



Sticking Points

How to Get Four Generations Working Together in the 12 Places They Come Apart

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

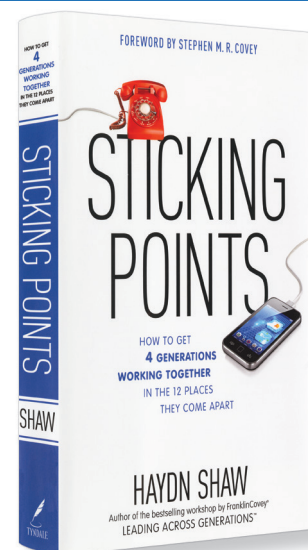
Leaders and companies face a new challenge: For the first time in history, there are four generations in the workplace: Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and Millennials. Anywhere people get together, the “ghost stories,” or histories, of the different generations impact the way they think. Generational tensions are inevitable, but they don’t have to leave you stuck.

Sticking Points is a practical resource for those people who need a guide to generational differences. In this up-to-date, readable guide, popular speaker and consultant Haydn Shaw offers valuable comparisons and a clear five-step plan for how to get the four generations working together in the 12 places they tend to come apart. When we understand why another generation thinks the way they do, we are much more likely to appreciate their differences and speak their language. We are much more likely to “stick together.”

Let *Sticking Points* show you how to lead in today’s uniquely rewarding and challenging organizations.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- To understand how different generations think.
- A five-step plan for leading rather than managing generational differences.
- Ways to apply this five-step plan to each of the 12 generational sticking points.
- Answers to the most common questions asked about generational differences.



by Haydn Shaw

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: STICKING POINTS

by Haydn Shaw

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Sticking Points: How to Get 4 Generations Working Together in the 12 Places They Come Apart by Haydn Shaw.

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Sticking Together or Coming Apart

Generational friction is inevitable today. Sticking points are inevitable, and they often get teams and families stuck. But they don't have to. The same generational conflicts that get teams stuck can cause teams to stick together.

Stuck in the past or sticking together going forward: It's a matter of turning a potential liability into an asset.

The most common complaint I hear from frustrated people in all four generations is "They don't get it." "They," of course, means a boss, coworker or family member from a different generation who the speaker believes is the cause of the problem. And in my experience, "it" usually refers to one of the following 12 sticking points — places where teams get stuck: communication, decision making, dress code, feedback, fun at work, knowledge transfer, loyalty, meetings, policies, respect, training and work ethic.

"They don't get it" is usually a sign that a sticking point is pulling the team apart. Each generation attempts to maneuver the others into seeing the sticking point their own way. And that's the first mistake — viewing a sticking point as a problem to be solved rather than as an opportunity to be leveraged. The irony is that when we say another generation doesn't get it, we don't get it either.

Once we get it, we realize that these sticking points are more than intergenerational differences. They are catalysts for deeper understanding and appreciation that can make teams stronger and better balanced. Sticking points can make things worse or better depending on whether the four generations can work together in the 12 places they naturally tend to come apart. ●

Blue Screen of Death: The Difficulty of Leading Four Generations

When there were only three generations, the time-proven process of "wait your turn" worked. But now we have four generations. "Wait your turn" is history because people live longer. Life expectancy was 47 years in 1900. Today, most people are just getting warmed up at 47. Second, there has been a huge acceleration in the speed of information, resulting in generations developing much more quickly and younger generations contributing significantly at earlier ages in knowledge-worker jobs. And finally, the "wait your turn" approach no longer works because we raised the last three generations as consumers. They were taught to question authority, shop for the best deal, and expect to be entertained.

Even if the people on your team came from the same town and attended the same schools, they did not grow up in the same place. The 1924 town that Traditionalists grew up in was very different from the one their grandkids experienced in 1984. If we miss that, we get frustrated and wonder what is wrong with others for not responding like we do. Frustrations lead to stereotyping. Once we begin talking in stereotypes, conflicts get worse.

Leadership starts with understanding, no matter what generational differences we face. Leadership is understanding other generations and how the world looks from their point of view, learning how to solve problems with them without first trying to "fix" them. It's not that hard to move from management to leadership; it means understanding five steps for leading through differences. ●



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Getting Unstuck: Five Steps for Leading Through the 12 Generational Sticking Points

Having four generations at work causes scores of conflicts every day, but 12 sticking points come up most often:

1. Communication: What is the best way to interact with my coworkers?
2. Decision making: How do we decide what to do?
3. Dress code: How casually can I dress?
4. Feedback: How often and in what ways do I want input?
5. Fun: How much fun at work is allowed?
6. Knowledge transfer: How do we pass on critical knowledge to new employees?
7. Loyalty: When is it okay to move on?
8. Meetings: What should happen in our meetings?
9. Policies: Are policies rules or guidelines?
10. Respect: How do I get others to respect me?
11. Training: How do I learn best?
12. Work ethic: How many hours are required, and when must I work them?

Knowing what the 12 sticking points are isn't the same thing as knowing what to do about them. Having a process makes all the difference. Whoever your are, whatever your role, you can help your colleagues work through generational differences by using the five steps.

Here are the five steps for leading through the sticking points the four generations encounter:

STEP 1. Acknowledge: Talk about generational differences. Competitive advantage goes to the team that can bring differences and frustrations into the open where they can be resolved.

STEP 2. Appreciate: Focus on the “why,” not the “what,” and the common needs. Appreciating other generations keeps generations talking instead of fighting. Emphasizing the common needs early on redirects the goal from “fixing” another generation to resolving the sticking point. Appreciating common needs settles down the emotions so we can start talking about the whys.

STEP 3. Flex: Agree on how to accommodate different approaches. Once people acknowledge and appreciate their differences, they can decide how to flex for each generation. When it comes to generational sticking points, the hardest thing for many people is separating their preferences from the needs of the organization. Clear defini-

tions can protect your team from generational preferences masquerading as business policies.

STEP 4. Leverage: Maximize the strengths of each generation. At best, cutting a deal produces a compromise, but maximizing differences produces leverage. Leveraging generational differences so that one person's strength makes up for another's weakness provides a large impact from a small team. Leveraging the strengths of each generation builds a better team.

STEP 5. Resolve: Determine what option will yield the best results when flexing isn't enough. If there are four generations in the workplace, you can't rotate a policy every four weeks in order to please each generation. Therefore, when flexing isn't enough, we have to resolve the issue. You will ultimately have to decide how you will move forward in those situations where everyone's preferences can't be accommodated. ●

PART ONE: GHOST STORIES: UNDERSTANDING THE FOUR GENERATIONS

Telling Ghost Stories

Historical events are like ghosts because their impact lingers long after the events are over. Each generation has its own historical ghost stories, especially the “I remember what I was doing when...” moments. We don't fully appreciate another person until we understand his or her ghost stories. In the same way, we won't appreciate another generation until we understand their ghost stories. The historical events during a generation's childhood years shape their values, worldview and definitions of success. Their shared experiences are what distinguish them as a generation in the first place. Telling ghost stories helps get four generations working together in the 12 places they come apart.

Traditionalists: Born Before 1945 **The Four Biggest Ghost Stories**

Ghost Story #1: The Great Depression. With little welfare and no Social Security, millions of people barely fed their families despite sacrifice and hard work. Traditionalists became more economically conservative, and that spread to other areas of life. They learned to sacrifice and show patience.

Ghost Story #2: World War II. World War II united the country like no other war. Sacrificing individuality for the cause was the norm, and complaining was the exception. World War II proved that large, hierarchical organizations could get things done. World War II introduced

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large numbers of women to mission-critical jobs outside the home. Authority figures at home were not questioned because the threat overseas was far more terrifying.

Ghost Story #3: The Move from Farm to City.

The transition from an agricultural to an industrial workforce accelerated after World War II. At the beginning of the 20th century, two-thirds of the United States and Canada lived on farms or in rural towns. By 1970, almost three-quarters lived in the city and suburbs. Farm life was significantly different because it made it easier to instill work ethic; it provided meaningful adult roles at a much earlier age; it made it harder to commit crimes; and it was driven by the sun, not the electron.

Ghost Story #4: Mass Marketing and Confidence in Experts.

Radio changed things for the Traditionalists. It became their link to the broader world and created the voice of “the expert.” The golden age of radio (1920s-1940s) was also the golden age of mass marketing. Each radio show was sponsored by a single company. The stars of that show plugged the sponsor’s products, creating powerhouse brands. Traditionalists valued the guidance of experts. Traditionalists ended their childhoods trusting in experts, confident in their leaders, and tuned in to mass advertising.

Baby Boomers: Born 1946-1964

The Four Biggest Ghost Stories

Ghost Story #1: The Boom of Babies. Never before in history were so many babies born so quickly. The Baby Boomers were taught that you have to compete to get what you want. Baby Boomers come across as domineering because they are used to being the center of attention.

Ghost Story #2: Affluence. Boomers grew up in one of the most economically optimistic times in history. Affluence strengthened the Boomer focus on self because parents no longer needed to have lots of children to support the farm.

Ghost Story #3: Television. For the first time, television allowed the entire country to see the same thing at the same time. And when the “thing” was Kennedy’s funeral or the first moon landing — powerfully emotional events — the nation shared common experiences as never before.

Ghost Story #4: The Generation Gap. Teenage Baby Boomers questioned their elders’ beliefs, listened to rock and roll, grew their hair long, and tried to spend all of their time with friends, embarrassed to be seen with their parents. The generation gap signaled a massive shift in values far more important than the music, tie-dye or protests that usually get the focus. The “Me” generation had

the money, time and freedom to explore self and search for meaning.

Generation X: Born 1965-1980

The Four Biggest Ghost Stories

Ghost Story #1: Squished. Numerically, Gen Xers are 25 percent smaller than the huge generations of Boomers that preceded them and Millennials that followed them. Marketers and the entertainment industry pay less attention to them, and they have less political clout. Being squished also meant they could forget about working their way up quickly, because they were stuck behind the Boomers. Boomers moved up twice as fast as Xers in their early years as the postwar economy expanded. Organizations also eliminated layers of middle managers just as Xers came along.

Ghost Story #2: Divorce. The first half of Generation X watched divorce become commonplace during their childhood. Between 1960 and 1982, the rate of divorce nearly tripled and then leveled off. The rocket rise of divorce left many Xers feeling alone. They turned to friends to find a family. This affected all Xers, even if their parents stayed married because they read about it in stories at school, watched it on TV, and listened to adults whisper about “another couple splitting up.”

Ghost Story #3: Downward Mobility. The confidence in the economy went bust for the Xers. It was now clear to everyone that lifetime employment and job security were history. Generation X missed the almost magical economic growth that made the Boomers so optimistic. What it did not miss was the growth in prices. In addition to being squished for jobs and housing, Gen Xers saw college expenses quadruple while grants and aid were slashed.

Ghost Story #4: Parody. Parody creates a poor imitation of something serious in order to make light of it and expose its perceived flaws. Access to information creates parody, as does skepticism — and the Xers have both. Generation X was the first to question and verify the backstory behind the news on their computers; they knew that news is always shaded by someone’s perspective. They learned that you can’t believe everything you are told. Gen Xers are skeptical of organizations. At work, they may trust their managers, but they wonder about their companies. They want organizations to quit spinning the facts and “get real.”

Millennials: Born 1981-2001

The Six Biggest Ghost Stories

Ghost Story #1: Heavy Parental Involvement. The Millennials were a “wanted” generation. There were half

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as many children per family in this second Baby Boom, but far more women gave birth. Safety became an increasing concern during this time, with parents reluctant to tell their children to “go outside and play until it was dark” like their parents did. Parents became their children’s activity directors, arranging play dates, driving their kids to activities, and staying involved even when they went off to college. They stay involved in their children’s work lives, too. This is not just a case of overprotective parents — Millennials and their parents have a mutual affection and admiration. Millennials want their parents involved in their lives.

Ghost Story #2: Fear of Low Self-Esteem. Millennials are confident. Their parents and teachers convinced them they are special, and they believe it. Also, while they had less freedom to be outdoors without parental supervision, they had more freedom to disagree with their parents and to express their feelings. They have the confidence to speak up even if they’ve only been on a project for a few days.

Ghost Story #3: The Consumer Age. The Millennials were raised as consumers. Their parents could offer them choices previous generations never had. That’s taught them to ask for what they want and look someplace else if you can’t give it to them. This often gets interpreted as an entitlement mentality. However, there are two halves to this generation. The first half grew up in a strong economy with available jobs, so they could be picky because there were plenty available. The second half has struggled in an economy with unemployment at record-high levels. Millennials are facing increasing college costs, a difficult job market and lower wages.

Ghost Story #4: September 11, 2001. Traditionalists and Baby Boomers believed in delayed gratification — work hard today and get rewarded tomorrow. But these young adults have grown up knowing that tomorrow may never come. September 11, 2001 shaped Millennial culture in at least two ways. First, they have learned not to wait until tomorrow to do something important. Second, they have a strong impulse to keep work and life in balance. They see no reason to sacrifice everything today for a future reward that may never come.

Ghost Story #5: Technology Everywhere. Millennials are the first generation to grow up digital. Millennials spend more than 53 hours a week with media because they use more than one kind at the same time. Millennials love technology because it makes them important to the older generations; it gives them freedom; it shrinks and expands their world; and it gathers them into tribes.

Ghost Story #6: Emerging Adulthood. Some Millennials take longer to figure out what they want to do than members of the older two generations did. There are many reasons emerging adulthood is more obvious today, but the biggest one is that we don’t believe a person is an adult until around 26. Remarkably, twentysomethings agree, thinking it takes that long to figure out what they want to do, commit to a long-term love relationship, and have enough saved up for their own place. ●

PART TWO: STICKING POINTS: HOW TO GET FOUR GENERATIONS WORKING TOGETHER IN THE 12 PLACES THEY COME APART

Decoding the Generations

If the four generations will acknowledge the 12 sticking points and work through them as a team, they will find themselves liberated to become a team with a unified vision instead of a group with different agendas. But to lead through the sticking points, you must be able to decode what the generations mean — and don’t mean. Use the five-step process (acknowledge, appreciate, flex, leverage and resolve) to lead through the following generational sticking points with your team.

Communication

Communication is one of the easier sticking points to get out on the table because people already speak openly about new technology and the differences in the way the generations communicate. When one generation says that another generation’s preferred method of communication isn’t as effective as theirs, things can get tense. Differences with communication etiquette get people even more upset. How much you should flex is based on business necessities and generational preferences. Here are some things to remember:

The older generations will need to flex with more technology, and sometimes younger generations need to go “old school.”

Acknowledge that every generation has its own communication preferences, which all have strengths and weaknesses.

Etiquette guidelines should be clearly established, because people say things online that they would not say in person or even in an e-mail. What employees say can impact the organization.

We can all increase our proficiency with the different communication preferences of the people we work with, live with or serve.

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Decision Making

The six most common ways decisions are made are as follows: 1) The boss decides; 2) The boss asks all employees for input and then decides; 3) The boss asks more tenured employees for input and then decides; 4) The boss and a few employees meet and decide; 5) The savviest person on the topic decides; 6) The team talks it over and comes to a consensus or clear majority. If not, the boss or savviest person decides.

Older generations are used to decisions coming down from the top, while younger generations are more comfortable with a flexible approach, usually deferring to the person most knowledgeable or savvy on the given topic. Each of the approaches has its place, but numbers 2, 5 and 6 better fit a global, information-driven economy.

The generational differences can help your organization become more effective by pushing employees to pick the best decision-making process for each situation rather than staying ingrained in their standbys.

Dress Code

Any dress code conversation must begin with acknowledging that the four generations give four different answers to the question of which clothes communicate the professional image you want for your organization. But it's also helpful to remind people that all generations want the same things: to be comfortable, attractive and to be taken seriously.

The different generations help one another by being translators who can help decode what clothing means to each generation. Older generations can help younger generations understand that clothing sends a message to other generations, even if that message is unconscious and unintended. Older generations also need to understand when clothes have no message other than what is now the style for an age group. Let the generations help one another understand the messages that are being received.

Feedback

Millennials grew up with constant feedback, so they expect that in the workplace. But all generations report that they want more feedback but aren't getting it. If the Millennials' push for greater feedback helps us all get more of it, then they, like a lever, will lift everyone's performance.

Your organization can dramatically increase that leverage if your people start asking one another for feedback, because they will be tapping into the wisdom of all the generations. Get your team to talk about what they want

and new ways to provide it. Then, the five-step process will transform generational tensions into a competitive advantage.

Fun at Work

The Millennials value fun more highly than other generations, but every generation wants to find enjoyment in their work. You have to ask your team what could make things more fun. It's also important to come to a resolution, an agreement as to when people can have fun as long as they get their work done. Clarifying the policy and sharing your intentions will ease generational tensions.

Just realize that the Millennials won't "grow out of it" if that means separating work from fun or personal life from work life. Technology allows them to blend these aspects of their lives. It's a 24/7 work world, and they know they have to take fun when they can get it.

Knowledge Transfer

It's a business necessity that we have the knowledge we need and that we eventually transfer it to the next generation. Because it's foundational, we need Step 5, Resolve, for this sticking point. When you understand each generation's preference regarding knowledge transfer, you can find the process that works for you.

Traditionalists and Baby Boomers need to acknowledge that Gen Xers and Millennials are comfortable with technology and would rather learn at their own pace, using high-tech methods rather than the observational and oral methods of their predecessors. Huge companies can use video (and other web-based technologies like podcasts and online discussions) to speed communication and increase knowledge transfer.

Loyalty

Getting unstuck around loyalty has two parts. First, we have to help the generations get a clear definition of loyalty that fits current economic and work realities. If we don't, older generations will always think younger generations have a moral defect because they're not as loyal as the older generations, and the younger generations will think the older generations don't understand the new economy.

Second, we must shift our energy away from criticizing other generations and towards discovering ways to make our organizations better so all generations want to stay longer. Loyalty is one of the sticking points that requires step 5, resolution. Here are five ideas that will help your organization resolve this issue:

- Remember that loyalty is the by-product of everything you do.

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- Gather a cross-generational group, and let them bring you ideas.
- Quit measuring yourself by Boomer-era standards. There will be more turnover.
- Millennials get bored easily and need new challenges.
- Make sure employees know what opportunities you have internally because new jobs are only a screen away.

Meetings

Acknowledge that the four generations view meetings differently:

Traditionalists met infrequently, and the boss did most of the talking.

Baby Boomers held meetings to gather information, and they created new political opportunities for everyone.

Gen Xers will multitask if meetings are not relevant or do not keep moving. They would rather do some of it electronically.

Millennials think meetings are okay, but don't want to be bored. They want meetings to be interactive and may interrupt.

Put this sticking point on your next meeting's agenda, acknowledging that each generation can improve meetings. Traditionalists are a stabilizing force, because they've faced many of the challenges that make people emotional in meetings. Boomers bring process and remind us of the value of face-to-face meetings. Xers help us get to the point. Millennials will make meetings a lot more fun if we let them.

Policies

You can't manage generational differences using top-down policies in today's workplace — you have to lead. This is one of the sticking points in which generational differences really stand out. Here's an overview of how policies have been viewed by each:

Traditionalists: Everyone needs to do what they're told.

Baby Boomers: Let's create a policy or procedure so everything runs smoothly and is fair for everyone.

Gen Xers: Rules are made to be broken.

Millennials: If it doesn't make sense, I'll assume it's a guideline.

A different approach to policy creation that recognizes all generational preferences is to use step 3, Flex. In this approach, a policy task force is created made up of representatives from all four generations. This task force has great leverage when using this recommended process:

Find representatives who are respected by colleagues of their generation.

Tell them you're not promising to agree with every detail of their recommendations but that you have complete confidence that by leveraging their generational differences, they can come up with something better than you could.

Lay out the business challenges. Tell them about prohibitive regulations, customer complaints and budget limits.

Let them work through the five-step process.

Because Millennials feel comfortable questioning policies and see them as guidelines rather than rules (if they don't buy the reason for them), the question is, "How do we get the Millennials to follow our policies?"

This is a generational collision. For Traditionalists and Boomers, policy is a reason. For the other two generations, it's an invitation to ask more questions. Boomers were the last generation to respond to policy. Millennials respond to people. Show them how policy impacts people.

Don't neglect two key things when dealing with Millennials and policy:

You need to translate the generational differences so that the Millennials understand why what they're doing is bothering Traditionalist customers. And you must relate the policy to the Millennials' values. Ask them to relate older customers' preferences to someone in their own lives of the same age. Link it to showing respect for that person.

Respect

Respect is foundational to relationships and often raises emotional misunderstandings. All four generations need respect, but they meet that need in different ways. Stereotyping other generations can be a real problem.

Many of the other sticking points — work ethic, communication, decision making, dress code and meetings — intensify if you and your colleagues don't understand how to navigate through differing definitions of respect. When people appreciate why the generations see respect differently, they naturally want to figure out how to flex so that everyone's common need is met. Here are some ideas on how to flex:

Identify their definition of respect, then flex. Like a person visiting another country, employees need to better read the reactions of the other generations and flex their personal preferences.

Don't take it personally. Realizing that the four generations have different views of respect helps to not take individual actions personally. One simple rule will keep your team working together when stereotypes threaten to pull them apart: They didn't mean it personally, so don't take it personally.

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Approachable and respectful works for everyone. Randstad's 2009 World of Work survey showed that all four generations want their managers to be approachable (92 percent for Boomers, mid-80s for the other three) and have an attitude of respect (91 percent for Traditionalists and Boomers; 89 percent for Gen X and 85 percent for Millennials).

It doesn't matter if you are the manager for a team or project or are simply an associate. It doesn't take big things to make a real difference when it comes to respect.

Training

Employees of all generations want more training. Both organizations and individuals have one thing in common — they will both have to learn to survive. It's a business necessity to make training work for all generations. That requires organizations to offer content in forms that suit the different generations best. Here's how each generation has viewed training:

Traditionalists: We got trained in the “school of hard knocks.”

Boomers: Training is a reward.

Gen Xers: Training is my security. If I'm not learning, then I won't be prepared for the future.

Millennials: Who would work for an organization that didn't provide training?

Let me suggest four lessons: Don't complain that the younger generations don't have what it takes. Don't assume you know what your people need. Create hands-on practice opportunities. Be clear on what you want your employees to be able to do when they're done.

Your organization will increase the time, energy and money they spend on training not only to attract and retain all four generations but also for your own survival.

Work Ethic

Tensions around work ethic come up more than any other sticking point. When you're addressing generational sticking points, it is critical to find the common need. For the sticking point of work ethic, the common need is fairness and balance. We all want everyone to do their fair share so no one feels taken advantage of.

The older two generations see work as the steak and everything else as the vegetables, salad and dessert. The younger two generations see life as a waffle. Work is one quadrant of the waffle, and everything else — friendships, family, volunteer work, and other things they value — make up the other three squares. So please, boss, keep your work syrup off the other three squares of my waffle.

Focusing on results rather than hours places the emphasis on business necessities rather than generational preferences. But that means if an employee doesn't deliver results, you need to address performance.

Your team will work best when you leverage the strengths of the four generations. Together they will help each other get more done while having more fun doing it:

Traditionalists know that there is no trophy until you put in the hard work.

Boomers know that good processes save time and prevent errors.

Xers can show us how to cut to the chase.

Millennials can figure out where the shortcuts are.

Work ethic is the most common sticking point in the workplace, but it doesn't have to leave you stuck. The generations need to help each other figure out how to get things done and balance their lives in our 24/7 world. ●

Conclusion: Sticking Together

You've learned how to spot generational sticking points and what to do about them, and you can do it. You can turn stuck to sticking together with your teams, organizations and families.

And you can also use the five-step process when you're stuck around generational differences with individuals. The most powerful impact of learning about generational sticking points for most people is that they realize those differences play a part in the frustrations they have with coworkers or family members.

Instead of getting irritated, look for ways to leverage generational strengths rather than getting stuck around the differences. Remember these two things, and you've got this: 1) Don't take it personally; the other person doesn't mean it personally; and 2) Speak the other person's generational language. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Sticking Points*, you'll also like:

1. ***The 2020 Workplace*** by Jeanne C. Meister and Karie Willyerd. Meister and Willyerd present a functional guide to help you and your organization create tomorrow's workplace of choice.
2. ***Grown Up Digital*** by Don Tapscott. If you understand the Net Generation, you will understand the future. If you're a Baby Boomer or Gen Xer: This is your field guide.
3. ***Generations at Work*** by Claire Raines, Ron Zemke, Bob Filipczak. The authors show how to overcome the clash of generations to create a cohesive, collaborative work environment.