

## The Vermeer Podcast

### Episode 4 – Lead and Engage | Scaling for Change Across Generations

Dave Wisniewski:

Welcome back everyone. I'm Dave, Vice President of Commercialization at Vermeer and your host today. We continue our podcast series Scaling for Change Across Generations. If you've been following along with this series, you know we've covered a lot of great content. We've talked about what a generation is and what a generation is not. We looked at each of the generations and spent some time digging deep on Gen Z and what you need to know about this new generation, who shockingly is already up to age 24. The last episode on how to communicate with Gen Z was really great. Today, we'll hear again from our generational expert, Jason Dorsey. Jason's going to walk through how we can effectively manage and lead multiple generations. He has five strategies that he has seen work with his clients, and he'll be sharing them with us today.

Take it away, Jason.

Jason Dorsey:

Hello everyone. It's Jason Dorsey. I'm so fired up to be back with you today for the fourth podcast in our series. And I want to give another shout out and a thank you to Vermeer for making this possible. Thank you for that very kind introduction. And thank you for making this entire series available to everyone. I think it's never been more important to understand how different generations are experiencing COVID and most importantly, how can you as a leader, best engage, lead, motivate through this time and in the post COVID-19 period. That's what we're going to talk about today.

Today's going to be a little bit different. The previous podcasts we've really focused on understanding what a generation is, what a generation is not. Remember, we talked about the generations and our view here at the Center for Generational Kinetics. We view generations as clues and not a box, but they're incredibly powerful, predictive and helpful clues to help you faster connect with, lead and drive influence for those who are older, younger, and even the same generation that you're in. Then we did a deep dive into Gen Z. This is that fast emerging generation that's already up to age 24 years old. It's really amazing to know that those 24 year olds in our research do not remember September the 11th. As you may recall from podcast number two, where we talked about each of the generations, Gen Z's defining moment was not 9/11. That was Millennials, Gen Z's defining moment is actually this COVID pandemic. And hopefully the recovery that happens afterwards and rapidly. We'll see how that goes.

So in our time today, we need to talk about the reality of being a leader in this time of stress and uncertainty. And how do you lead across multiple generations. Here at CGK, we've been doing a lot of work to study this and understand what can leaders do and what can leaders do when you're in a large company, a large enterprise, or even a smaller enterprise, whether or not you're an executive there or you're in a frontline management role. And that's what I want to talk about.

What are the specific things that you need to know and do in order to be able to lead, motivate, and drive influence across each of the generations. I'm going to share five things with you that we see work right now. And we see this in a very diverse set of companies that we get to work with and a diverse set of leaders, which I believe is the right approach to this because one size does not fit all when it comes to leadership. You and I know that. It just does not work. You can't just pick one thing and assume it's going to work with everybody. Increasingly we see that does not work.

So what we're looking for are principles and strategies that you can then customize to fit your exact situation, your strengths, the rules, regulations, and frankly, the physical geography sometimes of what you're able to do within your organization. And so we're going to share five things today that I've seen work very, very well in all types of different organizations. And I believe that these will be great for you, that you can be able to move forward and implement these right away. I know most people just listen to a podcast, but if you want to take notes, this is where you want to bust out that pen and take some notes. I know we have lots of great things that you can download on the Vermeer website to go with each of these as resources. So feel free to do that as well. Whatever works best for you. I'm a Millennial and I'm all about you find out the best way to learn and put it into action.

So here we go. What are the five things that you can do across generations to really lead multiple generations at the same time, both through this pandemic and post pandemic.

Number one, the first thing that we're seeing, we're seeing this in our executive briefings, we're seeing this in our research, is every generation needs to be reminded of the North Star for your organization. And what I mean by that is in tough, challenging, stressful times, it's very easy to go into a defensive mode. And for many of us, we had to do that. There was no choice. You had to go into a defensive mode, whether that was conserving cash or having to make tough personnel decisions.

But at some point we got to move out of that and move into that forward facing role of how do we start to play offense? How do we move forward? And one of the things that we see that's most important, if not the most important is clarity on that new vision, clarity on what you're driving towards. Because what we find is when we interview different generations in the same organization, they often feel that that North Star has changed because there's been this time of stress, turmoil and uncertainty. And so whatever that North Star is for you, you have to message it very clearly, very consistently. Remind people of what you are driving towards, remind people of what you are moving towards, remind people of why you're all in this together and what you're seeking to achieve, the problems you're solving, and how you're making the world a better place. This is so incredibly important. And all too often, it does not happen.

We sort of push us to the wayside as we're in triage mode. And the reality is people need to be reminded of that North Star and they need to hear from you and they need to hear from you that this is absolutely what you're pushing forward towards. So that's number one, remind everybody of their North Star. By the way, one of the best ways to do this is through video.

Number two, you need to clarify your non-negotiables. In times of stress and uncertainty, people think it's okay to cut corners. And it's very important that you, as a leader, remind everybody of your non-negotiable. Those are your values, those are your ethics, those are the unwavering things you absolutely will not deviate from. People are in a work from home mode or part time work from home mode and all these different things. You have to remind everybody that these are your non-negotiables. Under no uncertain terms would you violate these. And that's incredibly important here because it lets people also know that you stand up for what you believe is right. Whether that's how you serve employees, how you serve customers, the impact you're having in the world, you must make note of those non-negotiables absolutely clear. Remind people what is off the table. These are things that you will not do under any certain terms. And this is sort of the DNA, if you will, of decision making. Because when people know what the non-negotiables are, it makes it very straight forward to make decisions whether or not you're in a group or on a team at that time.

So number two, remind people, clarify your non-negotiables so that those are very well understood and everybody knows, "Okay, this is the rule when we go to make decisions."

Number three, this one we saw it really changed during the time of COVID. And we believe this is going to stick and continue post-COVID. And that is people want increased frequency of information and frequency of alignment across generations. And that's because many of us have moved to work from home or working remotely or work these staggered shifts, or just working in ways, in work styles that we did not anticipate that we would be doing. And when that happens, people get out of a rhythm. They get out of a cadence, they get out of alignment and that creates all kinds of issues for leaders because then you end up with bottlenecks. You end up with all these inefficiencies, you end up with somebody working really hard and the other person not working at all because they don't feel like they can get anything done because they don't know what they're supposed to do.

So what do we see work best in times like this and we believe coming out of this? Frequency of communication is going to become real important. Does that mean you need to talk every hour on the hour? Absolutely not. But what we do see works is three to five minutes every morning and three to five minutes every afternoon where people share. For example, in the morning, we did this at our company. What's the one thing that we are absolutely going to achieve today. And every employee in the company shares that. It's really fast. And then the second thing we talk about, are we stuck? Are there any stucks? Are there any bottlenecks, something going on that we're waiting on, that we need somebody else in order to get through, in order for us to be able to do our jobs? Many times people are surprised. They didn't know that something that they were working on is a holding up somebody else. Let them know that because then other team members can step in and help.

And then at the end of the day, we always recap sort of what we did or we're focused on, the gains that we made so people feel like they're making gains, especially in work from home, helps people to feel like they're all moving forward. And then we're able to reset it on a positive note and then move forward into the next day. So whatever that frequency is for you, it could be technology like Slack. It could be sending out text messages, it could be using Zoom. It could just be a regular conference call, but the idea is people need to be aligned. At the very least, managers and supervisors need to have more frequent communication with their team members during this time. And this is true by the way of every single generation. Every single generation we're seeing this. So frequency very, very important.

Number four, this one is really sort of a thought experiment, but it works really well. And that is in times like this, it can be important to revisit your incentives and whatever it is, your motivational tactics. And what I mean by that is if you're offering people gift cards to the movie for getting extra sales, well gift cards to movie theater right now may not be the right thing. There may be something that's much more motivating, more meaningful, and frankly, more practical that we should be offering. So it's important to step back and look at all your sales and performance incentives and see do they align with people's priorities today? And that could be tactical like finding the right type of gift card or whatever the incentives are all the way to different types of engagement.

Maybe you used to do a monthly meeting and recognize people, and now you need to be able to do a monthly Zoom and recognize people. But don't stop recognizing people just because you're not physically in the same room every month. So revisit those motivations, revisit whatever those incentives are that you're using because what may have been a fantastic motivator in the past or incentive in the past, may be not only tone deaf right now, may not work at all, or certainly in the way that you expect. So take the time to revisit those and find out what will work best now. And I always say, if you're not sure what's going to motivate people, ask them. People will share this with you.

We do lots of employees studies. And when we ask them, what's the top motivator, it's pretty amazing to see how different they are by generation and even sometimes by employee. Some people want a little more freedom in their schedule. Other people would like some type of cash bonus. Other people want recognition. When you know that, then you will be most effective in what you do as a leader to motivate them because you can do what you know works.

And the last one, we think this is going to be incredibly important coming out of this pandemic and in whatever the new normal looks like a new reality afterwards. And that is you want to engage everyone in innovation. Every single generation needs to be engaged in innovation. Right now in these times of stress and challenge, people are innovating in so many different ways. We're seeing this all around the world and you as a leader, this is your opportunity to engage every single person in that innovation process. Every single person brings diversity of thought and diversity of perspective. That's what you need to drive innovation today. And that's what's going to help the companies that come out of this strong with momentum and in a good trajectory and direction.

So it's very important to engage every generation in innovation today. Put the titles aside, put tenure aside, let people innovate with you. That is what will help you to lead, motivate and engage across every single generation.

So quick recap on those, make sure you're crystal clear on that North Star and let everybody know exactly what that is. Reinforce and clarify what those non-negotiables are. People need to hear that. Number three, drive that frequency of communication. Number four, review incentives and make sure that they're actually aligned with the reality today. And then number five, engage every single generation in innovation.

My name is Jason Dorsey. It has been incredible honor to be with you today on this podcast. Thanks again to Vermeer for making this possible. And I look forward to seeing you on the next podcast.

Dave Wisniewski:

Jason, thanks for sharing those five strategies with us. We hope you'll be able to take these strategies and apply them to your business. Join us next week as we wrap up the series with what you should be doing now and in the future now that you understand generational behaviors. Also, if you've missed an episode, you can find them all at [vermeer.com/podcasts](http://vermeer.com/podcasts). We look forward to seeing you next week.