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How to Align 4 Generations of Workers to One BIG Vision

Steve Sanduski: Lou welcome to the show.

Lew Jaffe: Hey, it's great to be here. Thanks so much for having me.

Steve Sanduski: Yeah. Well, it's great to have you here as well. And you're a coach here at CEO coaching international, and we've got another great topic lined up here that I think is really important. And. What's interesting is this is the first time in history that we've got four different generations in the workplace at the same time, and that does present some potential management challenges or leadership challenges.

So we're going to dig into that. So where I'd like to start today is talking about these four generations. So, so first of all, let me just ask, why do we even have to name. A generation. And is it actually a good idea to give a label to a generation when there's really so much variability within a generation?

Lew Jaffe: It's really interesting. You say that. I think some of the, the younger generations might not appreciate being labeled because that's where art we are today in society.

But it's also helpful to understand where everybody came from. So it's really not about the label, but it's about a set of experiences that got to a certain age. So myself as a boomer and that's people that are in their late fifties to mid seventies. You know, we grew up in a really interesting time post-World war two optimism, but our parents were either experienced the war or the depression.

So a lot of fiscal responsibility and hard work and excitement with a side order of the hippie movement. So we, we started to think about the world, but in very personal ways. And then after us came gen X, now it's interesting. My generation, we were at the beginning of inventing really cool technology, but didn't actually adopt it or use it until way later.

So you have the gen X population. That's about 40 to the mid fifties and they grew up at the end of the coal war. But more importantly, computing happened. And they started using data date. Everything was data-driven. But remember it's still before the internet, when they grew up in used stuff.

So there was the data that they collected versus having access to the worldwide web. And all data. And then you have the millennials and millennials are a really interesting generation because they grew up

with a technology explosion social media explosion, the, the connection, the beginning of the loss of privacy, because it was post nine 11.

So they also see the world differently. But they're the first generation that said not only do we have data, but we can convert it to information because we compare what we know in our small environment to what a larger environment knows. So they've really brought that into the workforce and they also though sit with a whole ton of student debt.

And that changes their perspective a little bit, but they also grew up in the, on demand world. Right? So when you and I grew up, if you wanted to see a movie on a Saturday night, you had to go the exact time, you'd miss it, or a TV show. You had to see the exact time, this generation, they know on demand.

They want to see a movie. They turn it on when they want, whether it be on a mobile device on their phone and. They want food. They don't have to go out to the restaurant. The food comes to them. They just see the world. I don't want to see in a narcissistic way, but everything revolves around them because they control their environments any way they want to control their environments.

And now you're starting to see gen Z in the workforce and their generation. They have all the things that the millennials had, but even more smarter phones, even bigger displays. And now we're adding this pandemic. So they're used to using their technology. Internally, they're playing their game. They're sharing everything online.

It's a whole different world. Plus their generation unfortunately experienced some of the 2008 meltdown, the financial crisis. So they're watching their parents struggle. And coming back and now you have the pandemic and you have that again. And we don't really know what that's going to do to the workforce yet, but they are now almost in a weird way, circling back to where the baby boomers were, whose parents lived through the depression and the lingering.

So it's, everything goes full circle, but I thought that would be an interesting way just to set the stage of why it's such a creative and a unique workforce. Because we have all these different people with different driving forces to get us there.

Steve Sanduski: I'm really fascinated by this idea of the different generations.

And let me present this in a couple of different dimensions and tell me if you think this is a fair way to think about it. So as a generation, we have people that are at a certain age in life and they experienced something that happens. For example, you mentioned the millennials who experienced the economic crisis in Oh eight Oh nine.

Many of them were newly in the workforce, or they saw their parents struggle. So that was an event that shaped. A cohort of people. And then you also have parents who shape the thinking of their children. So how much of a generations attitudes and behavior might be shaped by the experience that they experienced during these formative years and how much might be shaped by their parents who may be two generations removed or one generation removed who had different experiences?

Is there some interplay between those two variables?

Lew Jaffe: It's both an interplay. It's like tension. It's both dynamic and static all at the same time and different people react to it differently. So as an example, my generation, again, we were told, be first at work, your boss. See that you're at work.

You're the first in. You're the last out you have that hard work ethic and we're now passing that on. But we're passing it on to a group of people that see the world slightly differently because they are that millennial generation. And they're saying, you know what? I can get it done. And I have a great work ethic, but my work ethic isn't about nine to five.

My work ethic is telling me what I need to get done and trust me, I'll get it done. So they've adopted the really important parts, but again, because we live in such a connected world, we don't all need to be in the office at the same time. They see that. So one of my favorite books I'm going to just take a quick aside is called sacred cows, make the best burgers.

So my generation, the sacred cow was work ethic on time, but sometimes sacred cows, they started with something really great. But over time, they deteriorate a little bit, and this has influenced how I work, how I teach, how I work with my clients to take the best part of that sacred cow. But now the millennials have said, Whoa, yes, work hard, get things accomplished, but let's use the technology let's use the time we have, and they do see the world differently.

So they're taking the influences that our generation, the older generation had. But they're adopting it to their way and vice versa because they're getting people in my generation to start seeing some of that and be more socially responsible and be more economically responsible when it comes to why are you wasting so many?

I'll call them assets. But we don't recycle as much as we should and we're getting way better at it. And that's because the younger generation is changing that in us. So I do think it goes in both directions. And as you know, our kids either duplicate what we did or they go 180 degrees off. And I think you see that in the workplace too.

And it's, it's a place quite frankly, and work that creates frustration. If you don't really think about it, see it and discuss it. Because as we all know, sunshine is the greatest disinfectant. So if we actually talk to each other and my generation talks to the millennials and say, well, here's that common ground, you can accelerate a corporate culture by talking about the common ground, as opposed to focusing on those differences.

Steve Sanduski: Yeah. And I'm glad you mentioned this idea that it goes both ways. Meaning the older generation will influence the younger generation, but then the younger generation can influence the older. So I'm also fascinated by this idea of how fixed or non-fixed our psychology might be like, how malleable are we across time?

So you and I are both boomers. So we grew up in a certain type of environment. But I suspect you. And I like to think of myself as well as someone who, who can roll someone who can adjust as the times adjust and who can be flexible in working with people that may have grown up in a different environment than I did, and may have a different definition.

Of work, like you said, we grew up it's you're there eight to five or eight to six or eight to seven. And it's FaceTime, you know, that was important is having FaceTime people see you're in the office, but like you say, younger generation, it's like, just tell me what I need to do. I'm going to get it done.

It might be at midnight, but I'll get it done. So just don't worry about it.

Lew Jaffe: Right. and that actually plays into one problem that we do have with all of this. So I have friends that are in various elements of the retail business, and I actually coached some retail clients. And that's a real problem for them because they don't have that flexibility of I'll come in when I want and I'll get it all done because, and that is one of the biggest complaints they have and finding.

People to work for them is problematic because you have a generation that doesn't think along those lines. And so a lot of those people that come to work for them are really only coming for the money. And that's a problem too itself because if somebody doesn't have pageant and doesn't love what they're doing and they're just doing it for the money.

it doesn't get that great customer experience delivery. It just changes everything. So there are places where that younger generations philosophy doesn't work and how we fix those two things. And again, that's part of the tension. And it sadly, it falls on those that are in charge. So I don't want to say it falls on my generation because of a young person is opening up a retail store.

All of the sudden. They realized, you know what? Yes, it's the volume of work that gets done. So maybe me who's ordering product. And by the way, I have to work with the clock. I need to be ordering product in the far East 12 or 18 hours, different time zone or doing work with, for my online business. I may have folks in India as an issue sample.

So when you're managing it, You become more like the millennial and the time does it matter to getting it works? Does, but still when you have the store hours, you become more rigid in a time zone. So it really depends on what it is that you're trying to accomplish.

Steve Sanduski: Now you've touched on this a little bit already, but I want to go a little deeper with it, and that is.

How do we manage these different generations? And I think there's some interesting things that can happen here. So again, we're boomers. So we think, okay, well, we're at the top of the pecking order here, and we've got people that report to us, but it could just as well be where someone. From a younger generation is managing us.

And there's a different dynamic there, but let's just talk about as a leader and, you know, you've got multiple generations in the workplace. What are some things that we need to be thinking about? When

do we need to be flexible for someone who has a different behavior? Structure than we do that we grew up in versus when we need to say no, that's just a non-negotiable, this is how you need to operate in this situation.

How do we think about that? From a leadership standpoint?

Lew Jaffe: I always get down to two simple things for almost any decision: customer experience, generating profit for my shareholders. So when I look at that, and that's actually how I form everything and every communication I have with my teams and when I'm coaching, it's how we talk about the business.

Because when you sit down, doesn't matter, younger generation to older or older to younger. If you can have a clear strategic vision and you have these core elements of customer experience, Kind of cash because customers are cash waiting to happen, combined with returning a profit to your shareholders.

Once everybody aligned around the mission and the tasks to get that done, then you can have the conversation on how you get it done, because until you agree, that's your mission still we'll have a problem. So once you have the alignment around those elements, It's a lot easier to have a conversation of here's when we have to do it.

But I think you have to accept that, that we have all of these technologies let's use them. And I think that's harder. I still have friends that have AOL addresses, not because it's cool. And it's retro when it's come back. It's because he still had the original AOL address from when they first got online with a 28 baud modem.

So the, the world does change. But I think of my favorite line from Woody Allen's movie a long time ago, Andy hall, where he said a shark needs to move forward in the water in order to get water across its gills. And when it stops moving, it dies. We don't want a dead shark on it. Our hands, we all need to be moving forward, whether it be boomers or whether it be gen Z and everybody in between.

Steve Sanduski: In recent years, there's been a lot of talk about the multiple stakeholders within an organization. So you've got the customer. Of course, you've got the shareholders. Maybe you've got the environment, but you also have the employees. So how do you think about taking care of the employees? Because some people will say that the way you treat your employees is the way they're going to treat their customers. And so when we think about again, these generational differences, how much emphasis do we put on? Well, let's accommodate the employees because ultimately if we have employees that like what they're doing and they're happy in their work and they like the culture that may reflect and how they're going to treat the customers.

How do you think about that?

Lew Jaffe: So again, and the cultures that I create. I don't consider people, employees. We have external customers and we have internal customers, external customers buy our goods and services and pay the bills. The internal customers are the people that take care of the external customers.

But inside your organization, everybody is a vendor and a customer. The sales people actually go out and they get the sales and then they sort of vend them to operations in order to deliver on this sale. So the operations people are actually a customer. So if that salesperson treats their team members as a customer, and it goes on and on.

And if every vendor and customer inside your organization, because even if everybody does a great job, right. But the accounts receivable people at that point in time, right. They're waving. So they're the customer. Of the shipping department. Cause once something shipped, it's billed in any accounts receivable, people have to collect it.

If they give a really hard time to a customer, for whatever reason that customer doesn't come back, that's the end of the relationship. So actually they're a vendor to the front end of the pipeline. So you get repeat business because to me all businesses are the same gain and retain customers profitably in order to create value.

And we always talk a lot about gaming customers. Everybody knows what's my customer acquisition cost. It's equally important to retain customers. Because even more expected, right? Happy customer tells three people, unhappy customer because in social media they tell everybody, so that customer thing's important.

And that's true for your team members or your internal customers, because for them, they have lots of boards they can post on it. You a good company, you a bad company. But if, again, if you get the alignment on what's important, then it's really not a problem. it's about communication.

Steve Sanduski: Yeah, and this is an important point.

I want to make sure I understood what you just said. So earlier you had said there were really two things that you really run your businesses on. One is the customer experience, and second is generating a profit for shareholders. So what you're saying is when you say the customer experience, you're talking to the internal customers, which are the team members and the external customers. So you're viewing them as they're all customers--

Lew Jaffe: They're all customers, because at the end of the day, best example, my old company PictureTel. We had hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of engineers, the company's assets when a home, every day. Okay. And if we did not give them a compelling reason to come back the next day, because engineers, especially in the Boston area where I built the business engineers were the most precious commodity we had because I was competing with.

And sadly, all the companies are gone now, DEC and when, and next door of computers, they were all there. And so those engineers were in such supply. We had to treat them with dignity and respect. And I do believe that's important about all employees, whether it's somebody that people don't necessarily take as seriously that they impact the company, but the janitor, if you have a filthy work environment, people aren't going to want to work.

That person is vital to the corporate culture. No different than the CEO is vital to the corporate culture. So it's the entire chain. There's no better. There's no worse. There's just different.

Steve Sanduski: So we've got these four generations in the workplace. Have you found there is a tendency to have a conflict between generations, for example, is it a boomer trying to manage a younger generation or is it maybe a gen X-er who is managing a boomer?

where do you see like the biggest conflicts when it comes, trying to manage among generations?

Lew Jaffe: Most often, quite frankly, it's the boomer to the younger generation. However, it was funny this weekend on Saturday night live, they had a great sketch. knockoff on you know, a star Trek kind of adventure, where the captain is, the warp drives are melting down.

We need to take care of them. And he assigns a younger person. I won't even assign generation goes, says, go do it, go fix it right now. Don't give me orders. Cause right now I'm having a personal, emotional crisis. And I need to think about talking about my truth. And the captain says, we have an emergency. We can deal with your truth later.

And it was a very interesting caricature of what goes on. So the importance is separating. What's important versus what's interesting. And I think too, when you have people that are looking at their own personal crises in front of the strategy and the mission and the goals, that's when you have the conflict and that can be going up the chain because you can have older people that are having these crises that are not dealing with the mission that's at hand.

And that's problematic, so it can go in both directions, but being honest and it's politically incorrect to say it it's usually you have the older generations that are mission oriented working with the younger generations that are on their way to be mission-oriented, but they're not quite there yet.

Steve Sanduski: So as a leader, let's say you're the head guy or the head gal of the organization.

And you've got someone maybe on your leadership team that is not effectively communicating is not effectively managing multiple generations in their purview. do you do when you take that leader aside? How do you work with them to try and get them to be more effective leading multiple generations?

Lew Jaffe: So number one, again, communication and sunlight are great cleansers. So you have to talk about it. You have to have an open and honest dialogue of what's not working and often yeah. It's you can show metrics. You can show whether it be your leading indicators or your lagging indicators.

You can show them. This is not getting us closer to achieving our goal. So we need to rethink how we're doing it. And I just tell them right up front about it. And often I've been in situations where I bring someone in that is a chief people officer. So you make sure that that's happening because they will pay back their costs and salary tenfold by keeping people. having an outlet when there is that build over pressure. So they manage that as well as having programs and having communication tools. And there are experts. I am a modest expert in this, but there are people that are really real experts in this. And you bring in somebody that knows how to heal cultures, because that's really what it is.

I'm from the, keep it simple. You know, that was the Steve jobs thing. Simplicity is the hardest thing, keeping it simple as open lines of communication and state over and over again. This is the mission. These are the goals, help me achieve them because I don't think anybody ever comes to work and says, today's the day I'm going to mess up.

I think people want to achieve their goals. So if you state them and when something's not going, right, you talk about it. That's the only way to move forward.

Steve Sanduski: Let me ask you a tactical question and this might bring out some interesting differences between the generation. So we have the pandemic and obviously because of the pandemic, most companies had to work virtual.

Now that things are easy in here with the pandemic. Companies are having to decide, are we going to ask our team to come back into the office and work out of the office? Or are we going to have a more open policy where people can work virtually? Or are we going to have some kind of hybrid combination?

So let's exclude say some of the service businesses where you have to be there. You're a restaurant and you, you have to have your people there excluding those businesses. How should a leader think about making this decision on what is right for our company? Knowing again, we've got these multiple generations who all have different ideas about where they want to live and how they want to work and the time zone that they want to work in.

And that sort of thing. How should we think about a tactical question like that?

Lew Jaffe: I think first off and again, this is a little self-serving because I come out of the video conferencing industry and it's so great to see going from a nicety to a necessity. But with that said again, customer experience, both your people.

And you're paying customers. What serves that and what serves the balance sheet, the bottom line. And I think statement was spot on. There's going to be a hybrid. There are times nothing replaces face-to-face meetings, and hopefully one day we're going to be allowed to shake hands again. But with that said, it doesn't mean you need to be face-to-face all of the time.

And we are far more productive, especially. I just moved to Florida, but I lived in LA for 15 years and there were days I had a two and a half hour commute. I was not productive in that commute. So the ability to do my job remotely when I am doing a task that functions well, remotely is absolutely going to be part of the ethos as we go forward.

No different than a lot of corporations are looking at. you only have X number of dollars. If you can lower your real estate exposure because you don't need to have everybody there every day. People for the first time often have looked at that. They weren't always looking at that because the big office sent a message.

Now the big office is do I really want to ride an elevator with six other people to get to it? So I think it's opened the dialogue and the dialogue is. How do I keep my people highly productive? And part of being

highly productive is not having road rage and exhaustion coming to the office. And it gives people an opportunity for a little more work-life balance.

And last but not least, I think one of the most important things, especially. People that are intellectual property. So whether it be an accountant, whether it be an engineer, whether it be marketing person that needs quiet time, often having that from a home office is equally valuable to not having the distractions of 10 people coming into them.

So I just think you're going to see hybrids going forward. There's a time to meet and there's the time to not meet. And I think you're going to see that by the way in sales too. I don't think people are going to be sending six salespeople to something when one or two can do.

Steve Sanduski: Yeah I think obviously the whole business travel is going to be up ended here and it'll be interesting to see the dynamics of what that's going to look like when things are fully open again.

Now, one of the things That I'm hearing as a common thread in your conversation today is this idea of really having what I would call some core principles or some core values. You mentioned the customer experience, you mentioned profitability for the shareholders. And so when we think about a tactical question, like, do we require that our team members come back into the office?

What I heard you say is you really go back to these core principles, these first principles, and that is going to inform how you make some of these tactical decisions. Is that fair?

Lew Jaffe: that works for me. I couldn't have said it better myself.

Steve Sanduski: All right. Excellent.

All right. Lusa as we get ready to wrap up here, I've got just a couple more things I want to touch on. So first is I always like to ask, is there anything else here that you want to share that we haven't talked about yet?

Lew Jaffe: I got to tell you, I think you will listen to it, a lot of great things. So I'm just going to go back to all businesses to the same gain and retain customers profitably in order to create shareholder value.

And if that's at the core, I think you can get everybody to align around that.

Steve Sanduski: Excellent. All right, well, let's jump into some rapid fire questions. Are you ready to jump on the hot seat here?

Lew Jaffe: I certainly hope so.

Steve Sanduski: All right. Well, we love talking about books here. We're big readers. We're lifelong learners here at CEO coaching international.

So what book would you say has greatly influenced you?

Lew Jaffe: I mentioned it earlier. Sacred cows make the best burgers by a guy named Robert Kriegel because it talks about these things like meetings are sacred cow and companies. We have all of these meetings and now we're having all these zoom meetings.

Do we really need to have all of them? We need to have some of them. Do we manage them the best way? So what are your sacred cows? And have you evolve them to make them more relevant for today? the book has a whole host of them, but then I've looked at the companies I've worked with after I read the book and I said, okay, wow, let's slaughter that cow.

Let's make it a better cow.

Steve Sanduski: Yep. Kind of the creative destruction idea, perhaps. Yeah, absolutely. Excellent. All right. How about a leadership trait that kills success?

Lew Jaffe: Lack of integrity. Integrity is everything because people do business with us because they know us. They trust us and they like us. If you have no integrity, nobody will like you and nobody will trust you.

And what they know, you're not going to like, integrity is at the center a hundred percent.

Steve Sanduski: So I imagine you're a competitive guy. So I'm curious, are you someone who is trying to be better than, or out-compete others or are you someone who really measures against yourself? And you're just trying to be the best version that you can be.

Lew Jaffe: Can I have option three? How do I help the people around me be better too, as well as surround myself with people that are better than me, because I know if I'm the dumbest guy at the table, we're going to have a raging success. So I think it's really important to help those around you. It's important to, absolutely compete with yourself, show up as your best self, as far as competing with other people.

Everybody has a genius. And so I try to elicit everybody's genius, as opposed to saying my genius is more valuable than your genius because everybody does something different and everybody does something really amazing.

Steve Sanduski: I love that. And that's the first time anybody has ever said, I need an option three.

So thinking outside of the box there

Lew Jaffe: every once in a while. Okay.

Steve Sanduski: All right. One final question I have here, we've talked a little bit about values. You've talked about some company values. How about for you? Do you have one or two or three core personal values?

Lew Jaffe: We led off with integrity. I think doing the right thing for the right reasons is a little different than integrity, but it's similar.

So I tried to do the right thing that's for me personally, and have this little logo that I use often, and it says how people experience you is your brand. And I think understanding the person on the other side of the table, And really trying to speak into their need will help both of us. make sure people have a great experience when they interact with you.

Steve Sanduski: Great. Well, I think that's a place to wrap up here. So Lou, I appreciate it. And for all of you listening here, you can get the show notes and all the other great episodes by going to CEO coaching international.com. So Lou again, congratulations on all the great success that you've had in your career and being a coach here at CEO coaching international.

Lew Jaffe: Thank you very much, Steve. This has been awesome.

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