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STRATEGIES FOR CREATING THE PERSUASIVE ORGANIZATION



**BUILDING
COMMUNICATION**
with the
NEXT GENERATION

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Building communication with the next generation

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Communication forms the bedrock of any successful company — for the organization as a whole and for the employees who work within it. Strong external communication attracts clients, sells products, and boosts reputation; strong internal communication builds relationships, increases productivity, and increases job satisfaction. Importantly, strong communication isn't just about being heard — it's about persuading an audience to act in order to create even greater efficiencies, shorten time to market, and build a collaborative and cohesive team, among many other benefits.

Yet many early-generation employees lack communication skills, especially persuasive communication skills, and, in our experience, don't always see communication as an essential skill. Additionally, the way many leaders approach communication skills building does not resonate with younger generations. That's a problem for both the organization and its leadership.

Why? Because early career professionals generally, and Gen Z specifically, are more ready than any other group to leave jobs that don't prioritize personal development and job satisfaction. Executives looking to recruit this new generation and retain top performers must evolve in their approach to training, mentoring, and modeling communication.

For early career professionals, learning to communicate and persuade will be key to building a decades-long career in a way that is personally and professionally rewarding. Most jobs are littered with roadblocks that often can't be surmounted by hard work alone. They require collaboration, approvals,

buy-in, and consensus. Persuasive communication helps accomplish all these — but it is a skill, like any other, that requires instruction and practice.

Building the next generation of your company will require an investment in training for young professionals that recognizes the differences in the way they approach skills building in general, and communication in particular. And it will also require you to consider how your company's culture and your own leadership approach might need to change in ways that both meet the needs of the youngest employees and elevate the team as a whole.

Why shift?

Two important forces are at play here: the vital importance of communication in all professions and the emerging importance of Gen Z among the workforce. They intersect not only in the need to build a younger generation's skills but also in the need to learn to communicate within the organization and across generations.

For organizations, success often depends on the quality of communication, both internally and externally. Surveys have shown that large companies see an average loss of \$64.2 million per year because of inadequate internal communication and smaller organizations see an average loss of \$420,000 annually.¹ To put it more positively, another study found that “companies that communicate effectively had a 47% higher return to shareholders over a five-year period.”²

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1 <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/behavioral-competencies/communication/pages/the-cost-of-poor-communications.aspx>

2 <https://hbr.org/2009/11/new-study-how-communication-dr>



Meanwhile, Gen Z is, as one analysis observed, “poised to be the largest demographic of entry-level employees joining the workforce for the next several years”³ potentially representing a quarter of the global workforce by 2025.⁴

The many qualities and experiences that define this modern crop of early career professionals — digital nativism, diversity across race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity, and the isolation and disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic — have major ramifications for how they approach the workplace especially communication.

As Lauren Stiller Rikleen observed in the Harvard Business Review, many of these young employees experienced a disruption in their learning experience during COVID-19: inadequate virtual coursework, a lack of direct instruction, and abandoned deadlines and tests.⁵ The lack of structured learning for such a significant period continues to affect how they adjust to the expectations and rigors of a professional setting.

Additionally, for recent graduates from every generation, transitioning from academic writing — with its longer length, specialized language, and often descriptive, rather than persuasive, focus — can be difficult. Business writing thrives on clarity, concision, and direct action. Learning to write in a way that gets things done in a professional setting can take time and practice.

At the same time, greater diversity among young employees means they bring a greater set of

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backgrounds, skill sets, and perspectives to their careers — an asset that requires inclusive leadership that encourages its employees to bring their full selves and full talent to work.

Significantly, early career professionals seek out positions where they can build new skills. While Gen Z reports a greater willingness to switch jobs — in one survey, 55% of young workers were “very likely” to hunt for a new position in the coming year, versus 43% of millennials, 28% of Gen Xers, and 13% of baby boomers⁶ — they also put a greater emphasis on learning and growth. According to McKinsey survey data, only Gen Z ranks career development first among the criteria for taking a new job.⁷

The McKinsey report goes on:

Despite the broad consensus on the reasons why people leave a job or take a new one, the reasons to stay vary much more by age...

3 Business Horizons, Volume 64, Issue 5, September–October 2021, Pages 599-610, Business Horizons, DITTO for *Gen Z: A framework for leveraging the uniqueness of the new generation*, Shaun Pichler, Chiranjeev Kohli, Neil Granitz, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2021.02.021>

4 <https://www.zurich.com/en/media/magazine/2022/how-will-gen-z-change-the-future-of-work>

5 *What Your Youngest Employees Need Most Right Now* by Lauren Stiller Rikleen, June 03, 2020, Harvard Business Review

6 https://finance.yahoo.com/news/gen-z-are-the-most-disgruntled-workers-and-thats-a-problem-for-employers-150517925.html?guc-counter=1&guc-referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2x1LmNvbS8&guc-referrer_sig=AQAAADJ7gHAXcZlkaWwT8eH0gnGb6zMI0fgJGlg-JRFP6c1NsVdUtnNr9

7 <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/gen-what-debunking-age-based-myths-about-worker-preferences>

Gen Zers, for example, rank flexibility, career development, meaningful work, and a safe, supportive work environment as more important factors than compensation when they decide to stay with their current employers. The implications for employers are clear, especially in an uncertain economic environment. To care for and get the most out of their current employees and to keep their people aboard, organizations must tailor the employee value proposition in a more nuanced way.

That value proposition comes from the top — and an organization seeking to attract and retain new talent can't remain entrenched in outdated business practices. Training, communication, and culture shifts may all be necessary to reach out to younger generations and make them feel both valued by the organization and invested in becoming more skilled in their position.

New generations, new approaches

Organizations that are willing to invest in their newest employees and work in partnership with them will be well-positioned to take advantage of these young professionals' strengths, develop their skills, and evolve in ways that can be productive across all generations, from early to late career.

As a Deloitte analysis recently observed, "The future of work...draws on skill sets from diverging fields... The future of work will call for a return of the Renaissance figure: A person with many talents, interests, and areas of knowledge."⁸ With their individualized interests and ready access to knowledge through online resources, early career professionals are poised to fill that space for many organizations. Stanford's Rebecca Katz has added that this generation grew up with uncertainty — and it has made them resilient, flexible, and more open to new ways of thinking⁹

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8 <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/consumer-business/welcome-to-gen-z.pdf>, Deloitte, WELCOME TO GENERATION Z

9 <https://news.stanford.edu/report/2024/02/14/8-things-expect-gen-z-coworker/>, 8 ways Gen Z will change the workforce. Soon there will be more Zoomers working full time than Baby Boomers. Roberta Katz explains how their values and expect

However, organizational leaders need to know how to bring them in and engage with them in productive ways. This shift may have the added benefit of creating positive change across the entire organization. The Deloitte report goes on:

For organizations to attract and retain the best and brightest of [Gen Z] will require a different mindset. Employers will need to understand the behaviors and tendencies of a generation that expects much more personalization in how they want to be treated by their employer and is seeking more than just filling cookie-cutter roles. This personalization can be a positive change for all workers of all generations and can help attract and retain talent across generations.

Being open to and facilitating “job crafting” — allowing employees to redesign the tasks they take on and how they accomplish them — may bring greater job satisfaction and investment. For early career professionals, balancing this kind of flexibility with productivity requires strong bilateral communication of expectations from managers and of progress from employees.

The Latimer Group often uses the analogy of an arch to talk about the construction of professional skills. Each skill is a block in the arch — coding, reliability, program knowledge or engineering proficiency. But communication is the keystone: the one skill that enhances the value of each of those other skills and holds them together, to create the structure of a



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successful professional and leader. Those who thrive professionally can communicate their knowledge persuasively to generate action, credibility, and alignment.

As we've laid out above, many early career professionals have not yet fully developed their skills in professional, persuasive communication. They may not know how to create alignment within a team or ensure buy-in for their ideas. They may struggle with creating strong professional relationships with clients or building partnerships. But training employees requires more than a top-down, prescriptive approach.

Katz notes that younger employees "want to understand why something is done in a certain way." She adds, "When an older person says to them, 'This is how you should do it,' they want to check that out for themselves. It doesn't mean they're always right; it's a different way of understanding."

Practically, what does that mean?

First, treat them as partners in their own development. Create and document a development plan with clear, measurable goals and defined steps. Having ownership gives a sense of greater control and commitment to their own development.

Second, clearly define the expectations for business communications and their differences from personal messages. Many in Gen Z may approach messaging and email in their workplace in the same way that they do so in their private lives—make sure they understand where these types of communication diverge.

Third, offer regular, constructive feedback. Let them know what is working and what continues to be a weakness.

Importantly, organizational leadership should embrace the younger generations' desire for inclusive and authentic leaders and workplaces.

As Sylvia Ann Hewlett recently wrote in the Harvard Business Review, her research data shows, "People now gravitate more toward leaders who listen and learn from others before they make decisions—a trait seen as critical to growing markets and retaining top talent."

"To show confidence and decisiveness but also inclusiveness and respect, to balance powerful speaking and a commanding presence with listening and learning, and to project both polish and authenticity is a heavy lift," she adds. "But leaders who manage it can inspire their employees to greater achievements and help their organizations truly flourish."¹⁰

Katz argues that authenticity — marrying words to action — and openness provide mutual benefits to employers and employees. "My bottom line always to employers is stay open to hearing about different ways to get things done, because Gen Z has one foot in the future," she notes.

Developing mentorship programs and affinity groups—including generational ones—allows early career employees to develop stronger relationships within the organization, feel connected and supported, and see the benefits of training. Reverse mentoring can also provide the opportunity for younger employees to take pride in their specialized skills and see development and learning as an ongoing practice.¹¹

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¹⁰ Sylvia Ann Hewlett, "The New Rules of Executive Presence," Harvard Business Review, January-February 2024

¹¹ <https://thelatimergroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Latimer-Fathom-06-1D-online.pdf>



Creating an inclusive culture not only increases satisfaction and engagement for Gen Z, but across generations. As Pichler, Kohli, and Granitz observe, “Workforce diversity is related to firm performance, but increasing diversity is ineffective for firms that do not have an inclusive culture.”¹² For early career professionals, seeing clear evidence of institutional support for inclusive programs is crucial in job satisfaction; therefore, the researchers note, “firms should explicitly adopt policies and practices that promote inclusivity.”

And finally, offer these younger employees opportunity to learn and cultivate new skills. By encouraging young employees to see communication as a practicable skill, leaders can give them invaluable tools toward becoming more capable and effective in whatever role they might have.

In this respect, Gen Z isn’t so different from any other. Through training like The Latimer Model, they can understand communication as a set of discrete skills, each of which can be honed.

There is a fundamental need to break communication down into skills, and no matter how you communicate, where or through what medium, communication is comprised of assessing an audience, developing a message, incorporating the proper documents, and delivering it all in a powerful way.

The Latimer Group model works across generations because our approach to communication is practical and customizable. Our model includes a breakdown of four essential and interrelated skills: Assess, Message, Document, and Deliver.

- **Assess:** This skill is based on the importance of listening, awareness, intellectual curiosity, respect, and discovery.
- **Message:** Building on the broadened perspective gained in the Assess phase, this skill focuses on

increasing knowledge, preparing with a particular emphasis on audience, and gaining clarity on goals and priorities.

- **Document:** Supporting the Message previously developed with memorable and easily digestible visual materials.
- **Delivery:** Finally, put forward that Message with confidence, purpose, and minimal distraction, building connection with the audience.

These skills work for many styles and kinds of communication—the key is to hold a mindset of practice, purpose, and preparation. Persuasive communication isn’t an inherent skill but one that is crafted and honed. For younger employees seeking to grow in skill and experience, this structured and measurable approach gives them both the why and the how to improve their communication practice.

Every new generation has an impact on the workplace. At this moment, some organizations may have five generations, each with their own skills and needs, working together. For leadership, success depends not only on building the youngest generations’ communication abilities — it requires building the entire organization’s ability to communicate across these divides. This may be a challenge, but evolution can be generative. Investing now in making changes that bring in and boost Gen Z ultimately can make your organization stronger, more flexible, and better able to grow into the future.

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To learn more about The Latimer Group’s new Communicate to Belong Workshop, please contact us at info@thelatimergroup.com.

¹² Pichler et al