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Five Generations in the Workplace: What's a Chairperson to Do?

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Five Generations in the Workplace: What's a Chairperson to Do?

For the first time in our history, there are five generations in the workplace. Increased lifespan, rescinded mandatory retirement policies, and economic necessity have contributed to this phenomenon. This presents numerous opportunities and challenges for academic chairpersons. Understanding generational traits and patterns provides an important framework for developing effective leadership strategies to enhance the work climate and ameliorate conflict. The presentation focuses on characteristics of generations; situations, issues, and triggers that creates workplace conflict between generations; strategies for effective communication and conflict resolution between generations; and ways to enhance the academic department culture.

Numerous recommendations will be made to chairpersons. For example:

1. Increase knowledge of each generation. A list of excellent references including media resources is disseminated.
2. Consider strategies that maximize flexibility while maintaining essential staff and faculty expectations.
3. Use of a Memorandum of Understanding during hiring and annual reviews.
4. Reserving a part of faculty meetings to discuss generational issues and effective strategies to bridge gaps and adjust to differences.

Dr. Wertkin created and chaired the Millennial Project at Western Michigan University and delivered more than 40 presentations to administrators, faculty, staff, and business leaders in this substantive area. This topic creates strong emotional responses leading to lively discussion. A mixed method approach is planned. Material is presented via lecture, video, and a facilitated discussion. Emphasis is on considering effective strategies and providing ample opportunity for participants to share ideas and experiences.