

Praise for *Counter Mentor Leadership*

“This is a fantastic book, one of the very few I would call a ‘MUST read.’ Superb advice, actionable ideas, and fun to read. I will be strongly recommending this book to all of my clients and colleagues.”

John Spence, Author, *Awesome! Simple*, and a Top 100
Business Thought Leader in America

“As a leader, one of your greatest challenges is connecting multiple generations within your workforce and getting them to work together effectively. In this immensely helpful book, Kelly and Robby Riggs lay out a set of arguments and a blueprint for success that will sharpen your perspective and give you actionable advice.”

Tim Sanders, New York Times bestselling author of
Love Is the Killer App and *Dealstorming*

“*Counter Mentor Leadership* is motivational, thought-provoking, entertaining, and certainly challenging for all leaders! Although extensively researched, the book is an easy read on ‘new leadership’ - using basic proven methods while adjusting to a new work force that is incredibly driven, motivated, and tech-savvy.”

James P. Kellogg, Vice President, Colorado Rockies

“Leveraging the skills and talents of the multi-generational workforce is a leadership imperative in the 21st century, and Kelly and Robby Riggs provide you with the tools, resources, and wisdom to tackle this job head on. Reading this book is just like having a conversation with Kelly and Robby – engaging, fast-paced, lots of laughs, and peppered with practical leadership insights. Put their ideas into practice and watch your leadership rise to the next level.”

Randy Conley, V.P. Client Services & Trust Practice
Leader, The Ken Blanchard Companies

“Finally, a book on multiple generations in the workplace written by multiple generations. *Counter Mentor Leadership* will get you thinking, but more importantly it will get you listening to those older and younger than you.”

David Burkus, Associate Professor of Leadership and Innovation, and Author, *Under New Management*

“Shamelessly funny and brilliantly written; just don’t let the laughs get in the way of the many important leadership lessons—for every generation!”

Tom Koulopoulos, Author, *The Gen Z Effect: The 6 Forces Shaping the Future of Business*

“Kelly and Robby do a masterful job of transcending ‘the way we’ve always done it,’ while distilling the enduring principles of great relationships and effective leadership.”

Nate Regier, PhD, CEO of Next Element Consulting,
Author, *Conflict Without Casualties*

“I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to improve their own leadership skills, or the skills of leaders within their company. The focus on the 1-on-1 meetings has been a game-changer for me and for other leaders, and it has led to a significant increase in our employee engagement scores.”

Mary Kay Gibbons,  Human Resources, Animal Supply Company

“GREAT book! *Counter Mentor Leadership* is a reality check for anyone in leadership (young or old). It gives actionable leadership strategies using humor and wit to keep you highly engaged the whole way through.”

Jack Kosakowski, CEO (US Division), Creation Agency

“When it comes to pinpointing the real issues facing the modern workplace, Kelly and Robby are spot on. What most have labeled simply as technology gaps or generational differences, they have identified rightly as communication and leadership challenges. The winsome *Counter Mentor Leadership* will help us coach up the right kinds of leaders for decades to come. You and I will be better leaders because of it, too.”

Curt Steinhorst, Founder & CEO of Focuswise, Author, *Can I Have Your Attention? Inspiring Better Work Habits, Focusing Your Team, and Getting Stuff Done in the Constantly Connected Workplace*

“Counter Mentor Leadership is a relevant, fun, and inspiring book that provides a practical approach for becoming a transformational leader. Reinventing your leadership style is not easy, and Robby and Kelly provide thought provoking techniques to help you with your journey. Definitely a must-read!”

Eric A. Dorne, Chief Administrative Officer and Chief Information Officer, UNFI

“The point-counterpoint between Kelly and Robby is not only hilarious, but insightful. The leadership tools needed to perform at a high level are all inclusive, and I am going to recommend that my entire Executive Team read this book to become better leaders in our company.”

Robert E. Alger, President & CEO, Lane Industries, Inc.

“Counter Mentor Leadership offers great tips to help you shift the way you think and act with other generations, so you can both succeed. This is absolutely a “must read” for any organization trying to stay competitive!”

Dolores Alonso, Senior Director of Membership & Business Development, FPSA

“Drawing you in with wit and humor, this book is a valuable strategic guide for engaging today’s multi-generational workplace, providing many important lessons to create a more connected and collaborative organization.”

Angel Stacy, Director of Human Resources and Administration, Explorer Pipeline

“Counter Mentor Leadership is the perfect guide for those who aspire to be great leaders, especially in the tricky four-generation workplace. While it is written in a light-hearted style, it gets to the root of what great leadership is, and how you can become a great leader.”

David Brock, CEO, Partners In EXCELLENCE,
Author, *Sales Manager Survival Guide*

“Counter Mentor Leadership is a smart book that teaches us all how to relate to each other - regardless of generation. It is packed full of examples that explain the “what” and the “why” of the differences we experience thanks to four generations in the workplace. If you’re a leader who wants to make difference with the generations you lead, you need this book!”

Phil Gerbyshak, Chief Digital Officer, Vengreso

“Insightful, bold and cleverly written, this book addresses the complex dynamics of multi-generational workforce engagement, and describes what effective leaders MUST do to achieve extraordinary results”

Dana Birkes, VP, Business Strategies, Crossland Construction Company, Inc.

“*Counter Mentor Leadership* moves beyond tired management clichés and platitudes, and gives practical advice on how to bridge the divide between Boomers and Millennials in the workplace.”

Ryan Williams, Senior Vice President, FPI Strategies



“*Counter Mentor Leadership* offers a truly insightful perspective on the modern workplace in an extremely entertaining, often hysterical, read. Kelly and Robby teach the leadership skills and tactics you need to maneuver through this challenging situation and become a legit Counter Mentor Leader. It is an intuitive and easy-to-read format - you won't be able to put it down!”

J.R. Stewart, National Sales Manager, Filtrexx International

“Bridging across the span of generations is not an easy task to do, much less do well. Kelly and Robby provide a plan that any organization can apply today to stop the decline of productivity.”

Teri Aulph, Sr. Vice President and Chief HR Officer, Tulsa Federal Credit Union

“The Riggs boys have written a brilliant and timely leadership book. They've written a killer, How To, prescriptive, humorous, engaging and funny book with one purpose, to get everyone playing well in the sandbox. If you've ever even uttered the words “management effectiveness” then this book is for you.”

Jim Keenan, CEO of A Sales Guy Consulting, Author, *Not Taught: What It Takes to Be Successful in the 21st Century That Nobody's Teaching You*

“If you are in a leadership role today or want to be in one in the future, give yourself an unfair advantage in the marketplace by immediately buying this book. Not only do both authors have deep experience and credentials in this area, but they are also father and son. That creates a raw, honest, back-and-forth set of perspectives that is unique in a business book.”

Miles Austin, President and Founder of FilltheFunnel.com



Counter Mentor Leadership

How to Unlock the Potential of
the 4-Generation Workplace

Kelly Riggs and
Robby Riggs



N I C H O L A S B R E A L E Y
P U B L I S H I N G

B O S T O N • L O N D O N

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Introduction

ALTHOUGH IT'S TYPICALLY BETTER to start a new relationship with good news or encouragement, we actually have some bad news.

You are giving away your company's money.

Actually, to put a fine point on it, you're not really *giving* it to anyone. What you're doing is taking a significant amount of what your company earns every year and tossing it in the trash. Evidently, you take some kind of sadistic pleasure in taking a big pile of your company's money, dousing it in gasoline, and watching it burn.

Hopefully, we've gotten your attention.

You see, most companies believe that when you promote an individual to the ranks of management, that person *miraculously* becomes an *amazing* leader. We expect him or her to become the Queen of Inspiration, the Dean of Workplace Insights, *and* the Emperor of Employee Engagement. Which makes you, unfortunately, the King or Queen of Delusional Thinking, because (spoiler alert) a competent, gets-stuff-done (GSD) employee does not automatically make the transition from rock star individual contributor (we call them *doers*) to a competent, much less *transformational*, leader of other people.

Sorry. Does not happen. #truth (Boomers, refer to Millennials for guidance on those number signs commonly called hashtags.)

Of course, if you're making more money than you know what to do with, you probably couldn't care less. However, for most of us mere mortals, finding a way to add to the bottom line is always a topic of interest and, frankly, a constant struggle.

Oh, and to answer your next question—yes, there is plenty of empirical evidence to support our bold, bordering-on-offensive claim. The good news is that you can recover truckloads of cash by following the advice and tactics in this book. Is that just Millennial daydreaming? We don't think so. Boomer and Millennial, we are on the same page.

One thing you need to know is this book is NOT hypothetical or academic. It is a result of well over twenty-five years of experiences and observations in organizations with multigenerational conflict: a fifty-something entrepreneur and former executive (Baby Boomer) and a thirty-something MBA consultant turned entrepreneur (Millennial) who still thinks he's twenty-nine. We represent two totally different perspectives, but we have seen the same problems over and over:

1. A shocking lack of leadership skills in the workplace
2. The stunning, often unrecognized impact of technology on the workplace
3. The culture-killing generational divide that is demolishing many companies

Surprisingly, despite our very different perspectives as a Millennial and a Boomer, we see the solution exactly the same way.

The fundamental question—the thing we just don't get—is this: Why haven't more companies addressed this modern leadership dilemma? Here is a perfect example of the problem, taken from *New York Times* bestselling author Simon Sinek:

A couple months ago, I stayed at the Four Seasons in Las Vegas. Now that is a beautiful hotel, and the reason it is a

beautiful hotel is not because of the fancy beds; any hotel can simply buy a fancy bed. The reason it's a great hotel is because of the people who work there . . . The people who work there, when they walk past you, will say hello and you get the feeling they actually want to say hello, not that someone told them they have to say hello . . .

They have a coffee stand in the lobby and I went down one afternoon to buy a coffee . . . The barista behind the counter, his name was Noah. Noah was fantastic. He was funny. He was engaging . . . this kid was amazing.

As is my nature, I asked Noah, "Do you like your job?" Without skipping a beat, Noah said, "I love my job."

So, I followed up, "What is it that the Four Seasons is doing that you would say to me, 'I love my job'?"

And without skipping a beat, Noah said, "Throughout the day, managers will walk past me and ask me how I'm doing, ask me if there is anything I need to do my job better. Not just my manager. Any manager."

And then, he said something magical. "I also work at Caesar's Palace. There, the managers walk past to make sure that I'm doing everything right. They walk past and catch me if I am doing something wrong. There, I keep my head down. I just want to get through the day and get my paycheck."

Same person. Different leadership.¹

Some leaders get it, but the vast majority do not. Your people are not the problem; they are not the cause of the typical workplace issues. In most cases, the real problem is you, the leader. It is your inability to adapt to the leadership demands of the chaotic, four-generation workplace, and it is costing you an incredible amount of money.

You do, however, have a decent excuse. The management practices you learned, usually by watching other bad managers flail away, are a remnant of a workplace long forgotten. Those "Taylorian

Management” practices (our label for the methods espoused by nineteenth-century management expert Frederick Winslow Taylor), which are typically manifested in dictatorial, micromanaging behavior, also breed employee disillusionment, cultural complacency, and mediocre performance.

The sad reality, however, is that most of today’s leaders have been exposed to little else, and they have been taught even less! The result is a workplace in which two-thirds of employees are disengaged, disinterested in the company’s objectives, and cynical about corporate leaders.

As you can see, we place little stock in the premise that the conflict between leaders and employees is about generational differences. Instead, we believe the workplace conflict that exists is not really generational; it’s *relational*.

That fundamental difference in perspective has enormous ramifications for leaders, for employees, and for the bottom line.

Yes, we think you will have fun reading this book, but that’s not our *only* intention. We will show you two things:

1. The many aspects of the modern leadership dilemma (and the challenges that shape it)
2. A proven, repeatable, seven-step framework to overcome the workplace challenges

Our goal is to ignite the flames of change, compelling you to transform your behavior and make your company an incredible place to work. We will give you theory, research, stories, and actionable tactics that you can use to change your leadership behavior *immediately*.

This isn’t your father’s leadership book. We are going to push you and make you uncomfortable, because that’s where personal growth begins.

Our first tip? Instead of burning that money, you should invest it in teaching yourself and your people Counter Mentor Leadership.

A Short Guide to This Book

1. This is not another #boringleadershipbook. Which is to say, this book isn't a dissertation about some new management theory supported by a regression analysis of relevant research data. Ugh. We stay away from TLAs (three-letter acronyms) and promise you'll laugh and learn at the same time (or curse and throw things at the wall, which we will take as a good sign).
2. This book is for two different groups of people. Generally, they are referred to as Boomers and Millennials, but we will call them the **BOSS (Boomer, Old-School Supervisors)** and the **KIDS (Know-It-All Digital Self-Promoters)**. Clever, huh? (Our acronyms have four letters. You should be impressed.)
3. Okay, so we just offended Gen X (the group after Boomers but older than Millennials) and the Digital Natives (the generation after Millennials). Yes, this book is still relevant for you! In our experience, Gen X typically has Boomer tendencies but is more comfortable with technology, and Digital Natives typically identify with Millennials since they were born with an iDevice in their hands. Confusing? Don't worry, we'll sort it out soon enough.
4. As far as tendencies and how you relate, you are likely one or the other (the BOSS, or one of the KIDS), although you could be

that new species: a Millennial Manager with Boomer Employees. Wherever you fit, blending the two together in the workplace (the BOSS and the KIDS), one as manager and one as employee, creates a recipe for potential disaster. How long did it take for you to understand that you have fundamentally different perspectives on life and work: somewhere around five minutes?

5. If you are, in fact, an “Old School” Boomer Manager, and you’re reading this book to learn how to “manage” Millennials you’ve come to the wrong place. Learning to “manage” a Millennial is like trying to “manage” the relationship with your significant other. It’s going to end badly, and you’ll be starting over with a different one soon enough. This is about LEADERSHIP, not manipulation.
6. We think you will enjoy the book, but at one point or another, we may actually step on your toes. Hopefully, it will hurt enough that you’ll want to change, but make no mistake: our intent is to challenge you to think and to question the status quo of current leadership practices.
7. We’ve written this book in one voice, but that doesn’t mean we will always agree. So, you’ll get two perspectives—and you’ll always know which is which. Just look for the hats.



The classy, stylish hat belongs to the perspective of the BOSS (Kelly, aka the Pops).



The fashion-forward, ecofriendly, socially conscious hat (yeah, it’s a baseball cap) belongs to the perspective of the KIDS (Robby).

8. You should find this book to be easy-to-read (Robby says it’s “consumable,” which is some kind of special MBA word that he

borrowed \$100K to learn). Short-ish chapters. Practical advice. Actionable content.

- 9.** We will include **The Key Points to Remember** at the end of each chapter. These quick summaries should be written down and/or tweeted immediately. Don't forget the hashtag #countermentorleadership!
- 10.** No participation trophies were awarded in the writing of this book. #fakenews

SECTION ONE

Today's Workplace

TODAY'S WORKPLACE is like Saturday at noon in a suburban mall food court. It's chaotic, diverse, loud, annoying, and frustrating. It is a full frontal assault on the senses. If you're overly shy, reserved, or introverted or have problems with sensory overload, we would highly suggest you avoid it at all costs. That being said, the current workplace is also full of opportunity for the leader who can learn how to navigate it effectively!

To solve its challenges, the leader must first understand the complexities of the current workplace. If you can't define or understand this chaotic environment, there is no possible way you can solve its problems.

This is exactly what many leaders are guilty of: trying to solve a *systemic* problem with a variety of tactical solutions.

In many cases, they only manage to address the symptoms and never get anywhere near the root causes.

The first section of the book explores the workplace—its players, its challenges, and its opportunities.

Chapter 1

What We Figured Out Over Thanksgiving Dinner

“Each generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it.”¹

George Orwell

THANKSGIVING at our house is an epic event. Nona, the loving matriarch, makes more food than could possibly be consumed over the long weekend. This results in constantly eating and watching football; eating and *pretending* to watch football; or, when Nona demands, eating all together, engaged in a meaningful conversation.

Unlike many families, we don't have the “no religion or politics at the table” rule at our house. Which means, every once in a while, it can be a touch uncomfortable.



“Because kids these days have no respect!”



“Actually, it’s because the Pops is getting senile and has lost his filter.”

Thanksgiving 2014 was no different: seven people trying to catch up on a thousand things, all at the same time. As she often does, Nona reeled everyone back in with a question, this time directed at Robby: “Son,” she said, “how are things going in Boston?”

“It’s actually going really well,” Robby replied. “The client I’m working with is finally starting to understand that our team, though *much* younger than the gray-haired, pleated-khakis executives they would normally ‘take direction’ from, has a great perspective and a ton of value to offer.”

“Rob,” Pops interjected, “how did you get them to see the value of your team? Typically, Boomers whine and complain about how terrible Millennials are, and they would *never* listen to their point of view!”

Unfortunately, this is the truth. Even the Pops has been known to get in a few shots about the KIDS. (Don’t all older generations complain about the younger?)

“Kids these days with their pants hanging below their waists, with their iSomethings and selfies and apps-for-everything. All about themselves. They can’t they read and write like normal people, but they want to come in to work on Monday in flip-flops and be CEO by Friday!”

Nothing like throwing an entire generation under the bus.



“Hard to ignore when it’s so common!”

The challenge for the Pops is a tough one. He hears these same complaints day in and day out from clients who continue to struggle with these new, “high-maintenance” KIDS. And we can’t really blame him, can we? This is the popular belief of almost every BOSS. Even Robby experienced it as a brand-new consultant, fresh out of business school. This is a story he loves to tell.

Robby’s Stereotypical BOSS Encounter

My first client was an electric utility cooperative in a sleepy little town in North Texas, the kind of place where people have lived a long time and the company picnic is basically a family reunion.

The truth is, I learned more in the first six months with that client than I did in all of business school—about leadership, being a professional, setting expectations, taking initiative, and—sadly—the television show *Lost*. (Why did everyone love that show so much?! Time travel and multiple dimensions? I still don’t get it.)

I was working on a project that was to replace the client’s paper-based ticketing system. Technicians drove into the corporate office from all over North Texas every morning, picked up their tickets (repair orders), and then returned to the field to complete the work. Once completed, the techs would drive all the way back to HQ to turn in their tickets, resulting in thousands of miles driven each day. (Hopefully, you are starting to see the inefficiencies!)

I quickly realized we weren’t so much doing a technology project as we were helping the client transform their thinking.

The solution was to arm field technicians with electronic tablets, eliminating manual data entry by back-office staff and dramatically reducing drive time for each technician. Although the techs were generally reluctant to adopt the new technology, most were curious enough about the tablets that they were engaged in the process.

The supporting departments, however, were a much different story.

Most notable was the company's billing department. Their workflow process was painful, requiring employees to duplicate their effort over and over, manually inserting the same comments and notes on multiple screens. As I began to document the process, I asked why the notes had to be entered and re-entered that way. I was promptly introduced to that most famous of corporate justifications: "We've always done it this way."

It is that one short sentence that holds most organizations prisoner, and once that door slams shut, it becomes the equivalent of Alcatraz, seemingly inescapable.

We completed our "current state" documentation and moved on to designing the future state: the process that would support the new tablets. Clearly, one of the prime opportunities for improvement was the process within the billing department, which required me to meet with the director of billing. To say she wasn't excited to see me is an understatement, and she made it perfectly clear that she wasn't happy about me "messing up" her department. #perspective

However, I carefully explained the benefits of the changes: the elimination of the need to enter data on multiple screens, the ability to auto-fill comments from the tablets, and the opportunity to push meter readings into the system automatically from the field. A huge win, right?!

After showing her all the great things the new process would do, I wasn't exactly prepared for her response: "Who do you think you are? I have children older than you! What do you know about running a billing department?!"

After I pulled my chin up off the table (I was early in my career and hadn't developed a great "ARE YOU FREAKING KIDDING ME?" poker face), I asked her to explain to me why this wasn't good for her and her department. "Well," she replied, "that's just not how we do things here!"

Wow. Just . . .

Wow.

Finding Our Middle Ground

Much has been written about the clash between generations in the workplace. The challenges and the issues are undeniable, but we believe the key to success in this chaotic, four-generation workplace is completely dependent upon a change in leadership approach.

So, before we go any further, it's important that you understand how we define leadership. No, it's not the same thing as *management*.

The fact is, the majority of "leaders" are still trying to manage people using the same techniques that were developed in the late 1800s by Frederick Winslow Taylor, the godfather of modern management. He was the pioneer, and he quite literally wrote the book on it: his 1911 work entitled *The Principles of Scientific Management*. His ideas were all about enforcing standards and controlling workers (what is referred to as "management").

Here is a summary of his core principles:

1. Corporations are wildly inefficient in production processes.
2. The remedy for this inefficiency lies in systematic management rather than in searching for some unusual or extraordinary leader.
3. The best management is a true science, resting upon clearly defined laws, rules, and principles as a foundation.²

Management, according to Taylor, is all about the *system*. The people are simply part of the system; they are meant to serve it.

Taylor said, "In the past, the man has been first; in the future, the system must be first."³ Furthermore, his approach was built on the premise that the "workman" was considerably less capable (and by

capable, we mean smart, savvy, talented, educated, and innovative) than the “manager.” Taylor says,

It is only through **enforced** standardization of methods, **enforced** adoption of the best implements and working conditions, and **enforced** cooperation that this faster work can be assured and the duty of **enforcing** the adoption of standards and **enforcing** this cooperation rests with the *MANAGEMENT* alone.⁴

To summarize: Taylorian Management is all about forcing workers to do it “my way.” (Every BOSS just did a little fist pump and let out an audible “YES!”)

The problem here is obvious. Taylor wrote and tested his methods in a working environment that is *slightly* different from a *collaboration workspace* in the twenty-first century. He developed his philosophy in railroad yards, on factory floors, and alongside pig-iron handlers. We’re talking about the tail end of the Industrial Revolution, not exactly a Silicon Valley cube farm with a shuffleboard table in the break room.

Taylor, showing proof of his methods, adds this:

This work is so crude and elementary in its nature that [Taylor] firmly believes that it would be possible to train an intelligent gorilla so as to become a more efficient pig-iron handler than any man can be.⁵

To be fair, Taylor’s ideas, in the environment in which he lived and studied, really worked. Industrial America became more efficient. But, just because they worked *then*, we’ve allowed this philosophy of management to permeate our workplace *today*, more than a hundred years later. Successive generations of “leaders” have watched and soaked up command-and-control management, forcing and enforcing employees for over a century.

We shake our heads in shame and disgust. We aren't pig-iron handlers anymore! We are connected, distracted, educated, and innovative knowledge workers. It is only because of a lack of education in *leadership* that we are STILL trying to employ the Taylorian Management model today.

Do you get how ridiculously and offensively preposterous this is?! We've seen our world transform in basically every way, yet we think we can continue to utilize an out-of-touch and out-of-date management philosophy that was developed, more or less, to create indentured servitude.

Driving Transformation: Counter Mentor Leadership

For the first time in history, the younger generation has something more to offer an employer than enthusiasm and a fresh canvas. In the past, a new employee was instructed to "pay your dues," and promotion and advancement were dependent upon years of service and "working your way up the corporate ladder." But the workplace has been evolving quite rapidly since the Internet crashed the party. Now, the younger generation brings much more to the table than the ability to fetch coffee and make copies.

The KIDS have both the knowledge and the practical experience to navigate the rapidly evolving landscape of social media and digital tools. As technology infects the workplace, the value of the innovative, tech-savvy, so-called "junior" employee has increased a hundredfold.

Today's leaders must adapt! Any model of leadership that doesn't embrace intentional inclusion and collaboration with the KIDS is ultimately a death sentence to the organization and a ceiling for a manager's career.

After working with clients all over the world, from start-up to Fortune 100, our perspective is that leadership is **the art and science of getting things done through other people**, and *Counter Mentor Leadership* is the playbook to bring it to life. The transformational leader is a leader who coaches and develops the high-potential employee and simultaneously taps into the wealth of knowledge available from the younger generations and grows from below. Mentoring, reverse mentoring, and building a trusting relationship—these are the critical elements of Counter Mentor Leadership.

Most importantly, these new leaders have learned how to use every resource available. They are taking the best of the wisdom and experience of the “older” generation (the BOSS) and mixing it with the innovation and technology savvy of the “newer” generation (the KIDS) to bridge the generational divide and drive their organization to new and higher levels of performance and success.

These leaders put the following steps into action:

- Communicate the desired outcomes and constantly seek to be transparent
- Own the relationship with their employees
- Understand their people’s perspective
- Negotiate the obstacles that threaten success
- Teach their employees the essential skills
- Evaluate and course correct as needed
- Review constantly with their people—seeking feedback, new ideas, and engagement in the form of a very specific type of one-on-one meeting

Are you ready for this?

Key Points to Remember

1. If you ever hear “we’ve always done it that way” in the workplace, you should immediately investigate the process or task. We’ll wager big money there is an opportunity to improve!
2. Taylorian Management—the micromanagement style you see every day in the workplace—is dead and will not enable you to reach your true potential in the workplace.
3. Leadership is the art and science of getting things done through other people.



Check out this related *Counter Mentors* podcast episode: “I’m the Leader. Now Sit Down and Shut Up!” Visit cmtr.co/ep9.

Chapter 2

Technology: The Good, the Bad, and the Truly Scary

“I don’t have any of the modern electronics at all. I know the Internet would be a distraction. I would see things that interested me and never get back to writing.”¹

Elmore Leonard

THE POPS purchased his first “mobile” device in 1988. Back then, a mobile device was actually a car phone, which is really the only thing that made it mobile. It had an antenna for the roof of the car and a black box that went under the seat—very James Bond-ish (the Sean Connery version). They did make a portable version of the car phone, affectionately referred to as a “bag phone.” The problem was that it bore little resemblance to a bag, unless you’re referring to a twenty-two-inch roll-aboard.

This *innovation* did exactly one thing, and one thing only: phone calls. No texting. No browsing. No pictures of your food. No videos of screaming goats. Just phone calls.

The monthly investment for using that phone, using about thirty-five minutes a day, was well over \$400—about \$820 per month in today's dollar. Today, of course, you can pay around \$60 a month for a miniature supercomputer, a truly *mobile* device that will do everything short of teleporting you to another time zone. Streaming video. Instant communication. GPS. Online banking. Information on demand. And hipster food pictures by the billions.



“The KIDS and their food pics. I’m pretty sure pictures are the new trophies.”

This radical transformation took less than twenty years. By comparison, the time between the invention of radio and the first black-and-white television was over forty years, and it was another quarter century before flat-screen technology was invented.

Most importantly, for our purposes, technology has radically transformed the workplace in just about every way that you can imagine. Information is now available in the cloud, allowing every device in the building to connect and sync autonomously. Automation is possible in every part of the company, from manufacturing and operations to sales and marketing. Communication is instantaneous, around the world, across multiple platforms. We’re always on, always connected.

Technology has crushed the barriers to entry in dozens of industries previously occupied only by large companies. Smaller companies—even solopreneurs—can look and sound much larger and more sophisticated than they may actually be. Furthermore, today’s technology provides access not only to information, but also to customers, their habits, and their immediate feedback, creating an incredibly cost-effective platform for marketing and promoting a brand while providing the opportunity to personalize and individualize those products and services.

So, what's not to like about technology?

We heard you laugh! Or was that gasping for air? Quite obviously, technology, for all the incredible benefits it provides, also presents some serious challenges.

First, just keeping up with technology is a battle all its own. The newest version (hardware or software) is basically out of date by the time you get comfortable with it. Then, the time required to train on any new technology is always a significant drain on productivity. Worse still, technology issues, from hardware malfunctions to password changes to software patches, are a persistent source of friction and frustration in the workplace.

Yes, indeed, IT is the department we all love to hate. Nir Eyal, a contributor to *Forbes*, presented the truth of that statement in his article entitled "Why Everyone Hates IT People."

Quick: what's the biggest bottleneck in your company? Yup, we both know it's the Information Technology department. Let's face it, nobody likes IT people. For all of their technical wizardry, IT is where good ideas go to die. We follow their onerous documentation requirements and patiently wait in line through endless backlogs, yet somehow IT still can't seem to get their work done.²

Truth or tongue-in-cheek, most people understand the frustration of technology. However, we typically chalk it up to the small price we have to pay for progress—a whole new world, brimming with possibilities, propelled by a tidal wave of new and advancing technology solutions. Onward and upward!

Right?

Unfortunately, there's more to technology problems than a bit of inconvenience. For many, there is a real belief that technology has created as many problems in the workplace as it may have solved. In an *MIT Sloan Management Review* article entitled "The Dark Side

of Information Technology,” the authors describe some of the more common issues:

Pervasive and near-continual use of organizational IT systems is now beginning to take a toll on some employees’ health. Individuals experience “IT use-induced stress” or “technostress” for a number of reasons. They feel forced to multitask rapidly on simultaneous streams of information from different devices simply because information feeds come at them in real time; remote work and flextime tether them round the clock to their devices and workplaces; and short technology cycles and pressures from IT vendors mean constantly changing interfaces, screens and functionalities, often without sufficient FAQs and help-desk support. We also found in a survey of about 600 computer-using professionals that 73% worried that refraining from constant connectivity and instantaneous information-feed response would place them at a disadvantage at work.³

Stress? Pressure? Health issues? Maybe there is more to the price of progress in the workplace than we anticipated.

We’re not even close to finished yet.

The Scary Parts of Technology

One of the most pernicious workplace challenges presented by technology is *distraction*.

From Internet access and text messaging to social media and YouTube videos, technology provides constant and persistent diversions to workplace productivity.

A Harris poll, conducted on behalf of CareerBuilder, surveyed 2,138 hiring managers and HR professionals and 3,022 full-time workers to determine how employees waste time in the workplace.⁴

Twenty-four percent of workers *self-reported* that they spend at least an hour of a typical workday on personal email, texts, and personal calls. Twenty-one percent estimated that they waste an hour or more searching the Internet for non-work-related information.

According to that poll, these are the top four time-wasters in the workplace:

1. Talking on the cell phone and texting—50%
2. Gossiping—42%
3. Time on the Internet—39%
4. Time engaged with social media—38%

If you're a BOSS, you probably have a hard time believing these numbers. You likely think they are *way too low*. After all, the one consistent complaint from the BOSS is how much time those KIDS spend on their phones when they should be working! Unfortunately, the BOSS might be right. A 2014 Salary.com survey revealed that employees admit to wasting a significant amount of time at work:

- 31% admitted to wasting as much as 30 minutes daily
- 31% admitted to wasting as much as 1 hour daily
- 16% admitted to wasting as much as 2 hours daily⁵

That's right, roughly one out of every six employees (16%) *admit* they waste as much as a quarter of the workday!

But that's not the worst of it.

- 6% admitted to wasting as much as 3 hours daily
- 2% admitted to wasting as much as 4 hours daily
- 2% admitted to wasting as much as 5 hours daily⁶

One out of every ten employees admitted to wasting away 3 or more hours every day!

EVERY SINGLE DAY.

And we don't even have to guess what employees are doing to waste that time; the employees themselves told us. The biggest culprits? Google (24%), followed by Facebook (23%) and LinkedIn (14%).

Ah, yes, social media—*the gift that keeps on taking*.

That one problem—distraction—is bad enough to make any BOSS want to throw something, but there is even more danger lurking out there. Mobile technology and social media create a volatile weapon capable of inflicting great harm on your business.

Can You Say, “United Breaks Guitars?”

In 2008, David Carroll and his fellow band members from the Canadian band Sons of Maxwell were traveling from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to Omaha, Nebraska, to play a gig. Bad news for the band: upon arrival in Omaha, Carroll discovered that one of his Taylor guitars, valued at \$3,500, had been badly damaged.⁷

Carroll immediately filed a claim with United Airlines, but nine months of rejections and denials from the airline led Carroll to do what any self-respecting songwriter would do. He wrote a song about the incident. And then he posted it on YouTube.

Released in July 2009, the song, “United Breaks Guitars,” needed only sixty days to garner a whopping 5 million views. With more than 16 million views at the time of this writing, the song, and its two subsequent follow-up songs, made Carroll a bit of a star. He published a book (*United Breaks Guitars: The Power of One Voice in the Age of Social Media*), testified on Capitol Hill, was featured in major news shows and publications, and delivered keynote speeches at events all over the country.⁸

The point of the story, however, is the negative impact these events had on the image and reputation of United Airlines (much more about this phenomenon in chapter 9). Most importantly, little, *if anything*, would have happened to United Airlines without the incredible reach of technology and social media.

See the problem? Not only is technology an *internal* threat to employee productivity, it poses a significant *external* threat should companies screw over, anger, or simply miscalculate with customers. Social media can make you famous, and it can make your company infamous.

In his November 2010 Harvard Business School case, marketing professor John Deighton offered the following observation:

“[United Breaks Guitars] is a good case for getting a glimpse into a new world of communication, vs. the old world of Super Bowl ads and prime-time audiences,” says Deighton. “The new world doesn’t necessarily play by the rules of the old. One of the points we debate in class is whether social media are better at destroying value than creating it. In social media, an entity’s size and brand recognition make it more vulnerable to parody and attack, not safer. As we accumulate experience with these media, perhaps we will find that they tend to favor the insurgent over the incumbent.”⁹

The truth is, technology presents enormous benefits while creating significant hazards. It has completely advanced the business landscape while dramatically altering the workplace. It has made it so much easier to connect to customers, but it has also created a platform that empowers customers to destroy a brand.

Technology has created a love-hate relationship in the workplace which, for some borders on the extreme. Regardless of how you may feel about it, the impact of technology requires leaders to adapt or to be swept aside—assuming your objective is to grow revenues, attract talent, and keep more of your money.

Unfortunately, technology isn't the only challenge you face in the chaotic, four-generation workplace.

Key Points to Remember

1. Technology has enabled us to do incredible things, but it isn't without some *potentially devastating* side effects.
2. Seventy-eight percent of employees self-reported they waste between thirty minutes and two hours throughout the workday on the Internet! Yes, distractions are a huge problem.
3. Your customers are more connected and have more power than ever before. Thank you, social media. *The gift that keeps on taking.*

Chapter **3**

The Fight We Should've Seen Coming

“Creativity involves breaking out of established patterns in order to look at things in a different way.”¹

Edward de Bono

BEFORE WE GET INTO THE DETAILS of the current generational disconnect—which has shaped up to be an Ali–Frazier-esque title fight—let’s define the two opponents in the workplace.

Please understand that, despite the common usage, we’re not necessarily fans of the terms *Boomer* and *Millennial*. Gen X winds up getting ignored, and the Digital Natives are barely even in the picture at this point. On top of that, some Boomers have adapted well to Millennials, and vice versa. So, as we mentioned in the introduction, when talking about the workplace, we will simply call them the BOSS and the KIDS.

BOSS: the **B**oomer, **O**ld-School **S**upervisors

KIDS: the **K**now-It-All, **D**igital **S**elf-Promoters



“And entitled, and lazy, and a lot of other things that don’t fit into the acronym.”



“‘S’ is actually for *Superstars*, but Pops is too stubborn to admit it.”

Dig in to this chapter! We’re going to give you a quick overview of the BOSS and the KIDS (the facts and figures) and throw in all of our favorite stereotypes.

The BOSS: Pagers, Pay Phones, and Pensions

We like to describe the BOSS as anyone who still balances a checkbook or has no idea how to use PayPal. This group is counting on a pension and still believes their union rep has their best interest at heart (haven’t they seen *The Wire*?). They are primarily Baby Boomers in their fifties and sixties, the ones who are now retiring en masse, but also includes some older Gen Xers (the ones who don’t do change).

Here are the key facts and stereotypes you need to know:

- **The BOSS demands respect.** When this generation started their careers, they arrived fifteen minutes early and sat in the office chair until 5:05 p.m., come hell or high water. They did exactly as they were told and never questioned anything. They were “good soldiers” and paid their dues. They simply cannot understand why these KIDS would even think about, much

less actually consider, asking WHY something needs to be done. That is completely *disrespectful*.

- **The BOSS expects loyalty.** This generation, unlike their parents, grew up mostly in a time of security and predictability (notwithstanding their early days with the Vietnam War and the *crazy* hippies). They were raised, however, by parents and grandparents who survived the Great Depression and WWII. As such, there was a premium placed on *loyalty*—to country, family, and the job.
- **The BOSS places enormous value on work ethic, probably more than efficiency.** This generation manages, tracks, and thinks about time as the metric for work. They care about work ethic—time at work—more than just about anything. They place an enormous value on grit and the ability to persevere at work over the course of many years. The fact that these KIDS want to “take breaks” and “get more done with less” is vexing. Don’t they understand the value of work?
- **The BOSS prefers a real conversation, not a text message.** Psychologists, psychiatrists, and parents have proven it over and over—the most effective way to communicate is face-to-face. Period. So, obviously, this generation always seeks to leverage the *best* form of communication in each and every interaction. *They* don’t bother with Snaps or Facebook Live. After all, how do you communicate if you can’t look someone in the eye?
- **The BOSS typically values “the way we’ve always done it.”** If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself. This generation has been taught this and experienced it in real life for decades! Naturally, then, they see the way they’ve *always done it* as the *right* way. The *only* way. Why do these KIDS constantly rebel and want to do things differently? Don’t they understand if it ain’t broke, you don’t need to fix it?

- **The BOSS craves the comfort of the hierarchical organization chart.** When this generation started a new job, they were usually given the Organizational Chart. This sacred document enabled them to understand whom they could interact with, what the path to the top of the corporate ladder looked like, and whom they needed to buy a drink for. It allowed them to figure out who the most important people were (those at the top, obviously), and whom they should avoid (anyone with “Assistant” or “Marketing” in their title).
- **The BOSS covets the gold watch and the retirement pension.** You show up every day, you work hard, and the company will take care of you. The older generation grew up believing in the company from the time they were old enough to pour their own Wheaties. Success at work—and thus, at home—comes from working hard for thirty years. Respect, loyalty, work ethic, and results (if we're in a good economy)—that is success. And nothing says success like the gold watch and a monthly retirement check.

The KIDS: Snapchat, Smartphones, and Slack

The KIDS are a bit different. #understatementoftheyear

They are made up of people who don't write checks. Ever. They use digital apps like Apple Pay, Venmo, Cash, and PayPal. They believe they can show up at noon and get more work done before happy hour than the BOSS can accomplish during his five-days-a-week, eight-to-five nonsense.

This group is made up of younger Gen Xers, Millennials, and the fresh Digital Natives who are beginning to enter the workforce. Here are the key facts and stereotypes you need to know.

- **The KIDS demand respect.** No, they won't give it out automatically, but they definitely demand it immediately. They've been *experiencing* the new ways of the world since they learned to crawl. They know how to swipe, tap, cache, code, and debug. They have followers, friends, and #swag. They have more to offer the BOSS than she can even imagine. They don't understand why the BOSS is so condescending when they have a *better* way of doing it. In their minds, the KIDS don't get the respect they *deserve*.
- **The KIDS need to know "Why?"** Not once in their lives have they had to settle for the one-word answer "No." Not ever. They have negotiated, complained, whined, and used temper tantrums to get that question answered for two or three decades! "What is the BOSS thinking? He wants to just *tell me* what to do? Unacceptable! Doesn't he understand that if I know *why*, I'll be able to find a better way to do it?"



"Two bullet points in and already my head hurts."



Classic BOSS. Someone get the Pops his medication and a bottle of Ensure."

- **The KIDS want collaboration and coaching, not demands and directions.** This generation grew up learning that "everyone's input matters" and "there are no bad ideas!" This was modeled at home, at school, and in extracurricular activities. They were rarely given directions, much less demands. Instead, they've always been coddled and catered to. (Mr. and Ms. Helicopter Parent, we blame you for this!) They want to

brainstorm, ideate, collaborate, and think through potential solutions—not have the answer dictated to them. How dare the BOSS try to tell them what they *must* do each day, or (worse) what time they *have to* be in the office?

- **The KIDS value autonomy through flexibility and options.** Let's be perfectly clear. This generation values flexibility because they've had it every single day of their lives. They got to choose whether they wanted to watch TV before or after dinner (both, of course). They chose to take a transitional year between high school and college to work on their apps and journals and adjust to the stresses of life after high school. They got to choose between online, in-person, and "at your own pace" classes, which they attended at their leisure, wherever they wanted.
- **The KIDS will just text or snap you.** The KIDS check their phones a ridiculous 150 times per day!² *Obvi.* SMH—you don't know? LOL—try n keep up! #winning TTYL. (If you're a BOSS, you'll need a translation.)
- **The KIDS crave new and different.** "The Next Big Thing" is basically the tagline for this generation. They've been seeing bigger (or smaller), faster, more powerful, and just *better* "stuff" every single day. From hardware and software to clothes and accessories, they've helped to build a new standard of industry and innovation. Even *The Tonight Show* is way more hip now (sorry, Johnny, it's true). They want you to know, "You're welcome."
- **Many of the KIDS are "work martyrs." Just ask them!** According to a study done by Project: Time Off and GfK, 43 percent of the KIDS self-report as "work martyrs" (vs. 29 percent of the more than 5,000 survey respondents).³ They were much more likely to agree with key statements like "I feel guilty for using my paid time off" and "I want to show complete

dedication to my company and job.” They are so ridiculously important—they couldn’t possibly take a day off.

- **The KIDS will save the world.** Al Gore was right. Immediately after he invented the Internet, he figured out that the older generation has been killing our planet. Now the KIDS believe their job is to save the world that the BOSS has been destroying with her SUVs and his gas-powered golf carts. They would rather go broke working for a company that makes a difference than make a fortune working on Wall Street.

What Drives the Conflict?

If you’re one of those people we’ve labeled as the BOSS, you may be a little irritated by now. You might think our descriptions about you are all slanted negatively, while the stereotypes for the KIDS sound much more positive. (That may be because Robby wrote the first draft of this chapter, and it explains why he was so quick to volunteer.) You’re used to throwing around the negative stereotypes about the KIDS—entitled, lazy, undisciplined—and you tend to forget that there are two perspectives in this conflict.

While there have been many blog posts, articles, and books written on *what* causes the extreme conflict between the BOSS and the KIDS, we believe that there are simply three key issues. We’ve read about these issues and, more importantly, we’ve observed them first-hand with our clients.

From start-up to Fortune 100, these are the three components of this conflict:

1. **Attitude.** There is a distinct difference between the way the BOSS was raised and taught to act in the workplace (and social settings) and how the KIDS were raised and taught. The KIDS

have been tremendously influenced by several things the BOSS never had to be concerned with—technology, information access, social media, and helicopter parents. Yes, that's right, BOSS, it will dawn on you at some point that YOU were a huge part of creating this monster!

- 2. Workplace Expectations.** This one is incredibly easy to understand, yet researchers tend to confound our understanding with academic jargon. Simply put, the BOSS expects the KIDS to “pay their dues” and “show respect.” The BOSS *requires* the KIDS to show up on time, do what they're told, work hard, and (try to) add value. That's it. They are not expected to question *everything* and play on their phones *all day*. Is it really that hard?

Conversely, the KIDS expect the BOSS to understand the amazing life experiences and skills they have, to be thrilled to work with them, and to value everything they have to offer. The KIDS expect—no, *demand*—the opportunity to give their opinion. Plus, they expect to have the flexibility to work from home whenever they want to. Is it really that hard?

- 3. Skills.** The KIDS bring a specific set of game-changing technology skills to the workplace, including the ability to leverage apps like Pocket, Basecamp, Slack, Hootsuite, Canva, Wufoo, Box, Trello, Evernote, Calendly, Nimble, and CheckIn (yes, we made at least one of those up). The BOSS often has no idea what these tools are, what they do, or how they have changed the business landscape. Remember, KIDS were taught differently, raised differently, and they have a very different definition of the status quo.

The KIDS were taught the value of “teaming” and put a premium on learning to operate in an autonomous team. Roles were constantly changed—note taker one day and team leader the next. Their ability to flex and adapt, while always adding value, is what defines success. The KIDS have *very* different skills.

Even 007 Has Challenges with Millennials

In the opening scene of the twenty-third James Bond movie (*Skyfall*), 007 is shot and appears to be dead. Bond, of course, never stays dead, so when Queen and Country are under attack, he immediately comes back to life. Although he's only been away a short time, there is the sense in the movie that an entire lifetime has come and gone while he was "dead." (Somewhere, Daniel Craig is mildly irritated that we summarized forty-five minutes of his brilliant cinema in one short paragraph.)

After returning to 007-type duties, Bond meets his new quartermaster: the person responsible for supplying him with everything from transportation to his beloved Walther PPK. Q needs to finalize operational details, impress Bond with some cool new spy gear, and generally prepare him to get back in the game. Now, if you've ever seen a Bond film, you know that Q has always been an old, white-haired gentleman in a lab coat. The new Q, however, is one of the KIDS; a snarky young Brit who makes Bond very uncomfortable (cue sarcastic, dramatic eye roll).

Their first meeting perfectly sums up the conflict between the BOSS and the KIDS. Bond is in London's National Gallery, deep in thought, contemplating Joseph Turner's 1839 oil painting of the HMS *Temeraire*. *The Fighting Temeraire*, as the painting is known, is a beautiful work of art showing a once-grand, 98-gun ship being towed into the sunset, presumably to be torn apart and her scraps repurposed. This once-magnificent, lethal ship had played a key role in the British win over the combined French and Spanish navies in the 1908 Battle of Trafalgar. She used to be needed.

Bond's temperament is a bit prickly. The metaphor of an old warship no longer fit for battle in the modern world is uncomfortably accurate for where he is and how he's feeling. Then, a young stranger

takes a seat on the bench next to Bond. Smugly, he offers his observation of the painting, a thinly veiled comparison with Bond: “Always makes me feel a bit melancholy. A grand old warship being ignominiously hauled away for scrap . . . The inevitability of time, don’t you think? What do you see?”

Bond, irritated and presumably offended, gets up to leave, before learning that the young stranger is Q, his new quartermaster. Their awkward first meeting ends with the perfect example of the conflict between the BOSS and the KIDS:

Q: 007, I’m your new quartermaster.

BOND: You must be joking.

Q: Why, because I’m not wearing a lab coat?

Referring to Q’s relative youth and inexperience Bond quips that, no, it’s because he still has pimples.

Q: My complexion is hardly relevant.

BOND: Well, your competence is . . . and youth is no guarantee of innovation.⁴

In response, Q implies that he can “do more damage” on his computer while in his pajamas than Bond can hope to do “in a year in the field.”

In one short scene, you have the perfect contrast between the BOSS and the KIDS—between two completely different worlds and two radically different perspectives.

These differences are real, and they are potentially lethal in *your* business. This is especially true when companies fail to prepare their leaders (supervisors, middle managers, and executives) to be successful in the chaotic, four-generation workplace. How much do you think it’s costing you in terms of innovation? Or talent acquisition? Most important, how is it affecting your bottom line?

As you will see, you can capitalize on this tremendous *opportunity*, or you can eventually fade into irrelevance. We’re betting you

want to leverage the power of both generations but are just a bit unsure of how to proceed. So, our objective is to show you a path away from the problem.

We don't have a bulletproof Aston Martin to offer, but we do have some tools that will serve you best when you need them most.

First, however, we need to brief you on some important details. The problem is probably worse than you think.

How's that for a pep talk?

Key Points to Remember

1. The BOSS and the KIDS have radically different points of view. They were raised differently, taught differently, and (generally) think differently.
2. These differences drive an extreme disconnect on expectations inside the workplace.
3. There are three primary drivers of the generational conflict that you need to understand: attitude, expectations, and skills.



Check out this related *Counter Mentors* video podcast episode: "Why Can't You Act Like Adults?!" Visit cmtr.co/ep19.

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Chapter 4

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2. This quote, commonly attributed to Socrates, was actually crafted by Kenneth John Freeman for his Cambridge dissertation published in 1907. For further details, visit <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2010/05/01/misbehaving-children-in-ancient-times>.
3. Ekins, Emily. “65% of Americans Say Millennials Are ‘Entitled,’ 58% of Millennials Agree,” *Reason-Rupe Poll*, *Reason.com*, August 19, 2014, <http://reason.com/poll/2014/08/19/65-of-americans-say-millennials-are-enti>.

