



Where Have All Our Leaders Gone?

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Leaders are the heart and soul of our small towns and rural communities. Sometimes leaders are ‘formal’ – someone elected or appointed to an office or position, holding a title and some authority. Other leaders are ‘informal’ – those people who have no title, but a great deal of influence among friends and neighbors.

Whether running for city council election or running the local Rotary club, serving as a state association representative or serving spaghetti at a booster club dinner, community leaders lend their voice, time, and energy for the greater good. They are indispensable in helping our communities succeed. Yet lately, when you look around your community you may find yourself wondering, “Where have all our leaders gone?”

Where have all our leaders gone?

Our workplaces and industries are experiencing a wave of ‘Baby Boomers’ (today’s 50-to-70-year-olds) retiring in droves. This wave of retirement leaves an enormous void of knowledge, experience and leadership in

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Tip of the Month



5 Things Every Millennial Worker Should Know

There are many articles that promise Millennials the best way to get ahead in the workplace. Many come from non-Millennials who are proponents of that generation’s stigma. Here is a bit of advice from a Millennial to help young workers gain trust and respect of older workers.

1. **Make an impact by supporting, not destroying your team.** Start by establishing relationships with everyone in the office; co-workers, supervisors, even the person at the front desk. Take the time to find out what they’re working on, and how your skills may help them to accomplish their goals.
2. **Use technology to help your company’s objectives.** Instead of fuming

while senior leadership struggles to load a PowerPoint presentation, lend a hand. Also, e-commerce, cloud computing, and mobile technology are no longer frivolous options, but necessary tools for business. Use your Millennial tech-skills to support company objectives.

3. **Your idea is not always the holy grail of ideas.** Even though armed with an MBA and 4G connection, you may not have the most current and best information on how to shape a project. Seek collaborative input from peers and supervisors. While your plan may have seemed brilliant in the shower, it’s probably only the ground floor of where it could go.
4. **Never stop learning.** There are countless ways to develop professionally and they aren’t always online classes. Try partnering with associations, local

young professionals network, nonprofits, and even your local chamber.

5. **Wait!** Exercising patience may be hard because we have grown up in an instant-gratification world. Instead of being frustrated; enjoy the journey. The titles, money, corner office, and big home will come. Learn from those around you.

While Millennials will become the next generation of global leaders, we must negate the stereotypes that hinder us by acting contrary to them. In time, we’ll inherit all the responsibility we’re so desperately trying to gain now.

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“A ‘changing of the guard’ is a great opportunity to make our systems work more efficiently and effectively.”

its wake. Retirement often marks an exit not only from the world of work, but also from the world of community involvement.

Our boards, civic clubs and committees are seeing that retirement wave also carrying Baby Boomers from community leadership roles, too. As Baby Boomers retire from work and community roles, we find them passing the baton to the next group in line, often called ‘Generation X.’ Members of Generation X are the 30-to-50-somethings tasked with filling the shoes left by their Baby Boomer predecessors.

However, there are some stark differences between Baby Boomers and Generation Xers. This difference is causing many people to wonder, *“Why aren’t younger leaders stepping up?”*

Why aren’t younger leaders stepping up?

The most notable quality of the Baby Boomer generation is their attitude toward work and service. The adage “live to work” is often associated with Boomers; some might argue it was written FOR the Boomers. Baby Boomers and their live to work mindset committed to their industries, workplaces and communities in profound ways, often leaving time for little else.

If the Baby Boomers’ slogan is “live to work,” a phrase fitting to Generation X might be “work to live.” Gen Xers saw their Baby Boomer parents, bosses, and neighbors fill days, years and decades with work and sometimes, little else. They are letting that pendulum swing back as Gen Xers place greater focus on family, friends, recreation and outside-of-work pursuits.

Generation Xers are striving for, and often succeeding at, balance between work, family and community that Boomers found elusive. Baby Boomers lived to work, tallying up long lists of organizations, boards, clubs and committees to accompany full-time jobs. Generation Xers are working to live, creating a life that makes room for more than work, and being more selective in how they delegate time.

Instead of pointing a finger and wondering why younger leaders aren’t stepping up, we should first appreciate these different approaches toward life and leadership – not better or worse; just different. Then, we might be better served by asking, *“How can we help younger leaders take the leap?”*

How can we help younger leaders take the leap?

Both sides of this generational equation – our existing AND emerging leaders – have a responsibility to build and sustain leadership in our small towns and rural communities.



Here are some things to consider:

- *Existing leaders must have an open door, and an open mind.* If you are currently in a leadership role, look around your community for those who are respected, take initiative, and demonstrate informal leadership. Encourage that individual: extend an invitation to board or commission meetings, take him or her out for coffee and discussion, and offer to be a resource or mentor. Be positive in those interactions; you know leadership is often rigorous and demanding; focus also on the rewards you've received and things you've learned. They won't lead in the same way you did, so be open minded on what they will offer.
- *New or emerging leaders should focus on both possibility AND necessity.* I've never met someone who wants his or her communities to fail. Instead, almost everyone has ideas and hopes for how our communities can change and improve. Then, understand that no one else is responsible for assuring those ideas come to life except you. Investing time and energy into leadership is necessary to have a successful community future. Leaders before you stepped up and made sacrifices, because they understood it isn't up to someone else to make sure your community succeeds.
- *Together, consider ways to become more efficient and effective.* A 'changing of the guard' is a great opportunity to make our systems work more efficiently and effectively. Together, ask some hard questions about your board or organization: Can technology be used better, to reduce meetings and/or paperwork? Would a monthly instead of weekly meeting help with our dwindling attendance? Are we still meeting the needs of our citizens, or have we drifted off our target? People get involved and stay involved in organizations that are efficient, and effective.

