

Leadership Qualities in Managing a Diverse Workforce



We believe that everyone, including us, wants to be an effective team leader or manager. In order to do so, you may want to take note of these key points:

1. Clarity
2. Connection
3. Commitment

- **Clarity** _____

We need to be aware of our biasness and understand the teams we lead and manage. From famous poet Emerson to philosopher Socrates, the notion of *gnōthi seauton* (Know Thyself) has been a foundation for all skills. In order to manage talented individuals from different generations, we need to first understand ourselves. Below is a scale to help you understand yourself and plot where you are in terms of managing multigenerational differences.

Aware ► Acknowledge ► Tolerate
► Accept ► Embrace ► Optimise

As a business leader, are you simply **aware** of multigenerational differences yet not do anything about them? Do you **acknowledge** that there is a difference in your multigenerational team but stop short of planning ahead? Do you **tolerate** these generational differences within acceptable perimeters? Are you able to **accept, embrace** or even **optimise** your multigenerational team?

By pinpointing yourself accurately on the above scale, you will have greater clarity of your level of competency in managing a multigenerational team. Self-awareness and “knowing thyself” will make it easier for us to work towards optimising our multigenerational team. This little exercise can be repeated for your team members as well. Where are they on the scale?

You can now start an authentic conversation with them to work towards understanding each other effectively. The conversations will lead us to our next soft skill – connection through communication.

- **Connection**

Communication is an overused and under practised word. Everyone knows good communication leads to success. But every generation has different definition of what good communication is. When managing multigenerational work team, the key is to move beyond superficial communication to genial connection. The former Singapore Minister for Foreign Affairs, George Yeo, once related what a Roman Catholic cardinal told him about the late Pope John Paul II. The cardinal drafted a speech that stated, “Even though we’re all different because we speak different languages, we are one,” The Pope then corrected him, “No, it is not even though we’re different, we are one. It is because we are different, we are one.”

What we are saying is that no two persons are the same, though there can be identical traits. Diversity is inherent in any societies, and that goes to the different generations as well. Diversity unites us.

The take-home phrase is: to be human is to be different. We have to realise that, at the end of the day, what really matters are the differences and not the similarities.

The whole rationale and driving force of biological life is diversification. Organisations thrive because of different ideas and cultures. A management-imposed unity is a false unity (Chen, 2011). Differences and disagreements can often be productive when steered in the right direction. As the saying goes, “Many paths but one direction.”

Good management does not instil culture nor value that calls for all employees to act the same way. We need to connect with each other through meaningful conversations and quality interactions. We have to recognise that multiple generations exist in today’s market and workplace. It is a common phenomenon.

A brilliant and effective way to ease communication issues is to develop a communicative culture in your team. What do we mean by *communicative culture*? That means, you have to train your team to be more vocal than it already is. We are not talking about those rattling-on-and-on kind of communication. We are referring to a team that is committed to contribute to the company by voicing out ideas and concerns. It is only through such communication that we, as leaders, can weed out problems and prevent them from recurring.