

Enterprise

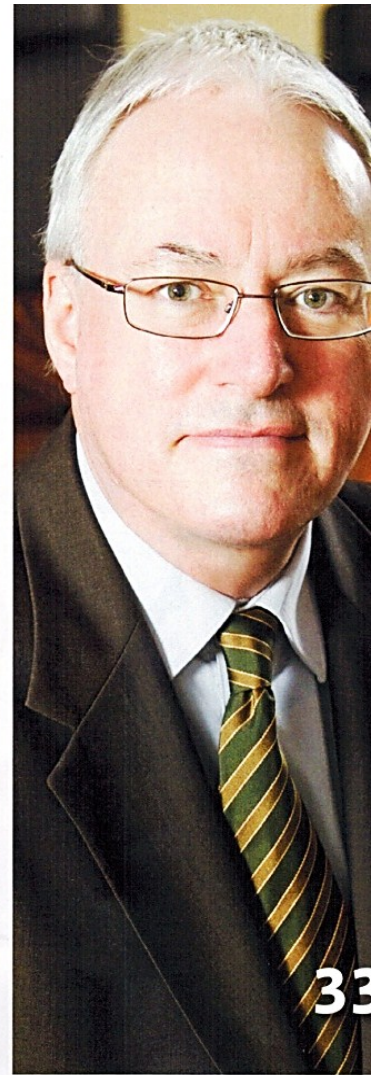
The Voice of Canadian Credit Unions

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The **NAME** GAME

With branding consultants on hand, credit unions are pushing traditional boundaries





COFFEE BREAK

18 **A Fast-Moving Landscape**

Hats off to branch managers!
Mary Frances Hill

24 **Banking Goes Retail**

Big Box stores are upping-the-ante for a bigger slice of market share.
Nick Rockel

33 **His Personal View**

George Keter reflects on the relevance of the cooperative principles.
George Keter

TACT

38 **Four Generations, One Workplace**

Why can't we all just get along?
Carol Crenna

HEALTH

40 **Take a vacation, Give yourself a break**

Are you secretly checking office emails while on holiday?
Sonu Purhar

DEPARTMENTS

6 Editorial

7 Small Talk

8 **Person of Interest** **Small Steps**

LEEDing by design.
Yolanda Brooks

42 **Marketing Maven** **Arrivederci**

But still Italian.
Lyndsie Bourgon



Why can't we all just get along?

Four Generations, One Workplace

IF GENERATIONAL JUDGMENTS and stereotypes create misunderstandings in your workplace, you're not alone. For the first time in history, four generations are side-by-side, trying to balance an age gap that spans five decades, complete with diverse perspectives, motivations and needs that, ultimately, affect workplace dynamics.

Bridging the chasms between pre-boomer, boomer, Gen-X and Gen-Y groups may be more about "imprints" than age. Olivia Mclvor, Vancouver-based HR specialist and author of *Four Generations, One Workplace: Sharing in the Information Age*, says, "We all differ due to family dynamics and cultural background, but imprints that occur during formative years — from music to major events — leave an impression that affects us for the rest of our lives. Each generation has hundreds of distinctive imprints that make us communicate differently and create different values and priorities."

Mclvor has trained over 20,000 people on generational imprints in sectors from banking to healthcare and also works with businesses that are now in crisis due to a lack of knowledge transfer. She outlines some of the common imprints that characterize each generation and offers ways to develop, engage and collaborate with each one.

PRE-BOOMERS (65 and older) were raised during times of war and the Depression (or have parents affected by them) with very little security, so they seek it through work. They experienced command-approach, patriarchal parenting, which was transferred to work, with military-modelled organizational charts and

hierarchy. They were taught to conform, not to question authority, and "If you work hard, pay your dues and do your time, the company will take care of you," Mclvor notes.

Develop: Avoid telling pre-boomers what to do; invite them to facilitate training; use traditional, understandable language; publicly reward them for contributions.

Engage: Ask for their opinions; show loyalty in your actions; offer work options that suit their changing lifestyle; encourage two-way mentoring; counsel them respectfully and frankly.

Collaborate: Make appointments for meetings; use face-to-face or telephone communication; use boomers as bridges to Gen-Xs or Ys; use surnames at initial meetings when addressing members.

Listen to their message: "Respect me and my wisdom."

BOOMERS (aged 47 to 64) rebelled against parental commands and constraints, resulting in the hippie, civil rights and women's rights movements, which greatly impacted work. They seek interpersonal, collaborative relationships. They work long hours to climb the corporate ladder. They're fiercely competitive because this populous generation had to fight for the same jobs. They're motivated by position, prestige, challenges and making a difference.

Develop: Openly respect their knowledge/experience; offer skills upgrades, including

technology; begin cross-mentoring; update job descriptions and encourage them to challenge the status quo.

Engage: Offer flexible work options; provide eldercare benefits for aging parents; give meaningful assignments and special projects;

ask about work history successes and challenges; reward them with accolades, titles and positions.

Collaborate: Be clear about objectives and targets; use face-to-face or telephone communication; get to know "who they are"; listen to and take their advice; don't act like an authoritarian.

Listen to their message: "Value me and the hard work and experience I bring."



GENERATION-Xs (aged 31 to 46) raised themselves, with boomer mothers in the workplace, resulting in an independent, resourceful, educated, and entrepreneurial approach. The 1980s recession created difficulty in finding jobs after older Gen-Xs finished higher education and their workaholic parents lost hard-earned jobs, teaching Gen-Xs to trust only themselves, not organizations. They "work-to-live rather than live-to-work" and they prioritize work-life balance in their own time. Technology is woven into their lives.

Develop: Provide high-level mentors; offer solid, open feedback and an informal approach; explain what to do, not how to do it; develop job descriptions together; use their enthusiasm, and offer career moves and resume building; authentically "walk your talk."

Engage: Offer flexible rewards and benefits (for young families and telecommuting from home); give clear expectations, a solid career path and competitive compensation; generate fun; help them pursue work-life goals; grant autonomy; build trust and avoid micromanaging.

Collaborate: Ask, "What do you think?"; consider performance outcomes, not hours; be flexible with hours; involve them in decisions; be open-minded to ideas; give positive feedback; commit to transferring knowledge.

Listen to their message: "Invest in me, educate me, and help me to climb the corporate ladder as a future leader."

GENERATION-Ys (aged 30 and younger) were nurtured by their parents. They are well educated, eager to learn and seek approval. They live at home or have parental assistance, enabling confidence, and they have high expectations of employers. They're team-oriented due to participation in group activities since birth and are friend/family-centric. Technology is a 24-hour appendage. They have "radar detectors" for false information. They're having less sex, drugs, alcohol and early marriages than any previous generation because they know the drawbacks.

Develop: Use self-directed, short multi-media training programs and technology rather than formal lectures/manuals; offer consistent, timely feedback; be patient; teach workplace and technology etiquette; offer skills development through project-based work; embrace social media for recruitment and training.

Engage: Make work tasks varied and stimulating; offer age-appropriate rewards attached to performance, not strict timelines; offer work-life options; avoid micromanaging; give compliments; encourage responsibilities and ownership of work; promote autonomy with boundaries; generate fun.

Collaborate: Communicate informally, with creative idea-sharing; demonstrate loyalty; offer individual attention; appreciate tech-savvy skills; ask their opinion; encourage cross-mentoring; avoid hierarchy mentality; invite online brainstorming; consider texting



OLIVIA McIVOR, author of *Four Generations, One Workplace: Sharing in the Information Age*, says that Gen-Xs and Gen-Ys bring a new kind of workplace diversity that will ensure businesses don't stagnate.

to "check in."

Listen to their message: "Mentor me, because I'm educated but need experience."

Decode differences through dialogue

McIvor encourages leaders to create trust within a safe, inclusive environment, openly discussing perceptions vis-à-vis four key terms — work ethic, company loyalty, technology and social skills — to break down barriers. McIvor also advises humility. "People complain about how much time they spend 'mentoring their boss.' If your employer is younger than you, accept that you probably aren't moving higher in the company. Share your knowledge; it's your role now. If you respectfully help them, they'll be loyal."

Karen Foster, a 47-year-old manager of two **Meridian Credit Union** branches in Guelph and Fergus, Ontario, says, "Boomers who work

well with Gen-Xs and Ys treat them like equal peers. Their casual storytelling may embarrass Gen-Ys sometimes because Gen-Ys see them as their parents' age, but it changes their stereotyped views. Gen-Ys give technology help to boomers and, in return, boomers teach them about corporate culture and provide context about how far we've come — from industry changes to women in the workplace. We give younger employees, who multi-task and learn quickly, projects that incorporate those skills; they deal with changes well, whereas boomers say, 'If it isn't broken, why fix it?'"

McIvor concludes, "If we cloned generations to have the same mindsets and values, we would continue to have the same business composition. But 21st century businesses won't survive if they do what they've always done." **E**