

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

## DIVERSE WORKFORCE BRINGS CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES

Workplaces today are more diverse than ever. Mostly, we think of diversity in terms of gender or race or ethnicity, but for the first time in history, we have five generations on the job at the same time.

Pew Research Center has defined the generations this way: Generation Z, born between 2001 and 2020; millennials, born between 1981 and 2000; Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980; baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964; and the Silent Generation, born between 1925 and 1945.

This multigenerational reality makes sense. People are living longer — and for certain older Americans, work is an economic necessity. Some are staying in the workforce because they enjoy their jobs and want to continue contributing for as long as they can.

Think for a moment about the differences among our five generations. They're significant: from different points of view and life experiences to different styles of working. It makes it easy to fall into the trap of stereotyping, which social scientists say we do

because of a need to structure our social environment. Grouping people together, after all, is much more efficient than evaluating them separately. It gives us confidence in saying that boomers are technology averse, while millennials don't like to work at all.

On Tuesday, the National Conflict Resolution Center hosted a conversation with an expert on leading intergenerational workforces, Dr. Megan Gerhardt, professor of management and leadership at the Farmer School of Business at Miami University and author of "Gentelligence: A Revolutionary Approach to Leading an Intergenerational Workforce." The program was part of NCRC's "Navigating the Uncharted" webinar series for workplace leaders.

Gerhardt noted that generation is just one layer of our multifaceted identities. Our gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture and where we grew up also matter, interacting to determine our individual perspectives and experiences.

In Gerhardt's view, generational stereotyping is lazy. When we resort to it — painting genera-

tional differences through a negative lens and shaming or mocking others — we subvert performance. Employees become less engaged and teams become less cohesive. Intergenerational knowledge transfer suffers.

To Gerhardt, working across generations makes good business sense. Yet a 2020 Deloitte report found that just 6 percent of organizations "strongly agree" their leaders are equipped to lead an intergenerational workforce. It begins, she said, with recognizing that employees — regardless of age — have shared needs, including respect, connection, competence and autonomy.

But, Gerhardt pointed out, the way we fulfill our shared needs differs based on the experiences each of us had during our formative years. Gerhardt used respect as an example: Older workers keep their heads down, focusing on the task at hand (to gain respect), while younger workers are proactive in asking for what they want or need, which can look entitled to older generations. The problem, Gerhardt said, is when we judge a situation through our own lens.

At NCRC, we teach a course called "The ART of Inclusive Communication" that gives people the skills to successfully navigate their daily exchanges with diverse colleagues and customers.

Workplace leaders learn to leverage differences among their employees to achieve impact, rather than seeing them as barriers. When put into practice, the principles of ARTIC contribute to an environment where people feel supported. It makes them more likely to collaborate, not compete.

Gerhardt's "Gentelligence" is built on similar principles. She suggested four practices to break down intergenerational tension and bias in the workplace.

1. Resist assumptions: Be cautious about relying on generational myths or stereotypes.

2. Adjust the lens: Work to identify the intent and interest behind the attitudes and actions of those from other generations.

3. Strengthen trust: Create a climate where employees of all ages believe their needs matter and their talents are well utilized.

4. Expand the pie: Replace perceptions of scarcity with ones

of integration, growth and opportunity.

In an article called "What to Know When Five Generations Share an Office," Charter columnist S. Mitra Kalita wrote about one assumption we tend to make: preferred communication styles.

She described the multiple ways to communicate as "chaotic," adding, "We aren't doing ourselves any favors by assigning entire generations a preferred mode of communication, versus understanding that, like all things, styles really vary individually. Without that nuance, misunderstandings can run rampant."

But in a meeting with my team just after the webinar, there was no mistaking the generations.

In a sea of cellphones and laptops, I was the only person scrawling in a notebook, just as I've always done.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit [ncronline.com](http://ncronline.com)

## CHARITY

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for 2019, 2020 and 2021 are different from the numbers listed on the 2022 tax filing.

It is not clear whether the 2021 and 2022 tax returns supplied by Community Through Hope have been filed with state and federal regulators; the records are not stamped as received by the agencies and do not appear on public databases.

Vasquez indicated that her organization had grown too fast and she was simply unable to properly comply with all of the various rules a tax-exempt organization is required to meet.

"CTH was a small nonprofit that during the pandemic stepped up to provide nutrition to thousands of sheltered and unsheltered individuals and chose to outsource our taxes to a 3rd party service," she wrote.

## Fundraising halted

Vasquez declined to explain the differences in reported revenue, as well as other discrepancies in the

internal tax documents. Instead, the Community Through Hope founder said last week that the organization has suspended all fundraising and sought expert help to correct its reporting issues.

"Community Through Hope is working along with our accounting and legal team to address and rectify our delinquent status with the IRS," Vasquez said in a statement. "CTH no longer accepts any monetary donations and removed all donation portals from its social media and website."

The announcement came this past Wednesday, five weeks after the Union-Tribune first asked the organization why it was raising money while listed as delinquent.

Earlier last week, the organization's website was still soliciting donations from the public.

Vasquez also said she sought professional guidance after suspending services.

"CTH has also taken steps to consult with local nonprofit experts in order to

complete this process in transparency," the statement Wednesday said. "CTH is no longer providing any gap services to clients at our current location."

Beyond the conflicting revenue data, Vasquez also declined to say why Community Through Hope reported no board members on the federal tax filings, or why she reported 24 employees one year and no workers the prior year.

May Harris, a San Diego attorney whose For Purpose Law Group specializes in nonprofit leadership and management, said lax record-keeping and reporting practices by any exempt organization harms other charities — and the public.

"We have to have faith in the nonprofit that people can rely upon and that the organization is compliant and transparent in what they are doing and how they are reporting out what they are doing," she said.

"That's part of the compact between the government and a nonprofit organization to receive that tax-exempt status," Harris

added. "That compact is an agreement that they will comply with the law because their assets are charitable assets of the public, not of any individual."

Two former board members contacted by the Union-Tribune said they left the organization because they were not provided critical financial information or documents. They asked not to be identified because they did not want to be publicly associated with the charity.

The 2022 federal return states that Community Through Hope was independently audited, but Vasquez declined to release the audit as required under state law. The tax filing also does not disclose that two of Vasquez's children are or were employees, as state law also requires.

## 'Close the door softly'

Community Through Hope first began helping unsheltered people within the last decade. It was formally incorporated as a tax-exempt organization in 2018, records show.

According to the IRS, the

charity filed what's called a Form 990-N in each of its first two years. Form 990-Ns are simple declarations that an exempt organization raised and spent less than \$50,000 during the specified tax year.

But in early 2021, Community Through Hope reported financial information to the state that appeared to contradict prior filings.

The charity filed a document with the state attesting that it had \$338,558 in revenue over the year ending June 30, 2020, and expenses totaling \$273,206. It also reported \$69,474 in assets.

The financial data reported to the California Department of Justice also conflict with information reported on the tax filings the charity provided to the Union-Tribune.

It's not clear where all of the money raised by Community Through Hope in recent years came from. Some documents indicate most of it was donated by the public; others say most of it came from government grants.

At least some support was approved by the city of

Chula Vista, which agreed in 2020 to award the nonprofit \$30,000 for a food-distribution effort, with options for two additional years.

But the grant was pulled after just one year, with little comment or explanation from city officials.

Community Through Hope will "close the door softly on our relationship with the city," Vasquez said at the time.

By May 2021, state regulators were warning the charity that it needed to both pay its annual \$75 registration fee and file a new tax return.

"In order to clear your organization's delinquent status and comply with the law, please submit the following reports, together with the information requested above to complete the current fiscal year's filing requirements," the Attorney General's Office told the charity.

According to state and federal databases, Community Through Hope has not filed tax returns since.

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