

# BRIDGING THE GENERATIONAL GAP IN EMERGENCY SERVICES

All Emergency Services Organizations (ESO's) have a continuous challenge of communicating across generations. This includes training, recruitment and retention, and overall agency culture. Contingency planning, promotions, and the legacy of service to the community must be achieved for the longevity of the ESO. Exchanging experienced-based knowledge from seasoned staff members, and embracing new ideas from fresh staff members is necessary to reach and maintain this goal.



## KEY ACTION ITEMS

### **Acknowledge:**

It's no secret; all generations are different. This means you can't just ignore it and hope it all works out. Everyone learns differently, absorbs information differently, and this is certainly true across the multiple generations in today's ESO workforce. Younger members may bring fresh ideas about technology and training, while older members can offer mentorship, wisdom, and hands-on experience.

### **Embrace the commonalities:**

Prioritizing work-life balance is no longer a perk; it is an expectation across all generations. This concept is increasingly common across all generations, and it affects morale and retention. Prioritize asking employees what they need, what's working, and what can be improved. This will build common ground, and let all the generations be heard and valued. Identifying the needs of the entire team allows for commonalities

to be formed at all career stages and begins the road map of attacking this concern for the entire ESO.

### **Adapt and implement:**

Make goals for developing relationships and mentoring programs. Successful programs need structure and mentors paired based on goals—not age. Experience or length of service can be helpful.

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## Mentoring:

Look for opportunities for younger members to teach or take responsibility for certain tasks. This will help build relationships through empowerment and communication with other members. Having seasoned staff members rely on the younger members and vice versa will help build trust in the generational gaps. Each group will experience ownership, build the organization, and improve the overall culture.

## Examples:

ESO's can appoint younger members to serve as technology ambassadors. These roles foster leadership, and peer training opportunities.

When online training is assigned, it can be completed individually but then discussed as a group afterward.

Create groups of 3-4, instead of 1-1; this allows communication to blossom and be less awkward. This concept also addresses the "them vs. us" mentality for all groups.

Schedule regular check-ins to track progress. Offer training to mentors and mentees alike; make participation part of professional development.

## Q&A:

### How can a younger member earn respect from the senior members?

Younger members should demonstrate commitment, show initiative, and remain open to learning. Respect grows from consistent performance, and mutual goals of the ESO.

### What is the best way to start a mentorship program?

Begin with voluntary participation, and clear guidelines. Match mentors and mentees thoughtfully, and offer administrative support and guidance.

### How can ESO's reduce communication friction between age groups?

Use multiple ways to communicate with all members. Offer training on tools and terminology to build understanding and shared language. Utilize bulletins, web pages, social media, and apps.

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