

**Notes** for IAM Conference, San Diego  
YP-Membership Meeting  
September 30, 3:15 p.m.

## **10 Ways to Change Boomers Minds About You**

The Boomer/GenX/GenY disparity at work is really a communication issue, not a character issue. You want to honor your own values, as well as the values of the other people at work, but you would do that in any case, with any group of people.

The biggest mistake you can make is to turn a multi-generational issue into a “them v. us” issue. No one wins. Everyone loses.

You have more to lose. Once you lose your ideals, goals, dreams you become a bitter, angry person and won't find a lot of jobs open to you.

**Baby Boomers' job experiences were very different.** The boss was the boss, and if you worked hard and did what you were told, you could rise through the ranks and become the boss yourself.

**There is proof that we repeat what we know**—children of alcoholics become alcoholics themselves. Abused children grow up to become abusers. It sounds counterintuitive, but statistics show it's true. We all want the same things: power, love, rewards, acceptance. How we get it depends on what we learned in childhood—not from what our parents said, but how they behaved.

However, generational values change, so your supervisor may show appreciation, explains a task or explains the deadline the way he would prefer, because he doesn't know how you would prefer—how you work best.

In order for you to do well, you have to be able to communicate your needs to your boss. Not fix him. Not change him. But communicate with him.

Communication can be tricky, and you may well have to manage your boss. This is not a power struggle. In fact, a power struggle will do more damage than good.

We work best with people who are like us—so your first job is to find similarities between your boss and you. It might be easier to start with topics that most people experience:

- Sports

- Food
- Music
- Free time
- Pets
- Where to vacation

You don't have to agree, you just have to open the door to talking about things you agree on and not taking your dislikes personally.

It's also good to remember that procedures—how to do things at work—aren't limited. There are many ways to complete a task, and more than one RIGHT way, but the only way to keep your boss and you happy is to discuss it. So work on the easy talking skills, so you can tackle the hard discussions with success.

**Let's take a look at 10 ways to manage your boss to a successful outcome for both of you:**

1. **Ask more than tell.** Find out what the boss thinks. Find out how he wants you to do the job before you do it your way. You'll be able to switch more easily if you can prove that you can do it the old way first. At the very least, listen and ask questions before you make suggestion.
2. **Don't assume your boss hates you** because you're young or they are old, get specifics about why they hate you. Work with specifics. You can't fight a vague idea.
3. **Ask questions about each assignment.**
  - a. When is it due?
  - b. What's the big picture?
  - c. Where does what I'm doing fit into the big picture?
  - d. Who does what?
  - e. Is it teamwork or is it individual work?
  - f. How often do you want me to report back?
  - g. What would success on this job look like?
4. **Ask about deadlines and priorities more than once.** The boss may not have thought it all through yet, and you can help with that. Work with steps, not the whole project all at once.
5. **If you make a mistake, admit it,** and have a solution prepared.

Admitting mistakes is hard; throwing your teammates under the bus creates life-long resentments. Take responsibility for your own screw-ups, figure out how to fix it or lessen the impact.

Then figure out how to create an early warning system to alert you before it happens again.

When you have all that figured out, and it shouldn't take long, go to your boss with the problem and the solution. It's hard to hate someone who's handing you a solution.

If you present your boss with a problem and ask for a solution, you'll be **stuck with your boss's solution**. And then you can't complain about it.

6. **Master the elevator speech.** An elevator speech is a 10-15 second sound bite that gives good information. It can **answer a question** like "How are you doing on the Patel project?"

It can **fill an awkward gap** by asking a question of the other person—a question that asks for information, opinion, or strategy. "What do you think about the Patel project?"

An elevator speech fits into the STAR pattern:

Specific  
Task  
Action  
Result

For example, "How is the Patel project" can be answered like this:

S---We've given them the estimate and answered questions

T---Now we are working on the packing/moving plan

A—If we get Ivan, Charles and Juan to start on October 4

R—we should make the deadline under budget.

7. **Show them the advantages of technology**

Baby Boomers did not grow up with computers, cell phones, text messaging, Second Life, Halo or Call of Duty.

They often pretend that what they don't know isn't important, but this is a tactic based on fear. Helping them learn gives them an advantage over their group and makes you valuable.

But you have to be tactful:

Say "I think I know a short cut, would you be interested in hearing about it" NOT "You're still using PAPER?"

Say, "I'd be happy to save you some time by demonstrating that software" NOT "You STILL aren't using that software?"

Say, "Yeah, I had some problems with that, too,"

NOT

"Loser."

8. **Never laugh at what your boss doesn't know.** Never diminish anyone. No one is as tough as they like to pretend. Laughing at someone's ignorance is always a bad move.

9. **Make eye contact throughout a conversation.** Baby Boomers were brought up to look people in the eye and study body language. It helps them gauge emotional response and set their own emotions to match. If you don't make eye contact, it is considered disrespectful. Don't set yourself up for a label. Think of it as being kind and doing what someone else needs to understand you.

On the other hand, don't stare.

**Boomers expect you to take notes.** Look at them, then at your notes. Not because they can't remember anything anymore, but because they know that writing something down makes you ask better questions. There are many ways to take notes, do what you find most comfortable—laptop, writing, iPhone apps.

When you are done, review what was said—deadlines, deliverables, priorities. A lot changes during a conversation, reviewing it at the end keeps you from wasting time.

10. **Don't text in meetings or on one-on-one conversations.** Multi-tasking is over. Task switching leads to mistake. So don't text during a one-on one meeting, don't play games during meetings. You think you can, but universally, if you text message during a conversation, you ask for information that's been repeated more than once, you don't get the objective right, and you can't summarize what happened. It makes you look dumb to your boss.

**Questions:**

What's can I do tomorrow to improve my relationship with my boss?

Ask your boss, "What can I do to improve my productivity?"

**What do you see as the biggest problem working with Boomers?**

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