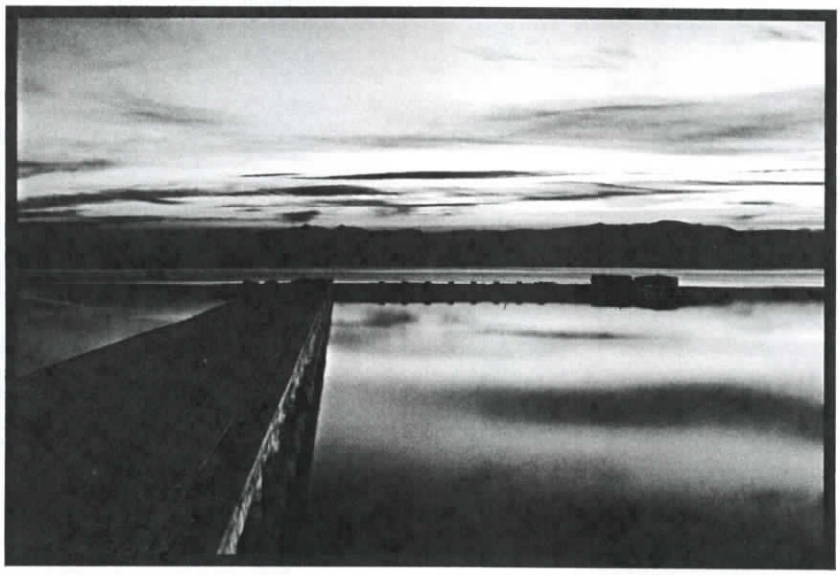
LOIS J. ZACHARY



THE MENTOR'S GUIDE

Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships

SECOND EDITION

teacher before that, is annoyed with Emily's constant griping about how long it took her to get her new position. Jeanne thinks that Emily is, like most other people in her twenties, arrogant and entitled—attitudes that Jeanne remembers from her teaching days and finds frustrating and infuriating.

Sylvia and Jon

At age thirty-five, Jon is being considered for a promotion along with three other financial analysts. His work product is excellent and he has demonstrated talent, but his department manager, Sylvia, wonders about his dedication and work ethic. No matter how backed up the workload, Jon leaves the office by six every evening. Everyone else, including Sylvia, stays until much later.

Even though he shows maturity and promising leadership potential, Sylvia wonders if Jon will be willing to adjust his lifestyle for the responsibility that comes with going to the next level.

Both of these examples speak to the challenges of intergenerational mentoring. We will revisit them as we discuss three of the four generations in the workplace today: boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Gen X (born between 1965 and 1979), and Gen Y (born between 1980 and 1995).[6] One caveat: these are general categories and represent clusters of common traits and characteristics. It's important to remember that although people are born into a specific generation, they might not have the mind-set of that generation for a variety of reasons, or they may have some overlap with an earlier or later generation if they were born at the extreme end of a range. Finally, generational typology may be more about the assumptions we make than about reality.[7]

Boomers

Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, were raised by the fourth generation, traditionals: parents who lived through hard economic times and had traditional values. Boomers tend to be the opposite of their parents in status, wealth, and idealism. As a generation, they are optimistic, confident, competitive, and goal driven. They measure self-worth by the quantity and quality of accomplishment. In fact, their identity is often intertwined with their job.[8]

Work focused and willing to put in long hours to achieve career advancement, they seek prestige, recognition, and reward for their effort. They are self-reliant and independent thinkers who feel comfortable challenging

the status quo. Boomers are idealistic and want to make a difference in the world. They want others to hold the same values and work ethic they do, and that means working just as hard and being just as committed. Younger generations, however, see boomers as workaholics and technological laggards who are set in their ways.

Boomers are often the first to be tapped as mentors because of their accumulated experience, wisdom, and expertise. They are particularly open to being mentors at this stage of their careers because it is a way of making a difference and "giving back" to their organizations. Like Gen Ys, they find working collaboratively tremendously fulfilling and meaningful.

Emily's mentor, Jeanne, is a boomer. After teaching for twenty years, she was ready to make a change. So at age forty-five, she redirected her creativity and made a career shift. She worried about this midlife transition and wanted to be accepted and credible, so she set out to prove herself. She sought out mentors, put in long hours, and advanced her career. She looked for guidance from people who were like her, seeking out the more mature managers who were the most committed and successful.

Mentoring Boomers

Like Jeanne, boomers may also be mentees. Lifelong learning continues to be a priority for them. Having a mentor makes sense as boomers find themselves seeking new ways to work, taking on different responsibilities, and moving to other roles. They want mentors who will be warm and caring. They want to be challenged, and they want the learning to be interesting and fresh.

Here are some pointers for mentoring boomers:

1. Challenge them. Boomers are not looking for "more" as much as they are for fresh ideas and new opportunities. Many feel bored, stale, and stalled out.
2. Acknowledge their accomplishments, hard work, and effort. Praise and recognition are important to everyone, particularly to boomers.
3. Make them feel your interest. Connect with them on personal and professional levels.
4. Show respect, as you would to any other mentee. Use a tone of respect, and engage them as a collaborative partner in the relationship.
5. Use appropriate language, but don't talk down to them. Avoid using slang and highly technical terms that are not commonly understood.

Gen Xers

Born between 1965 and 1979, Gen X is also known as the "me" generation. As a group they are entrepreneurial, productive, cynical, and often skeptical. They want to get their own needs met, take on individual responsibility, be inclusive, and feel that others trust them.

Sylvia's mentee, Jon, has two young children and shares child care and household responsibilities with his wife, who is also on a fast track at her company. Controlling both his work life and his family life is a priority, as is spending quality time with friends and family.

Like Jon, many other Gen Xers are challenged by the desire to make work meaningful and rewarding, even though it is not their primary focus. They work hard and pride themselves on being highly reliable and loyal workers.[9] They find work most enjoyable when they are creating something of lasting value, feel they are on a predictable, upward path to success, and feel their expertise allows them to be valuable contributors on a winning team.

Mentoring Gen Xers

Gen Xers seek mentors who are competent and direct and yet informal. They look to their mentors to gain a big-picture perspective, to help them define career expectations and develop a career path.

Being mentored by boomers like Sylvia is a challenge for them because they sense that boomers just don't "get them" (their parents are probably boomers). The result, according to Erickson, is that many get caught up in doing something because they think it is "going to lead to something else even though they don't enjoy it or think about it."[10]

Because Gen X is not impressed by authority, it is best for mentors to take a hands-off approach. Encourage creativity and initiative. Help Gen X mentees discover new approaches, set expectations, raise the bar, and then turn them loose to figure out how to achieve their goals. Talk about how to measure progress, put a process in place to measure it, and then give them regular feedback on their progress.

Here are some pointers for mentoring Gen Xers:

1. Set clear expectations, and identify measures of success. This frames the arena of action and encourages Gen X mentees to take control of their own learning.
2. Communicate regularly and give feedback. Touching base increases Gen Xers' self-confidence by letting them know whether they are on track. It also creates an opportunity for connection.

3. Build a trusting relationship, as you should with mentees of any age. Get to know your mentees in a collegial way. Stay in contact. Let them know that you trust them.
4. Make yourself available to answer questions and give just-in-time support. This keeps Gen X mentees moving forward.
5. Don't micromanage. Step back to let the mentee take charge of the assignment. Remember that learning to deal with setbacks is an opportunity for learning. You can speed the process by asking Gen X mentees questions that get them to reflect on their experience.

Gen Yers

More has been written about Gen Y—also known as millennials, echo boomers, net generation, first digitals, the iPod generation, and the "we" generation—than about any previous generation. With nearly 62 million members born between 1980 and 1995, they are the largest generation since the boomers.

Jeanne's mentee Emily is the poster child for Gen Y. Unlike Jon, she didn't need to balance her work and her life because she sees no separation between them; to her, they are seamless. Gen Yers like Emily are extreme multitaskers, obsessed with their career development. They want to get ahead and get it right. They have high expectations and crave feedback, but it needs to be authentic, continuous, and direct. They know what they believe and value. They want to be in the middle of the action and trusted to make it happen.[11] They bring high energy and full engagement to their work.

Mentoring Gen Yers

Gen Yers look for mentors who can offer them hands-on experiences that will empower them to take the next step. They prefer positive, collaborative, achievement-oriented mentors who will take them seriously. They naturally seek mentoring because they see their growth and development as a priority.

According to Sujansky and Ferri-Reed, "Nowhere is the difference between two generations more apparent than in how each of those generations uses language. The Millennials . . . communicate with each other using a rich mixture of slang language, colloquialisms, technical jargon and chat speak."[12] These "sound bites" offer a view of their world, their context, and their 24/7 dependence on technology.

Here are some pointers for mentoring Gen Y:

1. Tell them the truth, as you should with all other mentees. It sets the tone for the relationship.
2. Gen Yers want to be treated as equals. This means treating them with respect and acknowledging what they bring to the table.
3. Ask for and listen to their thinking. They want their opinions to be heard and taken seriously.
4. Make the relationship personal, fun, and engaging.
5. Offer challenging stretch assignments and a variety of learning opportunities.
6. Break goals into small pieces with realistic deadlines. Make sure they have the resources and the information that they need to achieve their goals.
7. Use technology. If you don't know how, ask them; they are masters of it.
8. Provide regular feedback, especially praise and affirmation.

Know Your Own Generation

We live in the context of our own generation, and we bring it into relationships. Just as we see our mentees as part of their generation, with whatever assumptions we may have about it, they see us through their own generational lens. Being effective in the role of mentor depends on being aware of how this might impact our relationship. Use Exercise 2.4 to reflect on the first time you became aware of generational differences between yourself and someone else and how that affected your relationship.

Table 2.1 offers a list of generational do's and don'ts that you can use as a guideline to review generational differences. Remember, though, that these are generalities: your mentees are all individuals.

Don't "Generationalize" Your Mentees

To a large extent, our current relational paradigm of mentoring reflects generational shifts as well as what we now understand about how adults learn. Not so long ago, we thought of learning in two big boxes: the learning-of-children box and the learning-of-adults box. Today learning has become more differentiated. Boomers and the previous generation, traditionalists, are probably more comfortable with mentor-directed relationships; they need to make more of a shift in their approach to mentoring, especially when dealing with Gen Y and the technological advances.

An effective mentoring relationship requires that each partner understand something about the other person's generational context and yet not make

EXERCISE 2.4

Reflecting on Generational Differences

Think about the first time you were aware of a generational difference between yourself and someone else:

- What did you observe?

- How did those differences positively or negatively affect your relationship?

- How might those differences affect your current and future mentoring relationships?

TABLE 2.1

Generational Do's and Don'ts

	Do	Don't
Boomers, 1946–1964	Give them challenging work with the opportunity for prestige. Focus on professional accomplishments. Expect hard work. Make them feel special. Talk optimistically about opportunities for change.	Micromanage. Create dependent relationships. Assume traditional or conservative values. Be cynical. Get bogged down in bureaucracy. Be afraid to try new things.
Gen Xers, 1965–1979	Demonstrate your own competence. Share information. Ask for their opinion. Set expectations. Talk about end results. Be collegial. Provide recognition for individual achievement. Provide support and suggestions, and get out of their way. Identify measures of success. Be technologically up to date.	Micromanage. Focus on the "boss" role. Exclude them from the communication loop. Ignore their opinion. Make it about "being a family". Make their goals too easy to reach. Protect them from making their own mistakes. Just give them "atta-boys" ("Great job!" comments that give them no real information).
Gen Yers, 1980–1995	Tell them the truth. Treat them as equals. Acknowledge what they bring to the table. Make the relationship fun. Let them have a voice and a veto in the relationship. Challenge and stretch their minds with a variety of assignments. Provide opportunities for teamwork.	Micromanage. Just give them orders and assignments without the rationale. Provide just negative, critical feedback. Assume they can't learn as quickly. Be unavailable. Be disrespectful even if they are your junior. Be afraid to learn new ways to use technology.

"generationalizations." Guidelines like those in Table 2.1 are helpful, but stereotypes are misleading. Aim to fully understand the uniqueness of each of your mentees regardless of generation. Without this understanding, it is easy to make assumptions that can disrupt the relationship and take it off course.

Remember Sylvia and Jon? Sylvia didn't understand Jon's priorities of trying to balance work life and home life, so she applied a familiar generational stereotype: she began to write him off as a slacker who was not a viable candidate for future leadership. In Jeanne and Emily's case, Jeanne was turned