

ADVICE FOR CREATIVES NAVIGATING THE WORKPLACE



What are your tips for working in a multigenerational environment?

—Oldster Working with Youngsters

Judy: My first tip is to ask, “What do Gen X/Y/Z and Baby Boomers all have in common?” Clearly they are all humans, affected by current events in today’s world. They all have personal lives with families and friends. They all have dreams and special talents to help them achieve their vision.

Sure, there are differences in the generations based on variations in how we were raised by our parents, along with changes in technology and the economic landscape. You may find it helpful to research sites like “The Center for Generational Kinetics” at genhq.com. They offer an interesting list, with each point ranked in the order of importance to Millennials:

The Top Five Drivers of Millennial Employee Engagement

1. I feel I am valued in this organization.
2. I have confidence in the leadership of this organization.
3. I like the type of work that I do.
4. Most days, I feel I have made progress at work.
5. This organization treats me like a person, not a number.

Do you agree that this “Millennial” list fits any generation? Next, Google “generational difference charts,” and I think you’ll find that many descriptors are similar. If you begin by noticing what you have in common as human beings, and then *embrace* your differences, you will have the means to develop an exciting, collaborative work environment. Consider that creative innovations often stem from connecting disparate ideas, so there is a keen competitive advantage in nurturing generational differences.

My own story offers examples of developing relationships in a multigenerational workplace. In my last two years at Target headquarters, I moved to the merchandise presentation department (MPD), having spent 20 years in marketing. The vast majority of the team in MPD were recent college graduates. I can’t express how much I enjoyed working alongside them, so curious, open-minded and fun. A group of us watched “The Bachelor” every week, and the morning after, we’d gather in the aisles for a quick chat about the previous night’s show. More laughs came as we’d check to see who had the Justin Bieber doll gracing their desk, an award for certain accomplishments. I used to do presentations on the competitive landscape, and I wanted to top them off at the end with a song related to my topic. I invited colleagues from MPD and store design departments who were also musicians and singers, to create a band. There were a dozen of us (from a variety of generations) with instruments including violin, guitar, clarinet, ukulele, double bass and percussion. We played the heartwarming Hawaiian version of “Over the Rainbow” to accompany my talk on color for 2,500 team members. Music brought us all together without a single thought given to generational differences. Most memorable was the merchant who came up afterwards with tears in her eyes and simply said, “Thank you.”



JUDY BELL
FOUNDER
ENERGETIC RETAIL



When I am looking for creative inspiration and the latest thinking in retail, I rely on magazines, websites and even Pinterest. Any suggestions on areas I might have overlooked or off the beaten path?

— Inspiration Seeker

Judy: I think it is essential to develop a daily practice of finding inspiration. In the new edition of “Silent Selling,” my college text on visual merchandising, I dedicate the first chapter to creativity and write extensively on how to find inspiration. Visiting retailers of all types, specialty stores, big boxes and grocers, and other services like banks and cafés, on a weekly basis is crucial. Even one hour a week is a beneficial way to see seasonal changes and promotions.

Inspiration can also come from non-retail resources, like movies. Richard Linklater is a director, screenwriter and producer who invested 12 years making the critically acclaimed film “Boyhood,” using the same cast of actors to portray the lives of a young man and his parents.

Elizabeth Gilbert is one of today’s top innovative thinkers. In her book “Big Magic,” she tells inspiring stories about the way Einstein used a tactic he called “combinatory play,” in which he would often play the violin when he encountered difficulty with a mathematical puzzle.

What is your “violin?” What do you love to do that gets you outside the scope of the project for which you are seeking new solutions?



We have a fantastic art director who started his career with this company. He has advanced his talent and his training along the way, but as a smaller company, his design experience is limited to the opportunities we provide. What are some ideas I should be using with him for fuller development? Are there classes he should attend or events to be part of? How do I broaden his talents?

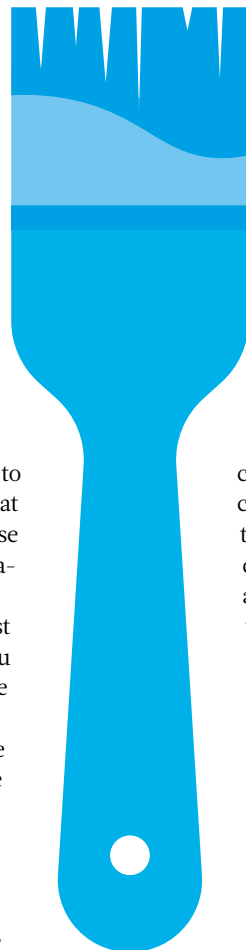
- Painting with a Wider Brush

Judy: It is admirable that you are looking for ways to build your art director's skills. It's obvious that you can see a bigger picture; if he expands and grows and continues to enjoy his work, the company will benefit, too. We are all hard-wired to seek newness, our brains work that way. Not only will new activities keep him interested, they will give him the tools to look at projects through new eyes.

You could begin by asking him to give some careful thought to his interests, both related to and unrelated to his work. What does he love to do, what makes him come alive? Based on those preferences, ask him to write a paragraph about his "dream job."

Putting it down on paper is the first step in making it a reality. Together you could brainstorm a list of activities he can do to begin his dream job today.

Are there college classes to advance his technical skills? Could he schedule some time every week to tour a mall to watch the changes in graphic design? Are there local Meetup groups that he could join? (In Minneapolis, there are a multitude of design-related Meetups,



including: Design Thinking, Doodle Dudes, Artist's Way, and Ink and Insight.) If your budget allows, a trip to GlobalShop would be invaluable—in just one day, he could attend a few seminars and take a walk through the show floor. If you don't have the budget, could you offer him the day off with pay if he covers his own trip?

One thing all of these activities have in common is getting up and out of the office. Even a walk in a nearby park once a week to free up his mind from projects can lead to inspiration that just doesn't come while seated at a desk. Building in these "creative breaks" is something he could begin immediately. Once we take an action in the direction of our vision, the forward motion propels us into unexpected synchronicities. 

JUDY BELL IS THE FOUNDER OF ENERGETIC RETAIL (ENERGETIC-RETAIL.COM) AND AUTHOR OF "SILENT SELLING." SHE HELD AN INSPIRATIONAL ROLE FOR 22 YEARS AT TARGET CORP. AND NOW SHARES HER INSIGHTS ON NAVIGATING THE CREATIVE WORKPLACE WITH DESIGN:RETAIL IN THIS BI-ISSUE COLUMN. SEND YOUR QUESTIONS FOR "ASK JUDY" TO JESSIE.DOWD@EMERALDEXPO.COM.