

Exercise: Generation X

How do Gen-Xers deal with communication and information?

The most ironic misperception of Xers is that they have short attention spans and do not deal well with information. Xers do think, learn, and communicate differently than members of previous generations, because their minds were shaped by the information revolution. Managers should maximize Xers' unique comfort and skill with information and info-technology by making some slight adjustments in their communication practices. And they should always remember: Xers have voracious appetites for information and learning.

THE FOUR KEYS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH XERS AT WORK

1. Maintain open lines of communication.

Schedule time every day or several times per week for brief detail-oriented communication sessions to review projects; provide updates on managerial issues; establish and adjust work goals and deadlines; monitor results; answer questions and resolve problems.

2. Build a rich information environment that facilitates ongoing learning.

Provide multiple learning resources in diverse media; encourage Xers to set their own concrete learning objectives in the context of structured self-study programs; and allow Xers to process information and meet learning objectives at their own rapid pace.

3. Encourage everyone in your company to be a teacher.

Create a learning environment by making teaching part of every person's job. Teaching should not draw core personnel away from their core tasks; rather, teaching should enhance productivity all around. When teaching Xers, share information and methods of practice without dictating unnecessary rules; try to let Xers learn by doing; inspire Xers to define problems, engage their innovative powers, and come up with creative solutions.

4. Challenge Xers with new projects demanding fresh skills.

Expose Xers to diverse facets of the business by allowing lateral moves to new skill areas. Armed with new skills and motivated by the learning process, Xers will gladly assume new responsibilities and meet challenges with greater productivity and initiative.

BRAINSTORMING EXERCISE: COMMUNICATING WITH XERS

Work through the four keys to effective communication with Gen-Xers in the workplace. For each key, identify THREE ACTIONS you can take to put that communication key into practice.

1. Maintain open lines of communication. Possible actions:

(a) _____

_____.

(b) _____

_____.

(c) _____

_____.

2. Build a rich information environment that facilitates ongoing learning. Possible actions:

(a) _____

_____.

(b) _____

_____.

(c) _____

_____.

3. Encourage everyone in your company to be a teacher. Possible actions:

(a) _____.

(b) _____.

(c) _____.

4. Challenge Xers with new projects demanding fresh skills. Possible actions:

(a) _____.

(b) _____.

(c) _____.