

Generations Apart: Bridging the Gap Between the Ages

At the International City/County Management Association Annual Convention in Montreal (Sept.2009), City Manager Ron Whitehead participated in a panel discussion on bridging the gap between the ages. Ron, Addison's city manager since 1982, gets energized by younger people in the organization. He says he learns more from them than they do from him. "Mentoring is not always top down," says Ron. "I have found that everyone loves to have a mentor no matter what age you are, and it doesn't have to be someone who is older or in a higher position." The panel developed the following tips for professionals of all ages.

Top 15 Tips for Professionals

For Young Professionals

1. Don't forget—you won't always be the youngest person in the room. Learn from those around you and pay it forward.
2. You have a responsibility to bring new ideas and ways of doing things to the top of the local government agenda. Be respectful, but be an active participant in the dialogue about innovation in the organization.
3. Technology is great, but this is still ultimately a relationship business. Everything cannot be solved with an email, text message or a tweet. It is important to connect with colleagues and citizens in person.

For Seasoned Professionals

4. Experience and tenure can cause seasoned professionals to discount the ideas of younger professionals. Listen more, and allow people to take some risk in implementing new ideas.
5. Value and reward the energy and enthusiasm that young people bring, and find ways to celebrate their successes.

On Mentoring

6. Mentoring needs to occur throughout one's career. Collect people who are important to you as you go along life's path, and make a conscious effort to nurture and protect those relationships.
7. Develop a mentoring relationship across generational lines—both parties have a lot to learn in this dialogue.

On Diversity

8. Diversity is a good thing—be it age, culture, ethnicity, etc. The more input you receive

from people who think differently, the better product you'll end up with.

9. Differences in age are often overcome by similarities in cultures, gender, interests, and life experiences. Look for these when you meet someone from a different generation as a bridging foundation—they have a much greater impact on values and views than age does.
10. We are very lucky to have so many generations at work at once—age differences link to our past and our future. With excellent health care and resources, this intergenerational mix will continue for the next decade.

On Knowledge and Wisdom

11. Realize that wisdom doesn't come with age, but with experiences, which can be valid and powerful at any age.
12. Know that IQ doesn't decline or increase with age. Accept that, and life will be easier for all of us.
13. Take the opportunity to leverage and learn all you can from those around you to build collective wisdom.

On Finding Balance

14. Make time for yourself no matter what your age.
15. Be happy where you are when you are there! Don't be so focused on the future that you do not enjoy the journey. You advance by being good at what you are doing right now. Don't neglect your present job, because you are focused on where you want to be ultimately.

Excerpted from a panel discussion at the International City/County Management Association Annual Convention, Montreal, September 11-16, 2009.