

## Community, Natural Resource and Economic Development Program

### Welcome to the multi-generational workforce

#### Situation

Today's employers are faced with the challenge of bringing together people from four generations to meet the goals of their organization. Each generation brings diverse perspectives, values, needs and expectations to the workplace. Changes in the workplace have made company and organizational structures very flat, with limited upward mobility, which causes people from different generations to compete for the same jobs. The overall result is that in today's work environment, no job is safe and no career is assured. This causes managers and employees to identify more with their own generation and blame other generations for workplace problems. Because generational conflicts in the workplace are based on a difference in values, ambitions, views, mindsets and demographics, each generation is motivated by different messages in the workplace.

Learning to blend the distinctive creative energies and accommodate the different working styles of these four generations will create a dynamic team. Helping employees from divergent generations develop skills that enable them to appreciate their differences will greatly enhance production, quality of performance and job satisfaction.

#### Response

In response to local business owners' voiced frustrations with managing particular generations, and the popularity of the "Managing Generation X" portion of their UW-Extension Team Building and Employee Motivation workshop, Beverly Stencel, community resource development educator, and Hans Hanson, area business educator, developed a workshop in 2001 on managing different generations. Communicating Across the Generations, a peer-reviewed workshop and curriculum, deals with four generations currently in the workplace, stressing that generational differences are just one form of work force diversity.

The Communicating Across the Generations curriculum is designed to help participants recognize the qualifiers that define a generation; identify the forces that shaped their attitudes, beliefs, and expectations, and influence how they see the world. Participants explore what motivates employees from each generation, their assets and liabilities in the workplace, their communication styles and how to meet their needs. The curriculum is designed to be fun and flexible, with innovative hands-on activities that encourage individual reflection, small group and large group participation. The goals of the workshop are to:

- Increase knowledge and understanding of the four generations
- Enhance comprehension of how generational differences affect the workplace
- Promote skills for effective intergenerational communication
- Expand capacity to manage diverse working styles across the generations

#### Outcomes

The curriculum has been taught to ethnically, racially, gender and age diverse audiences connected with the Wisconsin Dept. of Corrections (DOC), Wisconsin Dept. of Workforce Development,

Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Employee Trust Funds, Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College students, Native American tribes, local businesses and organizations, as well as UW-Extension staff. The DOC has repeatedly requested the workshop. Over the past four years, the workshop was taught at corrections and prison facilities, the DOC state conference, and for DOC regional staff. The curriculum received statewide recognition in 2002 with the "Quality of Teaching" award from the Wisconsin Extension Community Development Association and a live call-in radio program with Wisconsin Public Radio in October of 2003. The curriculum was introduced to a national audience at the National Conference for Cooperative Extension Educators 2003 Galaxy II Conference. Sales of CDs at this conference resulted in the curriculum being taught by Extension educators around the country.

Facilitators have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants over the years. Participants said that the workshop messages resonate with them regardless of their individual ethnicity, race, generation and gender, including immigrants. This response is illustrated by a comment from a woman of color who is a DOC social worker working with incarcerated individuals in downtown Milwaukee. She said the workshop was the best she had ever attended regarding diversity in the workplace, because it approached diversity from a social history standpoint, through the exploration of generational "defining moments," which she felt was particularly valuable and positive.

Comments from other participants include:

*"Last fall, I attended a Managing the Generations seminar. The presentation was informative, entertaining, relevant and useful. We put the information we gained to use immediately, and we are still talking about it."*

Dan Conroy, Human Resources Director, Nexen Group, Inc.

*"This program really helps connect the dots. In trying to find ways to motivate employees and get along with co-workers, this program provided realistic tools to help deal with generational differences."*

John J. Richards, Marketing Representative, Northwestern Wisconsin Electric Company

*"I found it to be one of the most enlightening courses I have taken since becoming a supervisor over 15 years ago. What I learned from this training reinforced what I had been experiencing for years as a supervisor. That there are real and distinguishable differences in the value systems of different age groups of staff in any given employment situation. This training assisted me in identifying these differences and provided me with strategies to utilize in the workplace. Now that I have had an opportunity to put these principles to work, I highly recommend this training for all employees. It has made a difference in the way we interact with one another as people while working towards common goals."*

Michael O'Keefe, Unit 504 Supervisor, Wisconsin State Department of Corrections

## Contact

Beverly Stencil  
Community Resource Development Educator  
Washburn County University of Wisconsin-Extension  
715-635-4444  
[beverly.stencil@ces.uwex.edu](mailto:beverly.stencil@ces.uwex.edu)

Hans E. Hanson  
Area Business Development Educator  
University of Wisconsin-Extension  
715-392-1448  
[hans.hanson@ces.uwex.edu](mailto:hans.hanson@ces.uwex.edu)