

STAND-UP AND MEET

BREVITY KEY TO SUCCESS WITH GEN-Y



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AT every conference or event I speak at, a question that invariably pops up is "How do you manage these unmanageable Gen-Y employees?" And at every session, I explain plainly that I personally don't believe that there is much difference between Gen-Y, traditionalists, Baby Boomers or Gen-X.

Every generation produces people that often change jobs, live care-free lives in their 20s, work really hard, play wholeheartedly and are impatient. And every generation is nagged and frowned upon by the previous generation.

In fact, a few months ago, Roberto Galeotti, who is a traditionalist in our organisation, was telling us how rebellious, naughty and mischievous he was during the 1960's Rome Olympics. He was frowned upon by the generation before him.

I can also easily find many Gen-Y employee who work hard, are loyal and push themselves to the limit. So, for years, I have believed that this generational myth is just that – hogwash.

However, recently, I came across one key trait that Gen-Y's seem to share – they have no patience for slowness.

If you grew up as a Gen-X, patience was the key to your success (and health). Everything took forever. Even turning on the computer could take up to five minutes.

But if you grew up a Gen-Y, speed mattered. Waiting 20 seconds for the computer to turn on was just too long a wait.

Even writing emails moved from paragraphs to one liners and brevity of intent. Being brief and effective became the new mantra of most Gen-Y (and possibly a few Gen-Xers).

However, the brevity of these employees never quite translated upwards to their bosses.

In fact, many managers continue to believe that having longer meetings and longer conversations with your employees have more impact. They are dead wrong.

Brevity is powerful. In a recent study by Zenger Folkman, people were asked how long the most powerful and impactful coaching sessions they received from their managers took.

The majority's response: less than 15 minutes. And these were not just Gen-Y employees but spread across all generations.

As our days become busier and packed with "stuff", brevity may be our answer to get more things done (and help our sanity!).

There is never enough time, yet there is a big problem with brevity.

THE AWFUL TRUTH

Being brief is painful and very hard. Brevity requires lots of preparation and work. Mark Twain once said "I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead."



It's easier to write a long email (which may go unread), but writing a short and impactful one may take hours of editing to perfection.

Even the best speeches are brief and impactful. Martin Luther King's "I have dream" speech lasted 16 minutes and Lincoln's Gettysburg address had only 10 lines. The same goes for meetings and everything we do.

It is easier to let meetings ramble along. To have an effective meeting requires thoughtful preparation, requiring time and effort.

But I am sure you will ask me this question: "Excuse me, but most of my meetings are ad-hoc as people just pop into my office unannounced and I just don't have time to prepare. How do you expect us to be brief and prepared for these sessions?"

TO STAND OR NOT TO STAND

True, most situations in our high-paced, highly packed lives happen spontaneously.

So, a key skill we must learn is the ability to manage such interactions in the briefest possible manner.

Ensuring that each of these daily encounters with your employees or bosses happen in short burst is key to your success.

In fact, most Gen-Y employees prefer short, highly intense interactions rather than long, complicated meetings.

Here are some ways I personally use to ensure I manage these brief exchanges effectively:

1 Always stand up

The moment someone comes into my office, I tend to stand up. By doing so, it clearly creates a sense of urgency.

Most folks immediately drop the small chat and jump into the heart of the matter that they came to discuss.

If the matter requires thoughtful discussion, I quickly walk with the person to a quieter part of the organisation and discuss it. Sometimes, during the walk, the matter may be resolved.

If the matter requires a quick decision, I keep standing throughout the meeting. Standing meetings generally are much more productive than sitting meetings. Blood is flowing quicker and most people are looking to quickly solve the issue.

These meetings are great as they force everyone to be short and the discussions have a very specific time limit.

2 Hasten the pace

When someone drops into the office and begins a leisurely chat, I quickly stare at my watch and announce that I have a meeting in five minutes (which is usually true anyway!).

This immediately hastens the pace, getting us faster to the core of the issue at hand. I also love walking meetings where I have a meeting while walking over to another appointment.

These meetings are great as they force everyone to be short and the discussions have a very specific time limit.

3 Schedule multiple short meetings

I try to schedule short 15 minute meetings instead of the customary one hour per meeting. Sure that occasionally gets me into a fix when some issues require deeper discussion and thought.

However, when people realise they only have 15 minutes, they come much more prepared with options and solutions. Thus, we end up saving huge amounts of "brainstorming" time and get quicker to decision-making and value added activities.

4 Use the four sentence rule

Years ago, FBI hostage negotiator George Kohlrieser taught me the four sentence rule. The rule simple states you MUST say what you have to say within four sentences.

After that you must pass the talking over to the other person.

That person also has four sentences to say their piece, and then passes the talking back. These four sentences back and forth can make dialogue and discussions extremely effective.

It is hard to master this but once you do, your brief encounters become very impactful.

5 Be audience specific

Each person is different and each meeting is different. Make sure your interaction is brief but also tailored and specific for the individual or group you are interacting with. Keep your message clear and simple.

6 End meetings with a clear call to action

Many meetings end with no clear action plan. Thus, more meetings are called upon to follow-up on previous meetings.

Make it a habit to scribble down three things you expect to be done

and hand that paper over to the person required to do the work.

Then jot this down in your note book (or iPad) and follow-up on it. Folks will get a clear message that action is required for every meeting.

Soon, your number of meetings will start to dwindle as people will realise that meetings are not for "chats" only but for action and execution.

7 Have lots of standing meetings

Not only is it good exercise, you will also see significant reduction in bored people playing Angry Birds while a long-winded participant goes on and on about a trivial issue.

Having everyone standing and meeting forces everyone to pay attention and saves significant time.

Standing up is also a sign of active learning. (And research back this up – "Groups that stood-up took 34% less time to make the assigned decision, and there were no significant differences in decision quality between stand-up and sit-down groups.")

FINAL THOUGHTS

In 1603, Shakespeare wrote, "Brevity is the soul of wit". Leaders must understand the power of being brief. By managing your time more efficiently, you give yourself more time for the high-value matters that can drive your organisation further.

But it starts with mastering brief interactions and encounters. Mastering it may take some time. So focus on making small changes to your meetings and interaction.

Start by standing and implementing the four sentence rule. Soon, you will enjoy the power of brevity. As Thomas Jefferson rightly stated, "The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do."

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