



with intercultural differences, managers need to adapt their leadership style according to the various generations."

For Susan Dyster, 27, it was a matter of tempering her natural manner when she moved up to general manager for marketing, products and services at Pollak Learning Alliance.

"There's a perception that a young manager is kind of like a bull in a china shop, a bit of a know-it-all," she says.

"Early on, I learnt to downplay that by really showing an interest in the view of others because sometimes I thought I was just voicing [my] opinion but older people might have heard that as downgrading their own opinions. So I really made an effort to listen properly and think before I spoke."

Dyster had the added complication of moving up to manage older colleagues she had worked with for years, and some she had socialised with regularly.

"Fortunately, before I stepped into the role I had time to kind of distance myself a little and mentally change the way I relate to them," Dyster says.

"We've each had to work on the relationship and put boundaries on the time we spend with social chat, and realise that there are times when we may have to have an uncomfortable work conversation with each other. That was probably the hardest part."

For most young managers, establishing new relationships with older staff is difficult but a necessary step towards leading them and gaining their respect.

"I look for some point to bond with people in my team no matter what their age," Razaq says.

"Building relationships is also a matter of recognising that everyone's unique and has different working styles and preferences but above all it's about trying to assess their values."

"The big thing for me was to try to show confidence and competence at all times. If you can do that, you will be more credible and people are going to respect you."

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The age of discontent

Young guns who leapfrog older colleagues face challenges, writes **Dominic Cadden**.

Many of us grow up expecting the guiding figures in our working lives to be older and more experienced than we are.

But in today's workforce that's all changing. A skills shortage, a transient workforce and changing attitudes to work-life balance mean young people are stepping into managerial roles more frequently.

The result is workers who are often being managed by bosses younger than them and youthful managers struggling to connect with staff who are sometimes decades older.

Ayesha Razaq, 33, manages the person who employed her at

utilities company ActewAGL. Her old boss simply didn't apply for the position.

"We have an ageing workforce in the telco and energy industry, and many of them prefer to focus on their work-life balance, and so younger people are increasingly taking over the management roles," says Razaq, who is general manager for customer and product operations and in charge of about 200 staff.

She says initially she was intimidated and thought that people weren't taking her seriously. She subsequently built up a network of mentors and hired an executive coach on a

Young-speak ... workers need to adapt to changing times.

casual basis as part of her training. "Then I realised that I may not have the answers, but I could try to engage my older workers and capitalise on all their strengths and experience," she says.

"Despite the age gap, if you can make older workers feel valuable, they feel more comfortable with you."

Research from the Australian Human Resources Institute is not as encouraging for younger managers. The organisation's surveys showed that more than 30 per cent of workers, including 80 per cent of baby boomers, don't want to be managed by a younger generation.

"In the book *Please Just F— Off Now, It's Our Turn*, Ryan Heath says that baby boomers have been in charge for so long and were such a big, influential group that they don't want to give it up," says Karen Schmidt, a re-engagement expert from Let's Grow. "The thought that these younger generations will change what they put in place terrifies them."

Schmidt says a key issue for young managers is understanding the different ways older people

'There's a perception that a young manager is kind of like a bull in a china shop.'
Susan Dyster

communicate in the workplace. "Younger people, particularly gen Y, tell it like it is, thinking that this is what everybody else does. If they have a problem with a worker, they'll say it — then they're accused of being rude and disrespectful."

"So it's easy for older people to say that younger people fly off the handle or they're too in-your-face. Equally, younger people can say that older people don't say what they're thinking, even when they're asked a direct question. They're not accustomed to this old roundabout communication style where you're supposed to imply all these things that people would not say out loud."

Chief executive Serge Sardo says the human resources institute's research tapped into several issues from younger managers, including confidence, capability and how to behave with someone who is older.

"Then when you get to generation Y managers, they tend to be a lot more confident and assertive, but it's more a case of not picking up on the relevant verbal and non-verbal communication from older workers," Sardo says.

"Leadership style is critical. As

Re-engagement expert Karen Schmidt gives advice to help young managers get along with older team members.

Prove your credibility. Make the tough decision or show that you support your staff.

Be careful you're not seen as bashing the organisation or "the old ways". Many in your team could have an emotional attachment to those old ways.

Tailor how you personally engage older workers.

Comparing your weekend clubbing with their gardening will be alienating.

You may need to slow down the speed of your relationship-building. Older staff may need more time to assess you.

Treat people the way they like to be treated, not how you like to be treated.

WINNERS FEMA AWARDS 2008 Congratulations

On behalf of the 2discover recruitment team I would like to thank all of our candidates and clients for supporting Carolyn Ezzy and Steven Gunther in attaining their place as finalists in the FEMA Employment and Marketing Awards. A big congratulations to Carolyn Ezzy for receiving the award for **Best Recruiter 2008**.

John Leith
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Winner



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Steven Gunther
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