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Contact Center Executive Forum Recap: Lessons Learned on the Multigenerational Workforce

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Managing a multigenerational workplace can be difficult due to the difference in perspectives found among a more diverse staff. Last week, **Hire Dynamics** hosted the **2014 Contact Center Executive Forum (CCEF)** for contact center managers to provide valuable industry insight on this generational gap. In order to lead thoughtfully and successfully, it's important that managers both understand and respect the generational differences and viewpoints of those they lead.

Tim Elmore of Growing Leaders (<http://www.growingleaders.com>) is an expert on how to bridge this gap and offered not only an informative, but also entertaining view on how to work with employees of different generations – especially Generation Y. He has written more than 25 books, spoken to over 350,000 students in 40 countries, and has been featured for his expertise in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post* and *Investor's Business Daily* among others. Below is a summary of his insight, as well as takeaway tips for navigating this "generational battlefield."

For the first time, there are six different generations in existence. Of those six, five are currently in the workplace. These five are the **Seniors** (1900-1928), **Builders** (1929-1945), **Boomers** (1946-1964), **Generation X – Busters** (1965-1983) and **Generation Y – Millennials** (1984-2002). Elmore's main takeaway was that we should be building a bridge, not a wall between generations.

The first step in understanding each generation is taken with the following key facts in mind:

1. Time becomes more valuable.
2. Expectations of convenience and service rise.
3. The demand for work to have meaning intensifies.
4. The hunger for options grows.
5. The sense of entitlement increases.
6. The need for speed and space goes up.

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7. The desire for customization expands.

Each generation is unique in the way they connect, learn and work. So what is the best way to work with people brought up in a completely different time than yourself?

For Boomers:

1. Recognize and understand them.
2. Ask them about their past roles.
3. Allow them to take charge.
4. Give them space and resources.
5. Call on them to give back and coach others.
6. Remind them of their younger years.
7. Appreciate what they offer.

For Generation X – Busters:

1. Listen and communicate understanding to build a genuine relationship.
2. Allow them to function outside of the conventional office.
3. Be brutally honest with them. They know life is tough. Don't pretend it isn't.
4. Give them places for authentic community.
5. Furnish a meaningful cause to embrace; let them lead.
6. Give them boundaries, but keep them minimal and explain them.
7. Influence your relationship.

For Generation Y – Millennials:

1. Listen to them and affirm their dreams and goals.
2. Give them a sense of purpose as they perform boring tasks.
3. Give them short term commitments to give them wins.
4. Offer realistic goals.
5. Help them focus on one goal.
6. Encourage them to simplify their life.
7. Discuss personal values with them and help them become value-driven.

Generation Y has adapted many nicknames, such as the Internet generation, screenagers, echo boomers, mosaics, bridgers and the digital generation. This generation is just now entering the workforce, and because they have grown up in a fast paced world with abundant technology, they face unique challenges assimilating into the workplace. Similarly, the workplace doesn't quite know how to best manage them. Elmore stressed the importance of understanding not only how much they differ, but also that they have more to offer the workplace than you may think.

Although this generation is nothing like others before it, they bring a lot to the workplace they work with. They are confident, energetic, tech savvy, social, creative, optimistic,

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family oriented and aware of their influence on those around them. Our world has changed so much in the past ten years that it's vital to keep up with the upcoming generation. Sometimes when presented with certain workplace situations, they misinterpret the work in front of them. Here are a few examples:

Because our world is full of _____, consequently they assume _____.

Speed... Slow is bad

Convenience... Hard is bad

Entertainment... Boring is bad

Nurture... Risk is bad

Entitlement... Labor is bad

Elmore concluded with three metaphors that help represent a better way to treat your employees in the workplace:

The first is to be a velvet covered brick. A leader in the workplace should be soft on the outside, but strong with their convictions on the inside. Be a leader that your workers can talk to, but also be strict when needed.

The second is to be windows and mirrors. As a mirror, reflect past mistakes and accomplishments that led to achieving goals and also the hardships and failure that came with it. As a window, be transparent so that your employees and the next generation can learn from you.

The third and final statement that Elmore left the group with was to play chess not checkers at work. Chess and checkers both have the same game board, and checkers has the same exact pieces in each set. Chess on the other hand, has various pieces in the game and if you know the strengths of each piece, you are sure to win the game. Great managers play chess with their employees. The more you get to know your employees, the more successful you will be. If you learn their strengths, you will be able to use them at work to not only your own advantage, but theirs as well. This is a strong way to run a company, and although it may be harder and take longer, it will be worth it in the end.

It was an excellent opportunity for the audience to learn how to work with different generations, as well as how to lead and connect with them in a way that makes the office more enjoyable and efficient.

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