

## Marsha Haygood, Career Coach: How To Work (And Succeed) Alongside A Younger Boss

---

**Q: I've recently reentered the workforce and I'm being asked to report to someone many years my junior. What advice do you have for working (and succeeding) alongside a boss that is younger and less experienced than I am?**

### **Be Open Minded**

Your scenario is not uncommon these days. With the amount of people who have been downsized and the number of people who have retired, the workforce is becoming a younger one. People who are either still working or have returned to the workforce are experiencing a very different workplace. There is now up to four generations coexisting in the workplace and every generation thinks and works a little differently.

If you are now going to report to a younger boss, you first need to get your head around any preconceived notions you may have about this situation and think if these ideas are going to serve you well.

Being confronted with a younger boss may prompt thoughts of "Why not me?" or "What do they know?"

If you begin the relationship thinking "I have more experience and I will need to teach this younger person how to do their job," you're already setting a tone for a possible confrontation or an experience that will not be a positive one.

However, if you view the experience with an open mind, aware of the fact that you might learn something new and that you might be able to share your skills and experiences in a positive way, it becomes a good team effort and can work out better in the long run.

### **Try To View The Situation From Both Sides**

If you're an older person heading back into the workforce, put yourself in your younger or less experienced boss' shoes. What preconceived notions are they going to have about an older person working for them? What are the things you have to do to demonstrate that their perceptions about you are not real? (Remember: They have fears, too.)

A younger person's perception is likely to be that you think you know everything, that you will be reluctant to listen and learn, that you are not flexible, that you are not very proficient with technology and that you are not going to be energetic.

If you are older, don't validate these perceptions. Shy away from talking about being tired, disliking social media and an unwillingness to change from how things have been done in the past. Instead show flexibility, discuss technology in an embracing way and try new ways of doing things.

The same rules apply to a younger person who hires someone who is older or who inherits a team that is more seasoned. It's important to think through any preconceived notions you may have and then let employees know what your expectations are.

For multiple generations to successfully coexist in the workplace, it is imperative to understand some of the challenges that may exist and look for ways that you can eliminate or at least minimize them.

### **Communicate In Their Language**

On a day to day basis, you may need to communicate with people of difference ages. Part of the solution means not making assumptions. Too often, we assume that people want to communicate the same way we do. However, it is no surprise that different generations communicate differently.

While some prefer face to face, others prefer phone, email or texting. The best way to avoid communication problems in the workplace is to pay attention to the corporate culture and to ask those you need to communicate with about their preferences.

The goal is to learn the expectations of your boss and those you will need to work with.

When you are open and adaptable and can focus on and demonstrate the value that you bring rather than the age of your boss and colleagues, you will be viewed as an asset no matter what your age.

The bottom line is that even if your younger boss doesn't have sufficient experience in your view, someone thought they brought value to the job and you will have a better work experience if you don't let their age or years of experience get in the way of you doing the job you were hired to do. It's a new day and there is always something that you can learn from others despite your age or theirs.

Remember that change is inevitable and this change may just be the kick in the butt that you need to get you out of a rut and learn something new. Rather than fight it, wrap your arms around it and enjoy the experience.

*Marsha Haygood, Author, Life Strategist, Empowerment Coach & Founder of [StepWise Associates LLC](#), a full-service Career and Personal Development consulting firm.*