

Communicating with young workers

In young adults, the part of the brain that regulates the fight-or-flight response is usually more developed than the part that regulates decision making and problem solving.

Positive reinforcement (or corrective instruction delivered in a positive way) can be an effective tool for young worker training because it is more likely to be processed in the prefrontal cortex where we form strategies and judgments and make connections for problem solving.

While negative reinforcement may appear to get immediate results, the effect is often reactionary, short term, and based in fear, not reason.

The role of respect

Young workers are less likely than other age groups to question the behavior of those they respect. This can be an effective tool for mentoring and training. On the other hand, young workers may mimic the behavior of co-workers they respect—even if they know that this behavior is undesirable or unsafe.

Young workers are more likely to respect someone who demonstrates a genuine interest in the worker's safety, well-being, and advancement. They are less likely to respect someone who they believe is motivated by the best interest of the company.

Young workers often respect co-workers who have risen up through the ranks or who demonstrate real knowledge of the workplace. Peers may be more respected than supervisors, managers, or business owners.

Each generation has unique qualities. Knowing what each group values and how they may think can lead to better communication and a safer workplace.

Generation	Time table
Traditionalists Loyal, conformers, respect authority, disciplined, and formal	1900 to 1945
Baby Boomers Optimistic, step-by-step promotion, question authority, and value relationships	1946 to 1964
Generation X Independent, flexible, want structure, immediate communication, and fun	1965 to 1980
Millennials Multi-taskers, confident, adaptable, highly social, team tasks, and extreme fun	1981 to 1994
Generation Z Socially responsible, connected, communicate in 140 characters or less, and influenced by peers	1994 to ?

Young workers

16 to 25 years old

Like teamwork and competition.

Choose whom to respect.

Prefer short, frequent, positive feedback

Giving frequent feedback

Calling a young worker into the office to deliver feedback (even if it is positive) may make the worker uncomfortable and therefore less likely to absorb the information. Young workers may be more open to good and/or corrective feedback if it is delivered in the moment or "on the fly."

Young workers tend to prefer getting feedback in short, frequent bursts. They may interpret the absence of feedback as criticism or evidence of doing a bad job. They may find annual evaluations, with no other feedback, frustrating and inadequate.

Prefrontal Cortex
Reasoning



Amygdala
Fight or flight