



Photo: PCI

Bring 'Em Along

Dr. Krista M. Brown, *Managing Technical Editor*

For how many generations has it been said, “This younger generation doesn’t want to work hard and isn’t as smart as we were”? I’ve heard this for more than 50 years, and I’m sure my parents and grandparents heard it, too. Typically, when I ask someone to provide facts substantiating this opinion, they become flustered, offer a hearsay account, or change the topic. My supposition is that the belief is unfounded, and the root of the problem may lie with us, not “them.”

Let’s take the case of an employee who is six months into a position with your firm and you don’t feel they are “coming along” as you’d hoped. Hmm . . . Have they been given the appropriate tools, training, and supervision? Or were they shown their work area, given an assignment, and left on their own to “figure it out”?

Are you concerned that they are not completing their assignment? Or is the issue that you expect the task to be completed just as you would have done it in the past? Explain what the task is, why it needs to be done, and what the time frame is. Then discuss ways to approach the work. You may find that your employee knows another way, and the alternative method may provide benefits. I was once part of a group that met on Saturday mornings to run a 5-mile loop. One day, a newcomer suggested that we run the loop clockwise. The “seasoned” runners objected: “But we’ve always run counterclockwise!” When they were asked why and could offer no reason, the new runner invited everyone to follow him clockwise, and we did. The world did not end, and we enjoyed a different view of the scenery.

It is important for all of us to have excellent communication skills. Create opportunities for your employees to make presentations. They will either wow you with their skills or show you where they need some help. If you do not yet feel comfortable having them present to a client, encourage them to get involved with a local school. Second graders find a hardhat and high-vis safety vest really cool! The presenter can mix concrete and have the students read and record the temperatures. With some thought, the hardened concrete could become something useful

for their classroom. These opportunities should not be limited to engineers. A CAD operator could show a REVIT model and allow students to try navigating through it or adding to it. These types of presentations improve your employees’ skills and are beneficial to your organization, the industry, and local schools.

Many organizations are suffering from reduced participation. Doing things as we’ve always done them is not improving the situation. Don’t just invite members of the younger generation to join; bring them along, introduce them, and ask for their opinions! Follow up with them after the meeting. What did they find of interest? Perhaps they want to join a subcommittee, assist with an upcoming function, contribute to social media, or prepare a report or presentation slides. The younger generation typically knows how to put pizzazz in graphics! This experience will also expand employees’ knowledge and skills.

I recently met with the officers of a student chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers. I was blown away! They presented the chapter’s budget, answered my in-depth questions, and told me about planning and executing a field trip to a power-producing dam. The chapter had also held an outing at a local reservoir so the chair of the civil engineering department, who is highly experienced in canoeing and kayaking, and the faculty advisor could teach the students proper rowing techniques and water safety. At this single event, the student officers recruited new members, created enthusiasm for the spring concrete canoe competition, grilled burgers, and introduced lower- and upper classmates in an informal setting. Does this sound like a generation that “doesn’t want to work hard and isn’t as smart”?

Traditional ways of developing employees may no longer suffice. We need to take a more active role. Let’s ask our employees questions and listen to their responses. What are their short- and long-term goals? Show them the bigger picture—how their work impacts the project, the project team, and organization’s bottom line. We may find out that we—not they—have a lot to learn.

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