

Generational Differences: The New, The Now, The Experienced

Description: The most multi-generational workforce in history currently exists. Five generations are working together today. Pretty eye-opening, right? Jim Morgan, Vice President of Workforce Strategies at MRA, is here to discuss how, contrary to what some believe, the presence of five generations in the workforce is not a problem; it is an opportunity.

Listen to Discover:

- One size does not fit all across generations or within generations! And that becomes a big headache for employers because it's a lot easier to say, "Everybody comes in at 8 and leaves at 5."
- It really is a matter of being intentional with people and adjusting according to each employee's needs.

Transcript:

Transcripts are computer generated -- not 100% accurate word-for-word.

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Intro

Hello hello, everybody, and welcome to 30 minute THRIVE, your go-to podcast for anything and everything HR, powered by MRA - The Management Association. Looking to stay on top of the ever-changing world of HR? MRA has got you covered. We'll be the first to tell you what's hot and what's not. I'm your host, Sophie Boler, and we are so glad you're here. Now it's time to THRIVE.

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Sophie Boler

And I'm joined with Jim Morgan, our vice president of Workforce Strategies here at MRA. It's good to have you back, Jim.

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Jim Morgan

Good to be back.

00:00:34:01 - 00:01:00:15

Sophie Boler

Well, we talked last episode with Jim on the demographic problem or "the Great Sansdemic." But today we're here to really continue that conversation and talk about generational differences in the workplace. So a few podcasts ago, we actually talked about the candidate experience and you touched on how generational differences really plays into that experience. In fact, I recall that you grilled me on a few questions ...

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Jim Morgan

"Grill" is kind of a harsh word.

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Sophie Boler

... On how I would approach a job search based on my interests and my generation. So we've brought you back today so I can grill you on this topic. But it is a good one and I have seen reports that talk about the fact that there are now five generations in the workforce. So potentially today's workers could be working with a range from 20-year-olds to 70-year-olds.

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Sophie Boler

So there's a big gap there, but that has potential to have a huge impact in the workforce. So how can we make it all work? How can an employer expect us to work all together? Well, Jim is here to share some insights with us today. So let's just mention the fact that between you and me, there are four generations.

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Jim Morgan

Ouch! Well, welcome to you too!

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Sophie Boler

We're really looking at five different generations in the workforce, which include traditionalists, baby boomers, Generation X, Generation Y or millennials, and Generation Z. So, Jim, what does the generational makeup look like in the workforce right now?

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Jim Morgan

Right now, the millennials are taking over. They're at about 35 percent of the workplace. The Gen Xers are at about 30 percent. My group, the baby boomers, are slowly going out the other side, so we're down to about 23 percent. And the young kids coming up, the Gen Z's—your group—is making up about 12 percent. And there's still a little sliver of that traditionalist, probably less than about 1 percent right now.

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Sophie Boler

Okay. And I know you've been tracking this topic for most of your professional life. And we're really here to hear about a number of stories on how employers are managing these generational differences. So what leads to generational stereotypes or how do we come up with these generalized opinions of each other?

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Jim Morgan

You know, I think people first have to understand that every single generation has been stereotyped. I joke I'm part of the ponytailed, no-good, anti-war generation of never going to amount to anything. And now we own everything, so good for us! And it doesn't really matter who you are, it's just a matter of, you know, everybody thinks the next generation is basically going to be the end of the world as we know it.

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Jim Morgan

So far, that hasn't been true. So we're all just trying to figure this out as we go along. But the stereotypes usually come along because either there is some consistency in pattern and behavior based on what's going on in the world. And sometimes it's, you know, okay, we're going to make fun of each other. And I'll give you an example from my generation, the "hey boomer," you know, everybody saying, you know, what's wrong with that?

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Jim Morgan

But, you know, they ask questions like, you know, how come you're walking around with cash and 10 credit cards? Why do you always shout every time you're on Skype or on your cell phone? Why do you print out emails? My gosh, it's right there in front of you. Why can't you figure out for yourself how to take a Word document, make it into a PDF?

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Jim Morgan

You know, and I could say, Oh my gosh, that's not me, what are you talking about? But I also am smart enough to watch other people my age walk around and do exactly those things. So I think it just becomes a matter of some repetitive behaviors by some folks which are judged by different generations as, you know, what are you doing?

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Jim Morgan

So those are some of the things that people say about the boomers. So I'm sure you heard some things. What are the ones that bother you a little bit?

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Sophie Boler

I think we always get related back to technology, always, no matter if it's in the workplace or outside of it. And it's always just kind of like consumes our generation and also about the short attention span, I feel like you can't keep us, I don't know, engaged for more than 5 minutes. It's got to be fun. It's got to be,

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Sophie Boler

Why is it worth my time?

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Jim Morgan

You're the goldfish generation.

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Sophie Boler

Absolutely.

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Jim Morgan

Anyone who's ever had a goldfish, if you tap on the side of the bowl, you can hold their attention for 7 or 8 seconds. So that's your, that's your stereotype.

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Sophie Boler

Well, let's actually talk about the different values of each generation and how that affects each different generation as an employee. So I'm sure you have lots of stories to tell with each of those.

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Jim Morgan

Yeah. And this gets to your stereotypes because even the one that we just talked about, you know, we're saying, oh, you have no attention span or that's what people say to you. It's not an attention span thing. It's this is how fast the world moves now. And there's a reason that Twitter has 240 characters and TikToks can't be more than a minute or two long.

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Jim Morgan

And it's just the way that that things go so that that happens. So I think you got to look at, you know, as a couple of different examples. I mean, anyone who, probably in your case has a grandparent or maybe a great-grandparent, who might still be around that lived through the Depression. Well, that has serious impact on folks in terms of I'm going to hang on to every dime I've got.

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Jim Morgan

I don't trust credit cards because the bank failed me. I'm just going to have cash and that's that's how I'm going to do business. So little things matter. So if you look at, for example, the family and what did the family look like 50 years ago? And it was Mom staying home, Dad going to work, you know, 3.7 children and a dog.

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Jim Morgan

And that's what a family was. And over time, that's changed as a result of divorces, merged families, of same-sex families. I'm not saying anything is right, wrong or indifferent, but the definition of family has changed over the course of the of the generations. So that has an impact on people. The issue of education, which was out of reach for people for a long time, for my generation, it was like an expectation that we get to go to college, to people starting to question the value of college and now people are saying, "Hey, it's going to be free."

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Jim Morgan

You know, and again, I'm not judging that saying right or wrong or indifferent, but when things like that happen, it has an impact. And so whether, you know, for my generation it was civil rights issues. For current generations, it might be school shootings. You had 9/11 in there to affect the generation we have. Now we've had a pandemic.

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Jim Morgan

All of those things shape people in terms of who they are and how they function, and that sort of leads to, okay, there are differences among the generations because their experiences have been so different.

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Sophie Boler

And now that we know what to expect from an employee side, let's take it a step further and really examine how leaders interpret the generational differences in the workplace. So can you talk about the different leadership styles of each generation?

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Jim Morgan

Yeah, you know, I don't know so much that it's the leadership style. I think it's just the way that the world has changed that you've got to understand the people that are working for you. And in our case, one of the cases you're in our internship program and we asked all of you, you know, what's one of the biggest things that you want from your boss?

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Jim Morgan

And it was “I want their cell phone number so I can text them.” Okay. Well, that’s your preferred method of communication. And I can guarantee you those Gen X and boomer bosses probably are like, “There is no way in the world I’m giving you my cell phone number so you can text me all day long.”

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Sophie Boler
Right?

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Jim Morgan

That’s not you being nosy or you wanting personal information—it’s your preferred method of communication. So, you know, how do we figure that out? So it goes back to when we talked about the candidate experience and what you’re expecting differently. So as a leader, I need to understand how you want to function and how you want to do get things done.

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Jim Morgan

So that’s a little bit on me as a leader. As a leader, I need to be looking out for what are the benefits that are of interest to you. You may say, “Hey, I came out of college with \$20,000 in student loan debt. That means more to me than anything,” whereas someone else might be saying, “I want to a 401(k).”

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Jim Morgan

Someone else might want health care. But if I’m listening to what the needs of the people are that that work for me, I’ll begin to understand some of those things. If I know how you want to work—remote, in person, you like being with people, do you not like not like being with people. It’s not so much, I would say in that case, the generational we all are different in every generation and these generations have 80 million people in them.

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Jim Morgan

So it’s not like everybody’s the same. But your expectation of you’re not going to be faxing anything, I can pretty much bet on that. You don’t want paragraphs of information, you want bullet points. So I’ve just got to understand how you function and what’s the right way for you. I learned that by doing performance reviews because, I mean, you’ve worked with me.

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Jim Morgan

I'm not a real detail-oriented person. I'm not about, what are your five things? What are you going to do? What are you going to measure? I'm more about asking you, So what do you think's important? And we'll write them down and say, Okay, that sounds good, let's go do that. That doesn't work for some people. They want to know, "What are the three things I'm supposed to do?"

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Jim Morgan

How are you going to measure them?" And so you have to even look at the performance reviews and saying, "Okay, what are Sophie's expectations?" And those might be different than someone else and someone else. So I'd say for the most part, it's really getting to know the people that you're working with and personalizing things to the extent where maybe you can understand where they're coming from.

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Sophie Boler

Yeah, absolutely. I totally agree with that. And I think you mentioned about the flexibility, the flexibility to like, for example, I think a lot of people in my generation, if let's say you had a meeting at 8:00, they might show up at 8:01 or 8:02. So maybe just, you know, changing how you approach those meetings to fit each generation and maybe it's a Zoom call or something like that.

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Sophie Boler

But can you share any insights on how the different generations might respond to these different leadership styles or even different generations?

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Jim Morgan

Well, I mean, you just mentioned a couple of them. So I think people misinterpret, "Okay, we're going to have a meeting at 4:00 on Friday afternoon" and an old-school person might be like, "yeah, that's my way of making sure everybody's still here at 4:00 because we work from 8 until 5. And I want to make sure that you're there."

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Jim Morgan

Well, I've had people who work for me that are texting me at 3:00 in the morning, you know, saying, "Hey, I finished the project." And that's great. I'm not reading it at 3:00 in the morning, but they're working at 3. They might work on weekends, they might work at night. You know, they're getting the work done. So part of it becomes, are they getting done what you want to get done?

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Jim Morgan

It's not really so much my interest as to when you get it done or how you get it done. I just want the product. So we've got to figure those things out. We also have to look, I think at, you know, what are the goals of the different generations because that's changed so much in terms of what their career might look like.

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Jim Morgan

Historically, you know, your career defined who you were like that was your life, and that began to change. And people thought, you know, no, I'm not going to let it define who I am, and I'm not just going to have one career for 30 years, and I am going to move around a little bit. And that's not necessarily a bad thing.

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Jim Morgan

50 years ago, if you lost your job, it was like, oh you're a failure, what did you do? Now it's almost a badge of honor. Like, yeah, no, I quit that job. I wanted to go do a different job and I'm going to switch jobs every couple of years because that's how I think I'm going to build up more information.

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Jim Morgan

Whereas my generation was afraid to leave their job because I thought, well, that would be a step backwards. I'm climbing the ladder here. If I step out, I'm going to have to go down a couple of rungs. You look at it more like the more ladders I can be on, the better off that I'm going to be.

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Jim Morgan

So again, know those are just examples of how different generations are going to look at leadership and say, don't give me a 12-year plan because I may not be here for 12 years. I want a plan, but I'd like it to be 2 years or 3 years. And then we can we can update it.

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Jim Morgan

But I'm going to keep moving. I'm going to keep my eyes open, not because I'm disloyal and not because I don't necessarily like the organization, but it's just the way that I function my whole life. I don't stick with things for 30 years. I kind of look at that as being crazy and I look at switching a job every 2 years like you're the one who's crazy.

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Jim Morgan

Well, maybe we both are, or maybe neither one of us. I don't know. But, you know, people just approach things very differently.

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Sophie Boler

Yeah. And speaking to my experience, I definitely like to know, like, what's my plan for the next couple of months? Like, what are my growth opportunities? Can I explore this area? Like, I like to know that I have a variety of different things coming my way, but I also want to make sure those are in place. And someone has a plan for my development basically.

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Jim Morgan

And that I will say that's one of the things that we've seen with the last two generations, more than anything else, is what's my career path look like and what's my learning and development program? So I want to know what is it going to take for me to get to the next level? How are you going to help me get to the next level and what does that next level look like?

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Jim Morgan

And again, if you tell me that plan is, it'll be 5 years before you truly understand, I'm going to look at you like, you know, no, it's not. Either I'm going to figure it out in 2, or I'm not going to be here anymore. And so I think we've had to do a lot of adjustments there as well.

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Sophie Boler

Exactly. But we also want to talk about how generational differences in the workplace can be a good thing. I feel like we've talked a lot about the challenges, but I'm sure you have a few stories around this, and what are some of the opportunities and other challenges that you've seen when there are multiple generations in the workplace at the same time?

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Jim Morgan

Yeah, that's a, and there are a lot of positives to it. Everybody always picks on the stereotypes and things, but I think there are a lot of positives. And one of the things I get to do at MRA is run roundtables and one of them is for CEOs. And I threw basically that topic on the table to say, okay, let's talk about the emerging leaders and the next generations coming up.

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Jim Morgan

And it was really fascinating because a couple of the I'd say more progressive companies, the more progressive CEOs that were in the group were talking about everything that your generation and maybe in the one before you brings to the workplace. And I had sort of introduced the discussion saying, you know, when I started working, I brought nothing.

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Jim Morgan

I don't mean it like I was an incompetent buffoon, but everybody who came before me could do the things that I could do. Your generations—and I don't want to stereotype you with the technology—but you've learned so many things that you walk into the workplace with more knowledge than a couple of the generations above you. And so the CEOs picked up on that and said, you know, we've been spending time trying to figure out what is it that the people under 35 know that we could use to our advantage, and few of them across the list were, you know, the communication skills, your ability to communicate across a multiple platform, whether that's social media,

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Jim Morgan

whether that, you know, verbally, whatever it might be that you you've got a skill set there. You've also got a level of confidence because basically you've been on film since you were born, you know, and you're not uncomfortable sitting in front of a camera. And, you know, I mean, you're 22 years old and you're running a podcast and there's a camera running.

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Jim Morgan

Yeah. Good for you. You know, but I know a lot of people that are my age are just sitting down with the camera would be enough to freak them out and it would take us 50 takes before we got through the introduction. So you're comfortable with all those things. You can adapt to new challenges. People can throw you a curveball because your whole life has been sort of a series of curveballs.

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Jim Morgan

You understand social media better than anyone over the age of 40. And I've got lots of stories there that I could tell, but you understand it and you understand how the platform works and you understand how people utilize it and where someone my age might be freaking out because something got posted, you'd understand that that's going to be buried in about 2 seconds and this is going to be gone and no one's going to see it again or this is where you stop the conversation.

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Jim Morgan

Don't try to entertain someone on social media. You know, it's not going to be a logical conversation. So all of those things that we're talking about saying, this is what these folks are bringing. So maybe rather than looking at a 25-year-old saying, oh, we can't put them out on the road as the face of the organization to say maybe they should be the face of the organization because they understand the technology that comes with presenting.

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Jim Morgan

They're comfortable in front of people. They don't mind having cameras in front of them. So maybe age isn't the defining factor in what that should be. On the flip side, I would argue, you know, people that are my age are, we do have some experiences and yes, you'll get some stick in the mud that'll be like, wow, we tried that and it didn't work.

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Jim Morgan

And now we're trying it differently. But we've seen a lot of things. And one of the issues we have right now with a lot of our member companies as emerging leaders in that, I got to watch other people make a whole bunch of screwups because I wasn't going to be taking over anything till I was 40 or 45.

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Jim Morgan

Now you're taking it over at 25, 30, 35. So you've got to be prepared to do those things. You've got to be ready for those things. So that's where I think, you know, maybe some of the baby boomers may be able to help you with experiences that you haven't had the opportunity to see yet. So every generation brings its strengths and weaknesses.

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Jim Morgan

And again, I think it's, you know, who can do this and who can do that. And again, you can't stereotype 80 million people, but there are tendencies within groups. And I think I can pretty safely say that, you know a lot more about technology than I do because you've just had to do it for 25 years.

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Sophie Boler

But, you know, a lot of things that I don't know.

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Jim Morgan

Yeah, I've got to figure out which ones are valuable so I can share them with you. But so yeah, there's a everybody brings something to the table. I think it's a matter of finding that out, whether it's by their, their just their personality type, it's by their generational experience or what it might be.

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Sophie Boler

And I think we can definitely learn from each other too, based on other generations' strengths. But do you have any departing words of wisdom for for listeners today or employers for what we like to call the now and the experienced worker?

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Jim Morgan

That whole question sounds like, all right, old person, can you tell me what it is you've got to offer to the young people here?

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Sophie Boler

I didn't mean it like that.

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Jim Morgan

You know, I think as much as we get into these generational differences and I think that they matter because they matter if your generation wants to text their boss, that matters. Because if that's your preferred method of communication, I'm not saying it's going to be right or wrong, but you and your boss have to both understand, is that the way we're going to do it or not? Because someone's going to have to make an adjustment.

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Jim Morgan

And people have to understand that while you might work differently, it doesn't mean you're not working as hard. And so, again, a lot of people who look like me will be, well if you're not in the office, I don't know what you're doing. I can make it pretty good argument that I've seen people in the office and I'm not sure what they're doing, so I'm not sure that that's the measure.

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Jim Morgan

But it's more are we clear on what the goals and objectives are? Because whether you get it done on the road, at your apartment, in your house or wherever you might be, it doesn't really matter so much. Now, if there's a customer portion of it where you've got to be somewhere—completely understood. But that pandemic changed everybody's paradigm.

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Jim Morgan

And so it was, you know, we had companies who, for years were trying to go remote and couldn't do it. All of a sudden they did it in 2 weeks because they had to. So all of those things are starting to change. So we're all different. We've all had different experiences. I think it's really the employer's job to figure out what motivates whatever the person might be, how do we engage them in the organization?

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Jim Morgan

Because if they're engaged and they're motivated, they're going to do more for us. And one size does not fit all across generations or within generations. And that becomes a big headache for employers because it's a lot easier to say "Everybody comes in at 8 and leaves at 5. That's the rule. We're done." But if half the people are unmotivated by that rule, then you're not getting the most that you can out of.

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Jim Morgan

So now we've got to figure out how do we set up policies and procedures that let people do things the way that that they need to do it. So I guess I would just say that it really is a matter of being intentional with people. It's trying to figure out what does Sophie need and how is that different than what Jim needs and how can we all sort of live in harmony here?

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Jim Morgan

Even if you're never here and I am here or I'm never here in your area, you are here that we both understand that we're getting our stuff done. We're just doing it in a very different way. But the company benefits if we're doing it in the way that we can do it the best. So it's hard. It's not simple rules anymore, but I think if we're for taking the individual into consideration, that's sort of where you have success.

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Sophie Boler

I was going to say it seems like a very individualized process. But that takes up just about the time we have for today. So thank you for joining us today and continuing that conversation. And it looks like we can learn a lot from each other on how to really close the generational differences gap. So we have added Jim's LinkedIn profile.

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Sophie Boler

You've probably seen it a couple of times by now in the show notes, but if you haven't yet, make sure to connect with him and if you have any questions on today's episode or really just want to chat with Jim and follow up on his expertise. I'm sure he'd love to have a conversation with you.



EPISODE 15

Generational Differences: The New, The Now, The Experienced

00:22:38:23 - 00:22:41:06

Sophie Boler

But otherwise we will see you our next episode.

And Jim, thank you for joining us again.

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Jim Morgan

My pleasure. It's always great to be with MRA Nation.

Sophie Boler:

Always.

00:22:45:23 - 00:23:08:05

Outro

And that wraps up our content for this episode. Be sure to reference the show notes, where you can sign up to connect for more podcast updates. Check out other MRA episodes on your favorite podcast platform. And as always, make sure to follow MRA's 30 minute THRIVE so you don't miss out. Thanks for tuning in and we'll see you next Wednesday to carry on the HR conversation.