

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

# Addressing the Generation Gap on Your Team (with Tim Elmore) - Episode 312

## *Empowering Next Generation Leaders (Part 1)*

Developing the next generation of leaders seems to be one of the most pressing challenges churches are facing today. That's why we're kicking off a brand new series all about how we can intentionally raise up and empower the next generation of leaders in our ministries.

In this episode, Tony sits down with Tim Elmore, Founder and CEO of [Growing Leaders](#) and author of [A New Kind of Diversity: Making the Different Generations on Your Team a Competitive Advantage](#), to discuss how leaders can begin to address the generation gap on their teams.

### *Interview with Tim Elmore*

**You write that “the generation gap... has widened today, making collaboration and synergy on a team more challenging than ever.” Would you unpack this problem for our listeners?**

**TIM:** Here's my theory: The gap between generations is widening because the screens in our life went from public to private. Whereas we used to gather around a TV together, now we've all got a device in our hand that's exclusively ours—an echo chamber of people that think like me, talk like me, vote like me, etc. We can be millions of miles apart socially and emotionally and even spiritually because we just interact with different worlds. What I wonder is, instead of getting angry or frustrated about this, what if we learned to work together and leverage the unique strengths of each generation?

**What are some things leaders can do to be better at closing the generation gap?**

**TIM:** Those of us who are older tend to expect younger people to do all the “leaning in” and learning from us “adults.” However, because our world and culture today are changing so rapidly, it might actually be true that younger generations have a better intuition on where the world is going. So I think we need to meet in the middle: Boomers and Gen X have timeless insights and Millennials and Gen Z have timely intuition about where culture is going. What if we brought those two together? Too often we assume we have all the answers—we never turn our frustration into fascination and the gap between us just keeps getting bigger and bigger.

For example: 70% of high school kids today want to be an entrepreneur—they want to start something, not just join something. So what if, inside our ministry, we had places they could pioneer something and start a new project within a great established environment where we can love them, mentor them, coach them, etc? That's what I think the church is going to need.

### **What are some of the common things that create discord between generations at work?**

**TIM:** When I interviewed respondents from five generations, I asked them: “What do you want from other generations when you interact with them?” I got different responses from all five generations, but three responses came up in every single one of them: Humility, respect, and curiosity. Every generation said, “I would love for you to approach me with respect, curious about what I might have to offer and what I might share.”

Imagine a church or a ministry where everybody, young and old, was interfacing with humility, respect, and curiosity. The church needs to wake up and add timeless insight and wisdom to timely intuition and welcome the young, even though they've got a lot to learn (because we do too).

### **One of your chapters is all about Managing Preferences, Tensions, and Expectations. How can leaders begin to manage these?**

**TIM:** I remember learning from Andy Stanley, “There's a difference between problems to solve and tensions to manage.” I think there's probably always going to be a little tension between young and old that we'll have to manage. So I think in the job interviews, we need to talk about: What are your preferences (meaning you wish that were true, but it doesn't have to be to make it here) and what are your demands (meaning this is core to who we are).

Expectations are another huge issue because every generation comes into a church or a workplace with a different expectation based on when they were raised. When and where a person grew up has a lot to do with who they become and who they turn into. I think we, in job interviews or even just in interactions with family or at church, need to be asking: When were they born and how might that shape their worldview? So I think those issues of preferences, tensions, and expectations are all going to be big discoveries to make on everybody's part.

### **What are some ways that leaders can better understand the generations they work with without stereotyping them?**

**TIM:** In my opinion, stereotypes are mental shortcuts. We're too lazy to do the work to really understand the person in front of us, so we take shortcuts. What's interesting is that while we draw these conclusions, we don't want anybody else to do that to us. So I think we need to stop doing what we hate people doing to us and we need to do the work.

For example: If you were going to fly to a different country, you know that you're going to have to work harder to connect with people there because they speak a different language. They have different customs and they may have different values. We need to have the same mindset across generations and do the work to connect. Jesus showed us this by example—he always did the work to understand who was in front of him.

**John Maxwell has said that “managers treat everyone the same, and leaders treat everyone differently.” Tell me about this idea of “chess vs. checkers” in leadership.**

**TIM:** When I play the game of checkers, all my pieces look alike and move alike, so I treat them all the same. But if I have any hope of winning the game of chess, I have to know what each piece can do. It's only in knowing the strength of each piece can I win. Mediocre leaders or managers play checkers with their people: They treat them all alike and they get average performance. Great leaders have learned to play chess in the relationships of their life: They connect with others through the uniqueness of their strength, their personality, and their generation, and those people flourish under their leadership.

So it's a simple way of remembering that everyone in front of me is a chess piece, not a checkers piece, so I better know what they can do so I can bring out their very best.

## *Key Takeaways*

God has created each of us uniquely, so we can't be quick to over-generalize who someone is because of their age. Instead, we really need to get to know each person as a unique individual.

If you lead a team, list each person on your team and address these questions:

- Where are they in their faith journey?
- How has their family and upbringing shaped who they are?
- What are their unique strengths that they can contribute to the team? How can I help them maximize those strengths?
- What are the unique challenges that could hold them back without appropriate coaching? How could I help them improve?
- If they were in my seat, what would they do differently?
- How can I help them take their next step in their leadership?
- How should I be praying for them?

If you don't know how to answer these questions for each person you are leading, you probably don't know them as individuals well enough.

The intersection of the different generations on your team can be an advantage—and the intersection of the different generations in your church can also be an advantage. The healthiest churches aren't just reaching one generation—they are multi-generational churches.

Listen to the full episode on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or at [theunstuckgroup.com/episode312](https://theunstuckgroup.com/episode312).

## *Free Webinar: How to Structure Your Staff to Develop Next Gen Leaders*

If we want the legacy of our leadership to outlive us, we have to focus on giving leadership away to the next generation. Join Tony Morgan and Amy Anderson on September 28 for this [free 1-hour webinar](#) where you'll be empowered with the systems and strategies to confidently structure your church for future impact.

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