

We Before Me

I listened to a presentation from Steve Bench recently and he said something that might be the simplest way to identify the engagement challenges leaders experience as they manage younger employees. Steve shared that Traditionalists and Baby Boomers were taught to serve their families, communities, and employers. They shared a philosophy of 'we before me.' That short phrase says so much. It sets the stage for frames of reference that will vary by employee and impact the success of team communications and unity.

Every generation gets conditioned by their moment in history. World events, politics, technology, and economic conditions have a profound influence on each generation. They influence how people respond to challenges and opportunities. They influence how people process decisions and plan for their future. They influence causes and what is important to individuals, families, and businesses. The conditioning matters.

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Recent conversations with community bank leaders have included lengthy discussions about employee retention and talent acquisition. Everyone appears to be struggling with conditions impacting the available workforce, employment opportunities, and compensation requirements. Banks with success stories to share frequently share a common attribute. Their bank's culture and teamwork rates as a strength and competency. Strong teams focus on 'we before me.' The team

members focus on desired outcomes and each other. They understand the importance of doing things together. That bond is a powerful engagement resource and can reduce the effect of changing employment conditions. If you want to attract and retain engaged employees, work to enhance your 'we' value proposition.

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How do we connect this phrase to the management challenges faced by leaders today? Let's start by understanding that it is not just a generational difference. Engaged team members can come from any generation.

Every leader begins their management adventure with their own frame of reference and conditioning. Great leaders know that one frame of reference isn't enough to produce success. They understand that the people they manage will be different. They understand that motivations vary. When this knowledge is combined with caring management of each team member, teams unify and succeed. The leader (often times a well-tenured employee) is responsible for clarifying purpose, roles, goals, and accountability. It is the leader that needs to focus on engaging their team with a 'we' philosophy.

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This is where tenured leaders can stumble. They know what needs to be done and they can do it themselves. However, their individual execution isn't scalable. Team member talents and skills need to be leveraged if growth and success is planned. Team members need to understand their role and the purpose of their team. Valuable team members want to make a contribution. 'We before me' is a philosophy leaders need to define,

teach, coach, and mentor. Leaders should not assume employees already have a clear frame of reference for the concept.

If you are a well-tenured employee in a leadership role, are you open to new ideas? Are you willing to change how things get done? Are you learning something new every day? Are you spending time listening to your team's insights? Are you open to new ways of managing employees? Your leadership sets the stage for 'we.' Unifying your team and helping them pull together is no easy task.

To produce exceptional results with people, you need to spend time with people. It is difficult to build a team by administrating policies or mandating compliance with procedures. Your team members need your attention. And, if you have been a manager for a long time, the way you like to get the work done, may not be the most efficient way to accomplish results. Engage with your team members. Challenge them to contribute. Challenge them to support each other. Challenge them to achieve results. You are likely to find they are up to the challenge.

Change is happening every day. Are you making the necessary adjustments to be a relevant leader with your team? Pay close attention to your team and see how it impacts their 'we before me' beliefs and values.

