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Seminar focuses on working through generational issues in workplace

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MASON CITY — Four workforce generations gathered Tuesday to learn about each other's differences and how to co-exist better.

Andrea Fredrickson of the American Institute of Management Inc. spoke on "Mixing and Managing Generational Differences."

The four generations are distinctly different and include veterans, baby boomers, Generation X and Millennials, also known as Generation Y.

The main misunderstandings seem to be between the baby boomers, born between 1944 and 1964, and generation X and Y, born between 1964-1980 and 1980-2000, respectively.

Fredrickson said she has people come up to her all the time and tell her something needs to be done about the new generations.

"You're not going to fix them," she said. "They're not broken."

The differences need to be understood for a better work environment and because baby boomers will begin retiring in a few years.

"We're going to have turnovers with young people and not have younger customers if we don't change," said Fredrickson, who falls between a baby boomer and generation X. "You'll be working forever because there will be no one to replace them."

Baby boomers "live to work," like to hold meetings, worked their way up the career ladder and don't like confrontation, she said.

They'll send an e-mail to everyone about being late for work, rather than confront the one person who's been doing it, Fredrickson said.

"I know some of you are thinking 'I don't care what they think about me,' but that's bologna," she said. "We love to be popular."

Generation X doesn't follow the workplace chain of command, wants more flexible work hours, was raised by the TV and is more pragmatic.

"When they don't go through the chain of command we baby boomers freak flippin' out," Fredrickson said.

They also don't like meetings and think everything could be done more quickly if prioritized differently.

If generations X'ers get something done in 30 hours instead of the projected 50 hours, baby boomers tend to think they skipped a step or the work isn't going to be complete.

Generation Y also works more rapidly, but has been brought up in a "protected environment" and expects rewards for a job well done, Fredrickson said.

"Show me how I make a difference and reward me," Fredrickson said the generation thinks.

If this doesn't happen the person will move onto a different job. Generation Y is loyal to friends but not as loyal to a job.

"They want to try different areas," Fredrickson said. "We didn't figure out what we wanted to do with our lives until 30. They aren't 30 yet."

She suggests being open to ideas, let them experience different things in the workplace and understand that when they ask why, it isn't because they think you're an idiot.

"As a baby boomer who brings in someone younger, we can't give them the bitter beer face when they give a suggestion," Fredrickson said. "We have to embrace them."

It's important for generation X and Y to understand and make adjustments for baby boomers and veterans as well, she said.



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