.



PARKING LOT: PUT OFF-TOPIC IDEAS ON A SIDEBORD TO REVIEW LATER IF TIME ALLOWS.



NEXT STEPS: END THE MEETING BY NAMING WHO WILL DO WHAT TASK AND BY WHEN.



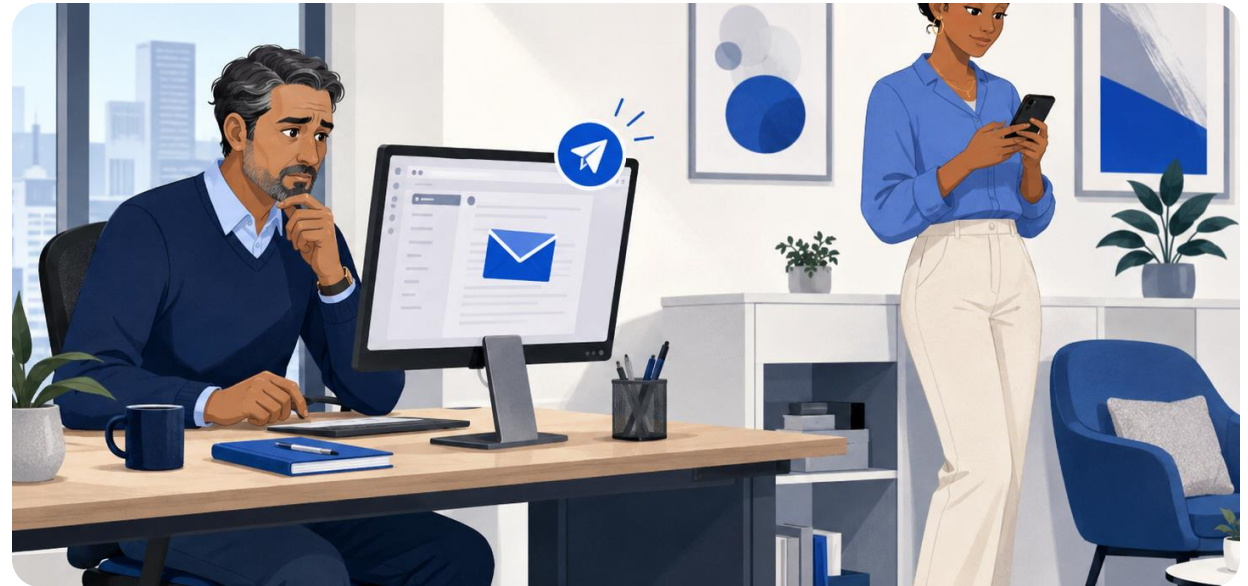
“Why didn’t you respond to my email?”

THE SITUATION

The manager sends an important email and receives no response for two days. The employee expected a direct message if the matter was urgent.

CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS LENS

Separate the facts from the story you are telling yourself.



SAMPLE STATE OPENING

“I sent the project update on Monday and didn’t receive a response. I assumed the message wasn’t being prioritized. Can you help me understand what happened and how you prefer urgent requests to be communicated?”

DEBRIEF • What changes when we replace a generational label with a curious question?

“They never speak up in meetings.”

THE SITUATION

A thoughtful employee rarely speaks during team meetings but shares strong ideas afterward. Their manager interprets the silence as disengagement.

CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS LENS

Separate the facts from the story you are telling yourself.



SAMPLE STATE OPENING

“I noticed you shared ideas after our last two meetings rather than during them. I may be misreading your silence as disengagement. What would make it easier for you to contribute in the moment?”

DEBRIEF • What changes when we replace a generational label with a curious question?

I never know how I'm doing.

THE SITUATION

An employee wants frequent feedback. Their supervisor believes people should work independently—and that no feedback means everything is fine.

CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS LENS

Separate the facts from the story you are telling yourself.



SAMPLE STATE OPENING

“We’ve had one feedback conversation in the last three months. I’m finding it difficult to know whether I’m meeting your expectations. Could we discuss a feedback schedule that works for both of us?”

DEBRIEF • What changes when we replace a generational label with a curious question?

“They refuse to learn the new system.”

THE SITUATION

A new case management module is introduced. One employee continues using the old process, while a colleague labels the employee as resistant to change.

CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS LENS

Separate the facts from the story you are telling yourself.



SAMPLE STATE OPENING

“I noticed the last two reports used the previous system. I’m concerned this could create duplicate work. What has your experience with the new platform been, and what support would be helpful?”

DEBRIEF • What changes when we replace a generational label with a curious question?

Remote work means you aren't committed.

THE SITUATION

A supervisor becomes frustrated by frequent remote-work requests. The employee believes flexibility supports productivity and family responsibilities.

CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS LENS

Separate the facts from the story you are telling yourself.



SAMPLE STATE OPENING

"I've noticed you requested remote work three times this month. I'm concerned about team coverage, but I may not understand the full situation. Can we discuss what you need and how we can maintain coverage?"

DEBRIEF • What changes when we replace a generational label with a curious question?

“They embarrassed me in front of everyone.”

THE SITUATION

During a meeting, an employee openly questions a senior colleague’s recommendation. One feels disrespected; the other believes they contributed to an honest discussion.

CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS LENS

Separate the facts from the story you are telling yourself.



SAMPLE STATE OPENING

“When my recommendation was challenged during the meeting, I felt my experience was being dismissed. I recognize that may not have been your intention. How did you see the conversation?”

DEBRIEF • What changes when we replace a generational label with a curious question?

“They’re always late.”

THE SITUATION

A colleague regularly arrives several minutes after team meetings begin. Some coworkers see it as disrespectful; the colleague believes arriving a few minutes late is not disruptive.

CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS LENS

Separate the facts from the story you are telling yourself.



SAMPLE STATE OPENING

“The last three team meetings began before you arrived. I’m concerned we are repeating information and losing time. Can you help me understand what is affecting your arrival time and agree on how we should handle delays?”

DEBRIEF • What changes when we replace a generational label with a curious question?

Recommendations to Improve Workplace Communications

- Cultivate a culture of mutual respect as a firm-wide endeavor.
- Determine communication norms.
- Identify what are demands, preferences, and expectations.
- Find opportunities for bi-directional mentoring.
- Pair up “modern elders” with “young geniuses” to invest in each other.
- Unite around a common purpose.



***What role can YOU play
to improve your
workplace communications?***

QUESTIONS





Thank you!

Reflect:

Have you observed or experienced generational miscommunication? How was it handled? How could it be handled more effectively in the future?

Who is most responsible for ensuring that a communication is clearly received: the sender, the receiver, or both?

In trying to reach multiple generations, should you use multiple channels? If so, how do you functionally manage multiple media?

How do you know when you need to adapt to a communication channel that you aren't familiar or comfortable with? How do you know when you need to challenge the expectations or mindset of "This is how we've always done it"?

What's one strategy you can use to ensure that your message is heard and understood by all generations?

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