

Age versus Respect

*JR,
My biggest issue that I've had to deal with is how to get treated with respect from my more experienced colleagues- sometimes they have issues with me being so young and sometimes they have issues with me being a female. Thanks,
Krystyna B., Project Coordinator*

First and foremost: for those having trouble with you being a female, send them to me! Both of my business partners are female, and not because of some diversity program, but because they are the very best I could find at what they do.

Developing credibility, respect, and learning how to be taken seriously is critically important to your career. So how do you overcome youth on your path to success? Glad you asked Krystyna!

Today, more young people than ever before face your situation as consequence of the aging of the “Baby Boomers” combined with the rough economy that is delaying many individuals’ retirement plans. Let’s take a look at your situation.

Your first challenge is to understand what drives the people you are trying to persuade and influence. People today are struggling with unprecedented change and an increasing speed of business unlike anything seen in modern history. Globalization, rapidly changing technology, increasing expectations of customers and their demands, escalating demands from Wall Street and investors, and unreasonable stockholders all play a major role in today’s business environment. This creates stresses and challenges for young business people that can make your situation seem even more frustrating. If you can frame your ideas or your projects in a way that demonstrates how you will help others succeed at solving their problems, they will not only take you more seriously, they will welcome you with open arms!

One way to help you figure out the right approach is to ask yourself “What Keeps Them Awake at Night?” This is a critical question I learned some years ago. As a young middle manager, my boss and mentor once told me: “I am not the slightest bit interested in how to make your life easier until I know for certain you know what is keeping me awake at night and are working to solve that problem for me”. He was right! While I was focused on my problems, I lost sight of the fact I was there to make him/her look good.

Many young supervisors and managers struggle with “respect”. Respect is not given as a result of your title or position; it is earned through your performance! You earn respect through delivering on your commitments and exceeding others’ expectations of you. Only by consistently delivering strong results will others begin to develop more respect for you and begin to trust you to deliver. Respect is tough to build and can be destroyed in seconds!

Another aspect to consider is the way a person appears. This can also have a powerful impact on respect and credibility. There is a time and place for personal tastes and fashion. Dressing “outside the cultural norms” of any organization can make it much more difficult to be taken seriously. Think, act, and dress professionally and

you will be treated professionally.

Last, but certainly not least, you must learn to recognize the Three Levels of Resistance To Change:

Level One: I Don't Understand It!

Level Two: I Understand It...I don't LIKE it!

Level Three: I Understand It...I don't like YOU!

The First Level of Resistance you hit will be for reasonable reasons: a lack of information, data, or possibly better defined context. They will be looking for a way to help you or to better understand your idea.

The Second Level of Resistance is more difficult: they do not like the idea or project because something about it seems threatening or is viewed as challenging something they hold valuable. Perhaps it's their "turf", their power, or it may be their security! Whatever "it" is, your job will be to understand and address it.

The Third Level is the toughest: your approach has sparked an emotional, visceral reaction. Until you fully understand the reason and deal with it effectively, not only will they not support you, they will actively work against you and your project. I have found that this almost always requires a face-to-face meeting with frank and honest dialogue to understand and resolve their concerns.

No matter your age or your level of experience, we all have some degree of influence. It's what we do with it that makes the difference! How are you going to use ***your*** influence to create something of value today?

J. R. McGee

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