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Teaching and learning strategy: Preparation time for speaking tasks

It has been said that the preparation time for a speaking task should be as long as the time allowed for the task itself. That means that if you have planned to have a role-play or business scenario (e.g. a simulated meeting) running for 20 minutes of class time, you should allow the students an additional 20 minutes of preparation time.

Although this may seem excessive to some, undoubtedly one of the reasons many students don't like, or even fear, role-plays is that they feel they have been thrown in at the deep end without adequate support. In a 'sink or swim' situation, lack of preparation time may result in the task sinking.

The more open the task, the more time students may need to prepare. Try negotiating the amount of preparation time with the students. If they know, for example, that they have ten minutes to ask questions and make notes, they are more likely to enter the task with enthusiasm and confidence.

The well-known mantra for holding a presentation (especially one in a foreign language) is 'prepare, prepare, prepare'. Why should it be any different for a role-play, scenario or even a discussion task?

Notes: this lesson plan can be used to follow on from, or introduce, another *Business Spotlight* lesson: Should networking sites be banned from work?
http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=60069&docid=550502

Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all the new and useful vocabulary they have learned during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

More on this topic

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics, go to the following lesson plans in the Business skills bank and the Business tasks series on onestopenglish:

Business skills bank: Problems with people
http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=60007&docid=148669

Business tasks: Talking
http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=59913&docid=157038

You can also listen to an interview about multigenerational workplaces on Business Spotlight Online:

Interview: Linda Duxbury
http://www.business-spotlight.de/podcasts/transcript/interview-linda-duxbury

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1 Warmer

Number these age groups in order from the oldest (1) to the youngest (4).

☐ baby boomers ☐ traditionalists ☐ millennials ☐ Generation Xers

Scan the first six paragraphs of the article to check your answers.

2 Key words

Before you read the article, match the key words (1-9) with the correct definition (a-j).

1. dependability	a. a small piece of equipment that uses new technology
2. to not be averse to something	b. in a harmonious way that is beneficial for everyone involved
3. gadget	c. the freedom to do things without other people watching you or knowing what you are doing
4. to embrace something	d. the act of always behaving in a reliable way and working in the way that people expect you to
5. cliché	e. things that you consider likely to be true even though no one has told you directly or you have no proof
6. compatibly	f. an action or idea that is predictable; a stereotype
7. micromanage	g. a plan or method for achieving something, especially over a long period of time
8. strategy	h. to like or enjoy something, especially something new or that other people think is bad or harmful
9. privacy	i. to control every part of a business or system in a way that is not necessary or useful
10. assumptions	j. to completely accept something, such as a new belief, idea or way of life

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by Margaret Davis

Many generations in one company: How do you reconcile different age groups in one workplace and keep everyone happy? Margaret Davis reports.

1 It's nine o'clock on Monday morning, time for the weekly project meeting in Joe's office. Joe, the grey-haired project leader, has a photo of his two children on his desk. The kids are parents themselves now, but the photo shows them as laughing children. Marjorie has brought her laptop to the meeting so she can take the minutes. Beth has brought a pen, paper – and cake. She is followed by Marty, the intern, who is listening to his iPod and reading text messages on his mobile phone.

2 Welcome to the modern workplace, where several generations meet, interact and communicate. So, who's who in this group?

■ **Joe**, 65, is a few months away from retirement. He is a member of the Veteran Generation (also known as "traditionalists"), born before 1946. This group believes in hard work, loyalty and dependability.

■ **Beth**, 55, is a baby boomer, part of the generation born between 1946 and 1964. Baby boomers grew up in good economic times and are used to seeing their demands met. They make up nearly 60% of today's labour market.

■ **Marjorie**, 41, is a Generation Xer, one of the group born between 1964 and 1981. Their job history has been marked by recessions in the early 1980s and 1990s. This made it difficult for them to find permanent jobs, so they changed frequently and many started their own businesses.

■ **Marty**, the 22-year-old intern, is a Gen Yer (also known as a "millennial" or a "nexus"), a member of the generation born after 1980. This group is comfortable working with new technology. They have been strongly affected by what they saw happening to their parents in the difficult job market of the 1990s.

3 All four have characteristics typical of their group. Joe has been with the company for more than 20 years. A loyal employee, he has worked hard to reach a position of responsibility, and he doesn't like change, as shown by the photo of his children on his desk. Beth is not so averse to change but prefers pen and paper to high tech gadgets, and she likes the personal touch of face-to-face meetings. Marjorie embraces technology, but has changed jobs frequently and is ready to leave at short notice if something better comes along. Marty is just out of university and has grown up with new technology. He thinks meetings are a waste of time – couldn't this have been done by email? – but is clever enough to keep his opinions to himself.

4 Clichés? Of course. No group corresponds exactly to these descriptions, but recognizing their existence may help you to understand and work more compatibly with your colleagues. And if you are a manager or supervisor, finding the right method of communicating with each group can reduce conflicts and misunderstandings.

5 If you are a manager in a multigenerational workplace, you should try to understand the interests of all the groups, according to Karl Kapp of Bloomsburg University in Pennsylvania. For example, baby-boomer bosses should play video games that are popular with staffers who come from Generation Y. "Understand that people like to be managed differently," Kapp says. "Gen Y wants a goal or an objective to reach but they do not want you to micromanage how to get there. They want their manager to be more of a strategy guide."

6 Employees should see the multigenerational workplace as a chance to learn from one another, suggests Ibn Newsome, senior manager for global marketing, strategy and insights at The Coca-Cola Company. "Everyone in their 50s needs a mentor in their 20s, and everyone in their 20s needs a mentor in their 50s," Newsome says.

7 It is important to adapt your communication style to the generation(s) you are trying to reach. Florida public-relations expert Marie Stempinski believes that, if you want to set up a meeting, you should use several different methods to contact people – voicemail, email and texting – rather than just one. Writing in the St. Petersburg Times, Stempinski quotes a Gen Yer: "Technology gives us wonderful, time-saving tools. I like to work as part of a team, but I'm not crazy about meetings. Skypeing and texting make sense. Yet, the Xers and boomers complain that I don't have the social skills I need."

8 Gen Y's ability to use new technology and to multitask is a big advantage, but employers may find it difficult to deal with their lack of company loyalty. "They want to have different experiences and learn skills they can transfer to other places," Californian diversity-training expert Simma Lieberman says. "So, they might work for an organization for a year, get trained and move on elsewhere," she told O&P BusinessNews website.

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9 Because they have grown up with social media such as Facebook and MySpace, Gen Yers have a different concept of privacy from baby boomers. "Privacy is an unknown concept in their normal lives, so, when Gen Y comes into the workforce, one of the challenges that you have to face is basically teaching them what is private and not private," says Ann Fishman, president of Generational Targeted Marketing in New York.

10 "There are miscommunications, misunderstandings and also assumptions people make about other generations and why they are doing what they do," says Lieberman. "These affect how people view each other, how people work together, and how much people trust each other." It is important to realize that no single group is right or wrong: each group has its own perspective, formed by its experience and environment.

Better communication

Don't assume that people in other generations think and behave the way you do. Barry Tolbert of the University of Phoenix, Cleveland Campus, has some tips on how to communicate with the different generations. Tolbert told the magazine Smart Business Cleveland:

- "For traditionalists, value their experiences. Appreciate what they've done. There is a wealth of knowledge there."
- "For baby boomers, show respect. Focus on relationships and results in your conversations with them."
- "For Xers, get to the point. Sometimes, they will get into 'what's-in-it-for-me?' mode. If that's the case, you may want to already have that question answered before you come to them."
- "For millennials, challenge them. Their minds are active 24/7 and they like to combine work and play. Ask their opinions; I guarantee they have them."

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3 Comprehension

Make notes to answer these questions about the article. Discuss your answers in class.

1. What do traditionalists think about responsibility and change?

_____

_____

2. How do Gen Yers' concepts of privacy differ to how members of the other groups feel about privacy?

_____

_____

3. Why might it be a good idea for baby-boomer managers to play video games?

_____

_____

4. Gen Yers are supposedly good at multi-tasking. Why might this be seen as a disadvantage by some companies?

_____

_____

5. Why have many Generation Xers started their own businesses?

_____

_____

6. Members of which groups are most likely to have had many jobs through the course of their working lives?

_____

_____

7. What do the different generations say about each others' social skills?

_____

_____

8. What does this quote mean? "Everyone in their 50s needs a mentor in their 20s, and everyone in their 20s needs a mentor in their 50s."

_____

_____

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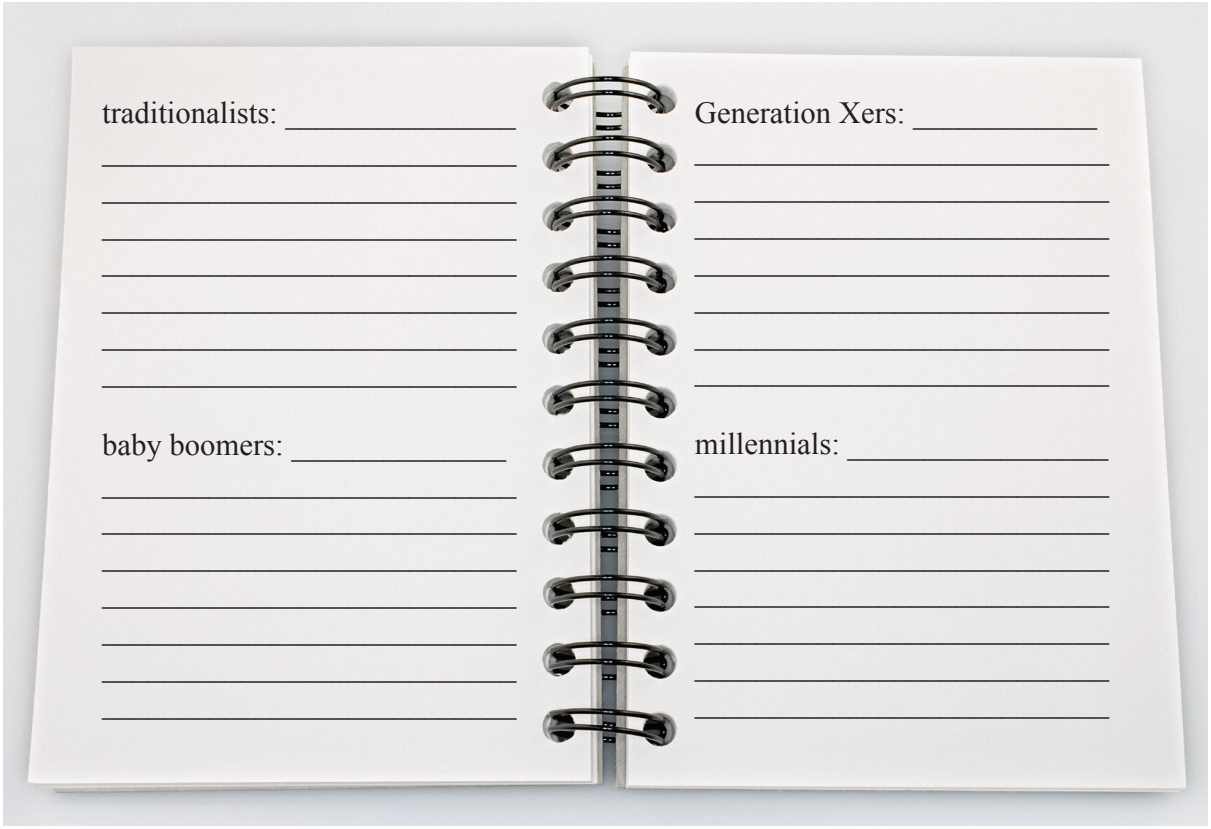
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Worksheet

4 Tips and advice

In the 'Better communication' section of the article, Barry Tolbert gives tips on how to deal with and react to members of each group.

Write more tips about working with each group which would help to produce an atmosphere at work that is harmonious and beneficial for all involved.



5 Discussion

Complete the sentence in the speech bubble for yourself.

Working in a multigenerational workplace is _____.

Then discuss these questions in groups.

- **Which age groups do your (immediate) colleagues belong to?**
- **Are there any difficulties with communication between age groups in your workplace?**
- **What are the advantages and disadvantages of working in a multigenerational workplace?**
- **Would you like to work in a more or less (age) diverse workplace?**

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Vocabulary record

Vocabulary record: All together now

verb	noun	adjective (+ opposite)	adverb (+ opposite)
assume			
	dependability		
		responsible	
			loyally

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