

## Rocky Mountain Conference on Aging Aging in the Workplace

### Generational Differences in the Workplace: Understanding the Aging Kaleidoscope

Presenter Name: Milan Larson Ph. D.

Presentation Date and Time: October 23, 2007: 11:00-12:00 Noon

Dr. Larson's presentation discussed the wide range of ages in the workplace. There may be some differences but overall people are similar no matter what their age. He started his presentation by discussing positive psychology. This is a new research approach that looks at aspects of the work environment that are effective and how to recreate them in other areas. Then he discussed myths about generational differences and strategies for managing the gap perception.

1. Before WWII psychology focused mainly on the disease model and less on identifying and nurturing talents and strengths. This model focused on what was wrong, identifying the problem and introducing change. A new approach to research is to focus on what is working, identifying the best practices and then replicating them in new areas. When focusing on the positive aspects of the work environment the productivity level will increase.
2. *Myth 1:* Employees from a different generation do not respect others, especially their leaders. *Reality:* Each generation defines respect differently. The younger generation asks questions to learn, not challenge authority. Older generations command social respect due to age, but that does not equal career respect.
3. *Myth 2:* People with experience make better leaders. *Reality:* Age does not matter as long as the leader is credible and listens well. All age groups look for similar traits in leaders.
4. *Myth 3:* Older employees don't like change. *Reality:* Older generations fear change for the same reasons other generations fear change; it creates uncertainty.
5. *Myth 4:* Younger generations are not as loyal as older generations. *Reality:* Loyalty is more about organizational level and role (manager vs. other non-managerial role) than age.
6. *Myth 5:* Older people are stuck in their ways and know everything from experience; younger generations know everything from educational background. *Reality:* All generations value a variety of learning experiences.
7. *Myth 6:* Values are different between generations. *Reality:* Values are more similar between generations but differ in how they act on the value. Individuals are all too different to fit into one common box based on age.

Submitted by: Leanna Miller, Colorado State University, October 25, 2007