

Conversations: Find the Common Ground.

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No matter in which generation we were born, we all engage in conversations. Conversations can range from dull to provocative. At the lower end of the spectrum, no thinking is involved. At the higher end, the conversation leads to action that causes change. These conversations require a commitment of mind and soul. Human beings are social in nature—we are built to be in relationships. Healthy relationships have a basis of meaning and dignity. The most sought-after relationships are those that bring comfort and invite change all at the same time.

The relationships with those who “get us” at our core and still love us are the most cherished relationships. Expectations between friends are like being in a healthy pressure cooker. Those relationships have healthy ways to let off stress, and the substances that are cooking together are forming a delicious meal with the perfect blend of spices, herbs, vegetables, and meats. Conversations are the core of any relationship. What is the common ground among the four generations in the marketplace today? Maybe rather than having each generation stand in a separate corner and lob information at each other, it is time to mix it up in a healthy pressure cooker and build meaningful and dignified relationships through conversations.

Baby boomers are the generation that “lived to work.” They redefined the way the world operates. Once boomers saw that the idealism of their youth was not going to work, they focused on building careers and sacrificed family and life. Gen X felt and lived with the down side of that choice, so they are the generation that “works to live.” With the boomers beginning to retire and not enough Gen X to fill the workplace, Gen Y is poised to make dramatic changes just like the boomers did decades before them. Gen Y has learned from previous generations, and they are saying, “work my way.”

Is it possible that “work my way” is actually Gen Y’s desire for their individual lives to have meaning and dignity? Isn’t that similar to what the boomers were fighting? Weren’t they fighting the establishment of corporations that seemed to strip meaning from work, making jobs very rote and conventional? Didn’t the boomers want to be in community with others?

The Great Generation is tied to the Great Depression and World War II. When the economy collapsed, people relied on themselves and on those with whom they had relationships. People with strong family ties and/or in a strong community turned to those roots when things got bad and were able to exchange services and help. At its best, dignity and meaning was always present.

Isn’t that really what Gen Y is asking—maybe demanding? They want to know to whom they can turn, on whom they can count when times get tough. They are asking for transparency. They are saying that it is okay that you made a mistake—just don’t hide it. Hiding takes away from dignity and meaning.

Gen Y will tell you absolutely everything that they have done, good or bad (depending on who is listening) and then ask: is there still dignity and meaning here? Maybe asked another way: is there still a relationship here? Can you still like me? Can you laugh with me? Can you teach me? Receive from me? Give to me? Work with me? What is the dynamic here and how can it be nurtured? What can we collaborate on?

Relationships and conversations were a given with the Great Generation. It has come full circle with Gen Y. Relationships must be present. The generations may not agree with each other, but for the sake of a relationship they will collaborate with each other.

What can you learn from the spiked-hair worker who works from home and never wears a business jacket? What can you learn from the man who hasn't missed a day of work for the past 40 years and still believes in wearing a tie to the office? What benefits can be discovered if we look for common ground that fosters community vitality? What are you prepared to let go to make the marketplace of the 21st century profitable for all four generations?

Initiate a provocative conversation and start a change.