Case Study 1: Registration for Music Lessons

It's about to reach the time of year for music lesson registration at an understaffed nonprofit organization. A group of people, including the marketing director, registrar, and education manager have collaborated to create a new system for registrations, instead of printing out costly forms and sending out packets for each lesson (which involves duplicates for family members and students who take more than one lesson). The team believes they can create an online registration system that will save time for multiple team members at the organization, as well as save money despite the initial outset of staff time to create it. It just so happens that these team members would be categorized as "millennials."

Some older members of the staff (who happen to be Boomers), have concerns. There are a few who don't understand the process. They question whether the education team is digitizing processes simply for the sake of digitizing them. Others are worried about the added time spent learning the new system would take them away from other work; or that it would be difficult for them to use correctly. Just because the current system is redundant for music school parents, they reasoned, it worked fine! Why fix what wasn't broken?

After sitting together and having an open, honest conversation, the groups begin to understand each other's perspectives. When the Boomers ask "If we don't have paper forms, do I lose my job?" the millennials respond with a previously-thought-out answer: "No, in fact, there's plenty of work to be done!" The millennial team explains to the Boomer team that the changes are being made for the "right" reasons and with good intentions. The groups agree that with deeper communication, trust, and training, this is the best way for the organization to move forward.

Questions to consider:

- Where did the breakdown in communication occur?
- What would have happened if the groups hadn't sat down together to discuss their perspectives?
- Have you encountered something like this in the workplace before?
- Would this story look or feel differently if the generations hadn't been mentioned, or if the groups represented different age groups than listed?

Case Study 2: Corporate Ladder Contention

Tim has been working at a mid-size company for a few years, since he graduated from college. He was excited to land this good job; he was at the bottom of the ladder, but the role had potential for him to move up over time. He's built good relationships with his colleagues and grown in his role through professional development opportunities.

Recently, Tim received a job offer from a startup in the same town, and he's seriously considering it as his next career move. His colleagues, who happen to be a mix of Generation X and Boomers, feel that Tim would be making a mistake to do so. They feel that he's considering abandoning them – after all they've invested in his growth and development! Why would he leave a job that gives him a chance at stability, growth, and benefits?

Previously, they had hired another millennial (Sam) who, after a few years, decided to leave his similarly stable post on the corporate ladder to travel the world for a year. Some were astonished that he expected to return to his job upon completion of his journey. Others were disappointed when, despite his promises, he decided to work for a competitor after the year.

Tim assures his peers that he doesn't wish to hurt their relationships, but that the opportunity seems "too good to pass up." Despite the volatile startup world, he reasons, now is the best time for him to explore the field, and that if he wants to move up in his position, the best way to do so would be at this new company. His coworkers are stunned – not only was that not an option for them when they were at that point in their careers, but their choices were right for them at the time. Why does Tim want to change the status quo?

Questions to consider:

- How do notions of the "corporate ladder" vs. the "corporate lattice" play out here?
- If the age of retirement is getting older, what does that mean for younger workers who want to climb a ladder where there is less room at the top, where more and more workers are staying longer?
- What questions do you have for Tim? What questions do you have for Sam?
- Have you encountered something like this in the workplace before?
- Would this story look or feel differently if the generations hadn't been mentioned, or if the characters represented different age groups than listed?