

## **Lessons Learned: From Palm Pilot to Coffee Talk**

I can still remember my first board meeting in the corporate world like it was yesterday. Everyone dressed to perfection - dresses for the women, suits, ties and lapel pins for the men. Not a to-go cup anywhere, but actual coffee mugs full of plain, stale coffee, placed in front of everyone's padfolios and printed-out meeting packets, and the smell of cigarette smoke still lingering in the air of the conference room.

And there I was, this young kid rocking a Palm Pilot, no tie, and a Starbucks cup in my hand. Such a different time, but what it was like to be a young, Generation X person, watching, learning, and absorbing workplace protocols from the Baby Boomers. No matter how cool I thought I was (I definitely wasn't), deep down, I was soaking up every little bit of those meetings, understanding how meetings should be run, how you should act, and how you should know your place. I was preparing for the future when it was my turn to lead meetings.

Cut to an ENX2 Monday morning team meeting in 2021. Everyone on zoom, most wearing an ENX2 hoodie, with a specialty coffee, smoothie, or tea, and either taking notes on an ipad or multitasking behind the zoom screen answering emails. Conversations spill over into topics such as whether you are a Wawa or Sheetz person (Proud Wawa member) or the latest episode of Falcon and the Winter Soldier. Such a different environment, but a great snapshot of the generational gap.

That (uncool) kid with the Palm Pilot is now in his 40's, tasked with running team meetings as COO of ENX2. I am a proud member of Generation X or the MTV Generation - like the music video and Real World type MTV (Sidebar: the Real World Seattle Season was the best ever). I definitely fit the profile too, as I still read the newspaper and magazines, still haven't cut the cord (cable tv), and for relevance to today's blog, was groomed in the old school/traditional workplace. The traditional space where you showed up to the office, punched in (yep - totally did that), did your work, and then went home. Your work life and private life never came close to each other - they were always separate.

Some may say it was a simpler time. I can still remember plotting out my route for a trip before mapquest (printed out) directions blew my mind or getting the first blackberry and thinking how great it was to get email on my phone. And if you are wondering, yes, the Progressive "Becoming Your Parents" commercials are really starting to hit home. As a people person, the generational gaps have always been fascinating to me - but as it relates to the workplace, it was becoming more difficult to navigate.

As my career advanced and my roles and responsibilities began to grow, navigating the generational gap became more and more difficult. While serving as Executive Director of Wilkes-Barre Connect - a non-profit economic development agency, we had to implement a system to capture how and when people preferred to be contacted. It ranged from the 100-year old family business that preferred morning, in-person meetings, to the young entrepreneur who

would text me at midnight. The acceptance, or better yet, the accelerated advancement in technology was further driving the generational gap.

Each generation has their traits. Baby boomers were shaped by World War II and Woodstock, they are loyal as the day is long, still go inside the bank, and have taken over Facebook. The Millennial Generation was shaped by the tragic events of 9/11 and the explosion of the internet, they started cutting the cord, are dominating the workforce, and have racked up some serious student debt. Generation Z has been shaped by smartphones and social media, are full of passion, truly caring, and see their work and personal lives as one. But us Generation Xs - we were always caught in the middle, lost between two huge generations.

As COO, and in-charge of building the team at ENX2 and interfacing with clients, understanding the generational gap is more important than ever. I knew that coming into the position, but it didn't sink in until I walked into the ENX2 doors for the first time. Nicole Farber, our CEO and Founder, had built this company from an idea in her head into an award-winning agency, serving clients across the US (and two other countries). It was a company built upon the strength of its team members, most of whom were Millennials or from Generation Z - which meant 99% of the things learned from that first board meeting were not going to help me at all. I needed to adapt.

That is the lesson learned in this blog - if I'm going to be a good COO, I must be able to adapt, and learn to understand, embrace, and leverage all of the qualities of each generation. No more Palm Pilots, but shared Google Calendars and Monday.com. No more memos, but sharing GIFs on Slack. Most importantly, understanding that in 2021, work and personal lives are no longer separate.

Since joining ENX2, we signed a partnership with [LinkedIn Learning](#) to provide our team members with access to their endless catalog of personal and professional development courses. We have Bagel Fridays - whenever we get back into the office. And just last week I decided to launch "Coffee Talk," an hour block between 8-9 AM every Friday where team members can hop on zoom and talk about all things non-ENX2 related.

Will this work? I have no idea, but I feel like it is a step in the right direction. It's me trying to adapt and become a 2021 COO, and expand upon the amazing foundation and culture Nicole built here at ENX2. It's up to me to listen, adapt, and create a culture that embraces each generation and prepares us for continued growth.

What do you think? How can I be a better COO and make ENX2 a place where no matter your generation you can thrive? Will "Coffee Talk" actually work? Drop me a line at [joseph@enx2marketing.com](mailto:joseph@enx2marketing.com).

## Side Note

This week's musical reference highlights my favorite album of all-time: "Blood on the Tracks" by Bob Dylan. It's one of the most meaningful and raw albums that I've ever listened to. My dad introduced me to Dylan at an early age, and I've always gravitated towards this album. It's widely recognized as capturing Dylan's personal life during his split from his then-wife Sara. His son Jakob (from the "Wallflowers") always described the album and songs as "my parents talking." Blood on the Tracks contains so many amazing tracks, including my all-time favorite song "Tangled Up in Blue" - a song that displayed Dylan's amazing ability to tell a story. I love the versatility of the album - as I can listen to it during work, or while enjoying a cocktail on the deck. No matter the scenery, this album will always remind me of my dad.