Making decisions is hard enough with a group of like-minded peers. But the hardest decision-making occurs when more than one generation is involved. Use the following suggestions to bring out the best in everyone.

Don’t Assume Everyone Has Enough Insight

It’s common to assume that everyone at the table has enough insight and information to participate effectively. All too often they don’t. Prepare them as follows:

• **Give them advance reading material**, such as an article about the issue you’re going to address.

• **Write a summary** of the critical elements of the issue and why a decision needs to be made.

• **Help them understand the differences** between the generations. Established professionals can get into a black-or-white view that makes them hold fast to the status quo. Younger people can have a limited view of options and consequences. Help them see that they can learn from one another and create stronger outcomes together. Give them information about the different generations, and stress the importance of respecting the perspectives of others.

• **Set the stage by doing a comprehensive presentation** at the first decision-making meeting.

• **Provide participants with clarity** about how the decision relates to your organizational strategies and why this is an area of concern. Don’t assume they understand this; consider this an educational opportunity.
Control Expectations

At the start, clarify the group’s role in the decision-making process. Are they the decision-makers? Or are they serving in an advisory function to others who will decide? Managing their expectations at the beginning will help avoid angst at the end if the final decider goes a different way than they recommend.

Establish a framework of what must be considered and the boundaries for how far they can go with options. Set limits. If there are budget or staffing limitations, say so.

Put everything in writing. That way, no one can say later that they misunderstood or didn’t hear about the parameters.

Manage the Discussion

It’s easy for people to defer to the enthusiastic young professionals in the group, but they can go way beyond the appropriate parameters. It’s also easy for younger team members to defer to older professionals, but doing so can stifle new approaches. You need the insight of all generations at the table. But it has to be effectively channeled.

Don’t abandon your team to work without your involvement. You don’t have to be there for every workgroup conversation, but you still need to manage the discussion. Frame things clearly for them:

• **Have them walk through the outcomes** of the options under consideration.
• **Encourage them to ask questions of each other** to explore the consequences of the ideas being suggested.
• **Require them to discuss** the pros and cons of each option.
• **For each option, challenge them to ask** if there is an element that could be combined with something already reviewed to make a stronger option.

Have tons of interim check points, and keep re-directing the discussion as needed. Manage how the group communicates so those with strong voices don’t drown out ideas from more introverted participants. If you get all participants deeply involved in the discussion, they’ll develop mutual respect and learn from each other. This enhances inter-generational communication and encourages a more collaborative dialogue.

Perform Vigorous Follow-Up

Develop feedback loops and mechanisms for follow-up. You’ll lose your younger team members if they don’t get periodic follow-up on the outcome.

Continue to involve the decision team in reviewing the progress of the decision implementation. Then they can help you adjust your strategy based on the evolving outcomes. Be prepared for amazing outcomes that one generation could never have achieved on its own.

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Get Better Results by Working Together

If you effectively manage inter-generational decision-making, you’ll create a team dynamic that’s powerfully focused on resolving issues. At the same time, participants will build critical thinking skills and learn how to work together for future decision-making. For more, see these articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

- **The Great Generational Shift: How Will It Transform Your Workplace?** (Vol. 35, No. 1)
- **What Makes a Great Team?** (Vol. 32, No. 6)
- **Three Steps for Getting the Most from Millennials** (Vol. 34, No. 4)
- **Increase Work-Group Productivity with Concréscent Conversation** (Vol. 26, No. 3)
- **Eight Steps to Managing Conflict** (Vol. 20, No. 4)
- **What Kind of Team Leader Are You?** (Vol. 32, No. 5)
- **The Boomer-Millennial Workplace: How to Defuse the Tension** (Vol. 28, No. 5)
- **Assess Your Work Style for Better Communication** (Vol. 37, No. 4)