

3.10: Critical Thinking Case

Stereotypes at Pitney Bowes

Many times, we think of stereotypes or discrimination only being an issue when it comes to things like gender, race, or religion. However, at Pitney Bowes Inc., the toughest stereotype to overcome is age.

Brigitte Van Den Houte starts her day in the normal way; however, she has taken a keen focus on persuading employees in their 20s that they have a future at Pitney Bowes.

For almost 100 years, Pitney Bowes, founded in 1920, has been all about commerce. But as the world turned to technology, the definition of what that meant for the traditional postage-meter equipment company had to change as well.

One of the biggest challenges of this ever-changing technological world is how the generations of employees can step aside from their stereotypes and understand one another to better work effectively.

At Pitney Bowes, their proactive approach puts younger colleagues with older colleagues in a mentoring situation. This is not the typical older mentor to younger mentor setup, however. Every few months, Houte arranges for the younger employees to spend the day with a seasoned executive with the plan of sharing experiences and ideas and offering advice. Houte states, “the old way of working no longer works,” and she’s right.

With over one-third of the workforce aging to 50 or older and millennials (young people aged 22–37) being the largest workforce group, it is imperative to put stereotypes aside and learn to work together. One big mistake for a manager would be to focus on the age difference rather than on what skills each person individually can bring to the table. Stereotypes such as “older individuals don’t know about technology” or “millennials are constantly job hopping and feel entitled” are put aside at Pitney Bowes in order to get the job done. With a more proactive approach, the range of variables within each generation can be utilized in the most effective way possible for an organization.

Questions:

1. What are other ways that a company can utilize a multigenerational team to their advantage?
2. What challenges does a multigenerational team pose for management?
3. What should the company and management team consider when attracting new employees of all
4. generations?

Sources: Hymowitz, Carol, “The Tricky Task of Managing the New, Multigenerational Workplace,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 12, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-tri...s&page=1&pos=9>; Ault, Nicole, “Don’t Trust Anyone Over 21,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 22, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/dont-tr...s&page=1&pos=1>.

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