

The Four Things Young Leaders Must Do to Effectively Lead Older Generations

1. Be an Active Listener and Learner

Since you are still learning to be a leader – be an active listener and learn from your older peers. Authority must be earned and thus it is important that you keenly observe how your older colleagues operate. Identify their strengths, personality traits and areas that could use refinement. Listen to the types of questions they ask in meetings. Do they take notes? Is their follow-up good? Always be mindful of what you can specifically learn from each member of the team. Be certain to acknowledge the lessons learned from your older colleagues by applying what they have taught you. Additionally, make sure that you identify the areas for improvement where your input can make an immediate difference in their performance.

2. Get to Know Them on a Personal Level

Though it may be difficult in certain workplace cultures, as a young leader you must invest your time to get to know the members of your team on a personal level. For example, I remember when I inherited a new department as part of my management responsibilities, when I was just 26 years old. My ten new staff members (teammates) were much older, married and had children who ranged between the ages of 15 – 17 years old. I dedicated three months to make a genuine effort to get to know them personally. As such, I began to take them out to dinner, attended their children's high school basketball games and – in one instance – even attended a counseling session with one of the kid's teachers. When I inherited this group of older colleagues, I learned that they had worked for a younger leader in the past who never gave them the time of day, nor did they seem to care about what mattered most to them – their families. These were loyal company employees who were grateful for their jobs, but they didn't respect the senior leadership team.

Getting to know your team breaks down potential barriers and also allows your older colleagues to get to know you. Be transparent and show them who you really are. It works both ways and remember that this will make them curious about who you are and what matters to you. Just be yourself and have an open door policy. Don't exercise the authority of your title unless it is absolutely required. Keep it simple; create an environment that is engaging, warm and non-threatening.

3. Blend Old and New Ways (Embrace Differences)

Make the transition of thought easier for your older colleagues to accept. Be strategic in blending your new ways of thinking with their current ways. Remember that your job is to help make them more successful and this requires you to help them continuously learn and grow. Be a good leader, not an entitlement hound. Be respectful of how they think and get creative in helping the older generations understand why your new ways of thinking make sense. Take your time, give them examples – learn how to earn buy-in.

Traditions matter to the older generations. Be mindful of this not just for your older colleagues, but for the good of the organization you are serving. I remember how eager I was to introduce new ideas and reinvent the older ways of thinking. I failed many times at first because I didn't pay enough attention to the historical dynamics that existed within the organization and between its people. I wasn't mindful enough of the traditions that were embedded in the company's culture and how people applied them to their work.

An excerpt from the article The Four Things Young Leaders Must Do to Effectively Lead Older Generations by Glenn Llopis

4. Earn Respect by Being Less Authoritative

Respect takes time to earn and should not be forced. Don't demand or command. Become part of the team. Take responsibility for your actions and learn to hold yourself accountable. Being the new young boss does not grant you special privileges. As a young executive, I never abused my power. In fact, my staff worked with my personal assistant more than I did. I wanted to ensure that any "perceived" privileges that I had were shared with the team. It's important that your old colleagues see that you are being respectful within your role. They want to know that your intentions are pure, honest and true. Learn to care more about your team and less about your power.