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MANAGING A MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE IN SENIOR LIVING (WITHOUT AGE BIAS)

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For the first time in our country's history, today's workforce consists of five generations working together. Millennials have overtaken the Baby Boomers and Generation X to become the dominant demographic of American labor. Meanwhile, members of the Silent Generation continue to play an important role in many workforces, while the youngest workers – Generation Z – are now entering the American workplace. Your senior or assisted living workforce is no exception.

While this creates an excellent opportunity for shared perspectives among workers, conflicts can arise between employees as differing generational personalities clash. Managers in assisted living have the unique challenge of developing tactics to effectively motivate and communicate with each generation, while avoiding stereotyping and age bias. Successfully meeting this challenge in senior living will hinge on how well you are able to grasp generational tendencies and engage each generation accordingly. Before tackling these challenges, let's meet the generations.

MEET THE GENERATIONS

According to a recent [Pew Research Center study](#), the "5G workforce" includes Traditionalists (or the Silent Generation), Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Each approach career paths differently.

For example, Baby Boomers are described as hard-working multitaskers who are valuable team players, while

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Chantell C. Foley

Partner

502.561.3969

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Millennials are generally considered to be the most tech-savvy and rely heavily on social media for professional growth. Millennials also account for most of the caregivers in assisted living facilities. Since this is one of the most critical positions, staffing and retention is vitally important.

With proper training, you can help to mesh the valuable contributions of each member of your multigenerational workforce. Your managers should also be aware of possible legal pitfalls that can result from managing such a generationally diverse workforce. This is especially true considering that age discrimination claims will likely increase as individuals remain in the workforce longer. With this in mind, a short refresher on the subject is in order.

WHAT IS AGE DISCRIMINATION?

The Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) is a federal law that prohibits discrimination against employees and job applicants who are 40 years of age or older. This law covers employers with 20 or more employees, employment agencies, government employers, and unions. Many states also have laws prohibiting discrimination based on age. Examples of age discrimination could include pressuring older employees to retire or making ageist comments and jokes.

WHAT ACTIONS CAN SENIOR LIVING PROVIDERS TAKE?

So what actions can you take to avoid or lessen the risk of age discrimination claims in assisted living facilities? Below are simple and practical things you can and should do.

- **Mitigate Age Biases In Recruitment and Company Image.** Be cognizant of implicit biases when advertising for positions in the assisted living workplace. Job postings that, for example, seek applicants with "1-5 years of experience" tend to be biased in favor of younger workers. Employers who need an entry-level person should, instead, simply describe the position as "entry-level."
- **Rethink Applicant Interviews.** Train interviewers to frame age-neutral questions. For example, ask questions that are related to the candidate's motivation, skills, education, and work experience. These include, "Have you had experience leading people?" or "We have a lot of face-to-face meetings, how do you feel about that?"

- **Job Training For Managers.** Train and educate managers about a multigenerational workforce's differing work styles to help managers adjust expectations and better communicate with their employees. For example, a Gen-X-manager who becomes frustrated with a Baby Boomer's resistance to use a smartphone may just assume the older employee is averse to technology. Such frustrations, based on stereotypes, could be viewed as a type of age discriminatory animus.
- **Develop Effective Retention Strategies.** You should include career counselling, training and development opportunities, length of service incentives, and mixed-age mentoring. Consider pairing older and younger workers so each may learn from the other's strengths and experiences.

Staffing and retention remain a top challenge for senior living providers in 2019 and will continue into the new year and beyond. It's important for your managers to understand generational differences to ensure that each generation of workers is engaged, while avoiding age bias. Bottom line: if you want your senior living facility to be as successful as possible, hire and retain the best talent that's out there, regardless of age.

For more information, contact the author at CFoley@fisherphillips.com or 502.561.3969.