What’s Age Got to Do with It?

Sally was living the life; as a young professional born in the 90’s, she was beginning her new role as a sales manager of an online store after amassing five years of work experience. As an extrovert, she loved her job and was optimistic about her future. In addition, as a recent newlywed, she felt confident in her personal growth and felt mature beyond her years.

At her company, Sally is responsible in leading a team in delivering exceptional pre-sales customer service around all product lines. She needs to set the right goals, targets and expectations for the frontline agents to follow as well as meeting targets such as excellent customers satisfaction, business results and sales related KPIs. Additionally, her daily tasks involve analyzing business trends to facilitate key business decisions, identifying and addressing gaps in company processes, employee training and any other activities related to enhancing customer experiences and increasing team morale.

Sally is the youngest leader in the company’s management team. In the first two years of her team management experience, Sally found that her leadership style evolved and grew along with her team. To Sally, trust and respect are the two most important factors in leading a team; therefore, it was organic and comfortable to frequently communicate with her team members. As the members of her team were always willing to share the challenging tasks voice their opinions, Sally’s leadership tasks went relatively smoothly.

Since June of this year, Sally transferred to a new team within the company as a leader. Although she had gained confidence in her prior work experience, Sally had difficulties adjusting as a leader to her new team members. For one, a third of the new group are aged in their thirties. They regarded themselves as more senior in experience and expertise and were not so inclined in treating Sally as their superior. As a result, Sally struggled to effectively communicate and motivate these group members.

*Motivating by finding the passion*

Sally put herself in her team members’ shoes and considered that if she also had significant experience, she would want her opinions to be valued and heard. Therefore, Sally decided to first listen. She scheduled deep one on one sessions with all the team members to hear their suggestions and perspectives. Not only did she show that she cared about how her team felt, she was also able to get some valuable advice. She also tried to delve into the psyche of her employees and asked them to identify words on a list that represents their motivation. From this exercise, she was able to understand better how and why her team members would respond to her leadership.

*Refresh by re-group*

Understanding that there are generational differences within the team, Sally tried to divide the team to different groups based on shared similarities and gave each group the freedom to manage themselves. In this manner, older employees no longer focused on having to work for a younger leader. At the same time, Sally knew she could rely on these older workers to get the job done independantly.

*Providing resources*

Sally understood that the older workers might not be willing to listen to the knowledge of a younger leader. Therefore, Sally invited external consultants to further the development of her team. By providing resources for employees to develop professionally, both younger and older workers are motivated to work harder. Sally hopes that by initiating these steps, she can slowly build relationships of trust among her team members. Overtime, she hopes to show that she is thoughtful and able to run a team, regardless of the members’ ages.