



The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer Transcript for Episode #032 The Creative Power of Intergenerational Teams

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Amy Climer: Welcome to the Deliberate Creative Podcast [Episode 32](#). My name is Amy Climer and Happy New Year everyone! This is the first episode of 2016 and I am very excited to kick off the first episode with an awesome special guest.

On today's show I am interviewing Sarah Gibson of [Accent Learning and Consulting](#). Sarah and I have known each other for a few years. We are both consultants in Madison, Wisconsin. Sarah is an expert on Intergenerational Teams. She has been working with teams and organizations for at least a couple decades, and she has written a book on intergenerational teams. She is here today to help us understand what generations are, and how they work, and how they can be both beneficial and how they can sometimes be a challenge within teams.

There are a number of resources that she is going to mention, and you can find all of those on the shownotes at climerconsulting.com/032. So head on over there, you can download the free resource that Sarah is providing to everybody, as well as get all the references and resources that she mentions. I am really excited to share with you all Sarah Gibson. Here she is.

Amy Climer: Sarah, thank you for being on The Deliberate Creative Podcast.

Sarah Gibson: Amy, thank you for inviting me. I am so excited to be here.

Amy Climer: Awesome! Me too. So start out and tell us a little bit about your background.

Sarah Gibson: I come from corporate training and, actually, also higher education. So I have done some teaching at the college level as well, but I speak primarily to groups about communication issues. And one of the things I love to talk about is this generational piece.

Amy Climer: And you own your own business?

Sarah Gibson: I do. I own my own business, Accent Learning Consulting. I also do a lot of keynote speaking at national events, and I have a book out there which we are sharing out on your resource site. It is called [The Zoom Guide To The Generations](#).



What is a Generation? [2:45]

Amy Climer: Awesome! All right. We are going to spend the next little bit talking about generations, specifically generations and teams and intergenerational teams, how those different generations impact a team. To start out, tells us what is a generation, what does that mean?

Sarah Gibson: Generations are a group of folks that share a set of experiences. They are also defined by birth year, so typically a 15 to 20-year span. And the experiences they share are things that you think back to your childhood and you go, “I remember where I was when....” “I remember where I was when JFK was shot. I remember where I was when the Challenger exploded. I remember where I was when 9/11 happened.” But the key is it is something that happened to your generation before the age of 18.

Types of Generations [3:33]

Amy Climer: Oh, interesting. I did not know that. So can you give us some examples of the generations that are alive today, what were those defining moments for them?

Sarah Gibson: Absolutely. So World War II is really folks that are 71 plus. In our workforce it is only one percent of the population, so not a lot in the workforce. But they are our customers, they are the people on nonprofit boards, all of those folks out there 71 and older. They went through the Great Depression and as a result they became very frugal. So these defining events create characteristics that travel with that generation over time.

Amy Climer: And what is that generation called?

Sarah Gibson: It is just the World War II Generation.

Amy Climer: Okay. All right, and then what is next?

Sarah Gibson: Next is Baby Boomers. Baby Boomers are 52 to 70-ish, and they have been through a series of defining events like JFK’s assassination, Civil Rights, Women’s Liberation, a number of things that created a really rebellious generation. So that is one of the characteristics. So even at like 65 they are saying, “I am not going to retire how you want me to. Let me do it in my own way.”

Amy Climer: Nice. Okay, and then what is next?

Sarah Gibson: Next we have Generation X. Generation X is you and I, we are in this category. It is really folks who are 35 to early 50s, 51, 52. Those folks, one of their defining events was two working parents and so they were latch key kids. They had a key around their neck, they came



home, they let themselves in, they made mac and cheese, waited till their folks got home from work. Really independent, and that characteristic travelled with them over time. So in the workplace, they tend to be very self-reliant, self-starters and usually do not talk to all the right people in the workplace on a project. So that is how it plays out for them.

Amy Climer: So they tend to just go straight to two steps above where they should or whoever.

Sarah Gibson: Not intentionally, like I am not going to offend somebody, that was not my goal, but I am being efficient. So absolutely, that is a primary example.

Amy Climer: Okay great. And then what is the younger generation?

Sarah Gibson: Then we have, from a research perspective, they are called Millennials. So Millennials are 34 and under. So 15 to 34 really in the actual age range. So workplace, we have got the upper half of them in the workplace, and interestingly enough they comprise 47 percent of our full time workforce right now. So they are the ruling generation right now. Characteristics, they tend to be a very optimistic group. They look at the world and they go, "Oh, there is a lot of hard things out there." Like they went through 9/11 and that shaped them very specifically, but another piece of it is they look at the world and say it is hard, "What do I do about that? I cannot do anything individually, but if we all do a small part we can make a difference."

Amy Climer: Nice.

Sarah Gibson: Yeah, it is a great characteristic.

Amy Climer: And then do we know yet that youngest generation?

Sarah Gibson: We do. Officially, according to the White House as of last April of 2015, the next generation is called the Homeland Generation, because of Homeland Security being one of the biggest pieces that has impacted travel and their global nature.

Amy Climer: Interesting. Yeah, they have never gone on an airplane without intensive security.

Sarah Gibson: Exactly, and that is where that comes from.

Amy Climer: It is probably too soon to know how that is impacting them.

Sarah Gibson: We have a few characteristics for them. For example, there is a cycle to this. They reflect many of the World War II characteristics. They tend to be more frugal financially. They also went through the recession and seen folks in 2009 losing jobs and parents losing jobs and things like that, so they tend to be a generation that goes, "Actually, I think that we are going to rent and not buy." So we are already seeing glimpses of who they are going to become, but they have a ways to go.



Amy Climer: And that Homeland Generation the oldest is 15?

Sarah Gibson: 15. So we are just starting to see them working at all the fast food places and retail jobs, but they are entering.

Generational Characteristics in the Workplace [7:31]

Amy Climer: Interesting. Great. So let's talk a little bit about how these generational characteristics show up in the workplace, especially when there are generations working together, which is probably pretty common.

Sarah Gibson: Yeah, it is very common. Let's talk about Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and Millennials, because we do not have a lot of World War II in the workforce. It impacts us because what ends up happening is we have different views of teams. So a Baby Boomer is very much about teamwork, but there is always a team leader. Somebody who is in charge of the project. They are also very aware of their status within the workplace. There were 80 million of them that came into the workplace. So what ended up happening for them is they would say things like, "Why would I tell somebody else that I am looking for a job? I would never tell them that." So while they are about the team, there is also this kind of collective sense of I have to protect me in this process. So status becomes important on teams, and their role within the team.

Amy Climer: And it sounds like maybe a little hesitancy for -- I do not know what I would say, transparency? -- but like I do not want you to know too much about what I am doing in the rest of my life.

Sarah Gibson: Yes, rest of my life or even in my work life. So succession planning, that has come into place for Baby Boomers where they are like, "Yeah, I do not want to pass on my knowledge to you because you are younger, you are probably faster at learning this, and if I share my knowledge I have no advantage over you in the workplace anymore." So that is one of the hard pieces on a team.

Amy Climer: All right, so that is the Baby Boomer.

Sarah Gibson: Yup, so Gen Xers, how do they react to teams? They are very independent and they are kind of like baseball players. So everybody has a job, everybody does their job, you will cover for somebody in an emergency, however you are not going to step into the role willingly. You are not going to really do a lot of collaboration because of their independence. So they tend to say, "Here is your part in a team, go do it. Now come back and report." And it is not a sense of collaboration.



Millennials are very much about collaboration. And it is the kind of collaboration of, “Let’s sit down together and let’s plan this and let’s work on it together.” And Gen Xers are thinking, “I told you what to do, go do your job.” So that is one of the challenges, is the sense of highly collaborative, “Let us plan together, let us think about this together,” as compared to the independents.

Amy Climer: That is making me think about the difference between collaboration and cooperation. I think sometimes those terms get used mistakenly, they get interchanged, and it sounds like Gen Xers are great at cooperating but maybe not that true collaboration. That is something they might have to pay more attention to and work a little harder at, where Millennials are like, “Oh yeah, we got this.”

Sarah Gibson: Right. And what ends up happening is Gen Xers can sometimes land on the outside of that, where you have got a group of really collaborative people and the Gen Xers willing to cooperate, but they do not look at collaboration as being efficient. So they are thinking these younger folks are wasting their time in the workplace, and the younger folks are thinking, “Why are you even part of our team? I do not get why you cannot work with us.”

Amy Climer: It makes me think about -- oh gosh, I feel like I hear this all the time -- of older people, I mean either Gen Xers or Baby Boomers, who are saying like, “Oh, the kids these days or the young generation these days.” Can you talk a little bit about that?

Sarah Gibson: There have been generational differences since generations existed. And there is this fantastic quotes, it is either Socrates or Plato, and there is references to both of them out there in the research. But essentially it says, “The young people of today think of nothing but themselves. They have no restraint; they have no patience for the wisdom of the older generations.” It is a fantastic quote. It was written in about 400 BC. So it is not that these things have not existed, it is that the hiccup for us right now and the pain point we are feeling is that the Millennials are entering the workforce in such large numbers, all at once, with a lot of Baby Boomers retiring. So we have not seen a demographic shift like this recently and so it feels really extra painful.

Amy Climer: Okay, interesting. So let us go back to the collaboration. People that have been listening to my podcast know that I am a big fan of collaboration. When teams can truly collaborate they can be more creative together. And they can essentially achieve this creative synergy where they can come up with things that none of them individually could have developed on their own. So can you talk a little bit about collaboration and what that looks like within a team? Or maybe how do you get a team to collaborate when you have these different generations there? And it is not just the Millennials that are all excited about it.

Sarah Gibson: Yeah, and I was actually thinking about it from the trust perspective. And one of your most recent podcast was on building trust in a team. If you do not have trust and respect



within the process, you are not going to get to that point of synergy. So that is kind of the angle I was thinking about this from as far as you have to respect where that person is coming from, and their viewpoint, and their style, their preference of teamwork in order to be able to understand that it is not personal in this process. I am going to trust that your intent is good and that you want the best for this team just like I want the best for this team. You mentioned once Lencioni on your podcast and talking about Patrick Lencioni's definition of trust. That is really a big piece of this, like am I vulnerable with this group, am I willing to apologize when that is necessary? So I think that a lot of it is that trial and error piece of having that trust level so that I understand your generational perspective and your preferences. And while I respect it, I have a conversation with you about it so that we can open the doors and we can then build the trust which allows us to reach that synergy.

Connection Between Trust and Conflict Amongst Generations [13:26]

Amy Climer: Nice. So one of the things I talked about in previous episodes is this connection between trust and conflict, and you were just talking about trust. Can you talk a little bit about how conflict shows up amongst generations in that connection?

Sarah Gibson: I think one of the really interesting things from a generational perspective is how we communicate conflict. That is the sticking point for a lot of folks. As Baby Boomers came into the workforce, they were raised by World War II parents. There were all these social norms about who you talk to and who you did not talk to and the chain of command. How you said things was super important. Gen Xers tended to be a little bit more brutal. I think about Gen Xers and I think about Beavis and Butt-Head and being really irreverent. So we like say things we probably should not say, or we use words that other generations find really offensive. Like the word "sucks". That is one of those offensive words. So that comes into play, how we say it.

Then for Millennials, they have this really intriguing two-sided personality where they are very inclusive, they are very diverse, and yet on the flipside, they tend to be really brutal in their communication. Not because they are trying to be offensive, but because they view everybody as peers. So I can say something to somebody who is two steps up the chain or to a Baby Boomer and I view it as being trusting. Like I am just telling you what I think so that we can reach the synergy in creativity, but the conflict that comes from it is, "Who are you to tell me that? You have been in the workplace for like three years. You do not have any experience here." And it is how it is said that challenges that Baby Boomer status and their competitive edge. Not intended by the Millennial in any way, but that is how it comes across.

Amy Climer: Yeah. Well and then there is the difference between intent and impact.

Sarah Gibson: Yes.



Amy Climer: And that, of course, the intent was positive but the impact maybe was not so positive.

Sarah Gibson: Right.

Amy Climer: And just being able to pay attention to that. I mean do you feel like the solution is awareness on the part of each generation to understand the other generation or...?

Sarah Gibson: As you know it is so multifaceted, which is what I love about your podcast because we talk about all of these things and how they tie together. I think there is an awareness piece. There are so many things we need to be aware of. We need to be aware of the generational piece of our communication style. We need to be aware of the different norms out there, the different diversity factors. Yes, we need to be aware of, but we also need to not be afraid of the diversity factor and have the conversation around it. So it is not just be aware, but it is also make sure that you take that to the next step, which is a conversation.

Amy Climer: Absolutely. Then people can understand each other. And that makes me think about this [job aid](#) that we are going to share with listeners. There is this free two-page handout, I guess you could say, that Sarah put together that you all can find in the shownotes and it just explains, it breaks it down. It is this beautiful table that says, "Okay, if you are in this generation here is how you approach conflict or here is how you... etc." That may be a tool that people could use for this issue.

Sarah Gibson: Absolutely. And I have had folks throw it on someone else's desk and say, "I just want you to check this out and I would love to go have lunch and have a conversation about this." I had a fantastic LinkedIn message from a friend of mine, a college roommate, who responded and said, "Sarah, I love this piece and I have prompted like seven conversations in my workplace just based on this." So that could be a potential challenge for your listeners, Amy, is to go and print that off and then give it to somebody and say, "I would love to go and have lunch and talk about this. Tell me what you think."

How Different Generations Can Work Creatively Together [17:10]

Amy Climer: Awesome. I love that. Before we end, let us just talk a little bit about the creativity piece. So we have kind of talked about teams and the intergenerational teams and how that might show up. But what advice might you have about teams who are trying to be creative together and they have different generations together?

Sarah Gibson: I think just keeping in mind that you need each other to truly understand your market, to truly understand your co-workers and your clientele. There are all these pieces out there that if you do not have the richness of that diversity, and the different generations on your team, you are not going to get that aspect. Here is a great example. There is a company here in



Wisconsin and they designed a very specific product, but it was all designed by Baby Boomers and their target market was Millennials. The Product line shut down after two years because they created it from their perspective of what they thought was going to hit the market and it failed. It was a huge endeavor, a really expensive machining product line and they did not hit the creativity piece on it because they did not look to other generations to get their perspective.

Amy Climer: Wow! Oh my gosh, I am just imagining the thousands, if not millions of dollars that went into something like that.

Sarah Gibson: Yeah, and not to mention like long term effects of laying off people and things like that. It really impacts all aspect of your business.

Amy Climer: And all they had to do was talk to some Millennials.

Sarah Gibson: Right. And the other piece is, I work with a lot of companies and they think, “Oh my goodness! I have to design this plan of how to work with the different generations.” Why don’t you incorporate all the generations to figure out what is their true perspective? Oftentimes, we take it on ourselves when it is designed to be a group collaborative creative process to figure out what do we do next in the workplace. What do those policies look like? What does this team look like? How does it function best?

Amy Climer: Yeah. It is so funny, there are so many things where all it takes is a simple conversation.

Sarah Gibson: Yeah, exactly. But we do not have the tools to start out so we are hoping to provide a few tools for that today.

The Weekly Challenge [19:13]

Amy Climer: This is great Sarah. I love this. I can feel like this is going to be really helpful for people. One of the things we always end every episode with is a weekly challenge. And you kind of alluded to that one a minute ago, but what would be a good challenge, something for our listeners to do this week to help incorporate some of the things that you have talked about today?

Sarah Gibson: I think even just watching on your team different people’s reactions and noting. We are not trying to peg people and say, “You are this generation therefore you are this way,” but it gives us a solid framework for just a perspective. Look at your team and try to figure out which generations are actually represented on your team. Then just watch in a meeting and see how they react to one another, and check out that [job aid](#) and compare what you are experiencing with that. Say, “Yup, this piece really rings true, or not on this particular person.” I think that that is a great first step for a team.



Amy Climer: Yeah. I am so glad you said that it is not about pegging people and putting them in this box. Because even when you were explaining the generations, like you said I am Generation X, but I could also really relate to some of the things within the Millennials and maybe even some of the things in the Baby Boomers. We are complex people.

Sarah Gibson: Absolutely. We are complex people and to boil anybody down to one factor would be unwise and it would be unfair. So yes, this is one component, a really helpful component, but it is just one component of our individual uniqueness.

Amy Climer: Yeah. I think, we have already said this multiple times, but using this as a way to start conversations.

Sarah Gibson: Absolutely. Yup.

Amy Climer: Sarah, if people wanted to learn more about you and about your book and what you do, where should they go?

Sarah Gibson: I would love to have them visit my website which is accentlc.com. You could also check out my book online. It is at Amazon and it is also available through Kindle. So those are options for them and it is called [The Zoom Guide To The Generations](#).

Amy Climer: Awesome. And we will put all these links in the shownotes. Sarah, thank you so much for being on the podcast. I really appreciate it. It was great.

Sarah Gibson: Amy, thank you for inviting me. I have been looking forward to this and this is going to be fantastic. So thank you for all of your work.

Amy Climer: That was so awesome! I love, I love love, love talking with Sarah. It is always great. You know, I actually did not know what the definition of a generation was. So that was really cool, just that little piece. But even just talking about differences and developing trust and in conflict and how different generations have conflict and how what one generation might see as completely normal and awesome, another generation sees as perhaps offensive or inappropriate. And wow! You can imagine how this could create a big issue if a team is trying to be creative together. That was really awesome. Sarah shed some light on that.

I definitely encourage you to download that free [job aid](#) that she mentioned. It is basically this two-page document with this table that lists the generations that are alive today, at least that are in the workforce today, and different characteristics and how they differ between each generation. Of course, like Sarah said, it is a tool, it is used to get conversation started. It is not to put people in a box. Thank you so much Sarah for being on the episode. So one more time the link to the shownotes is climerconsulting.com/032 because this is Episode 32. So head on over there and you could find all the resources that Sarah mentioned.



Also, I want to invite you, if you have not yet, to write a review for The Deliberate Creative Podcast on [iTunes](#). It is super easy, takes less than five minutes. You can write an honest review and I may just read it out on another episode. So head on over to climerconsulting.com/itunes or you can just type in The Deliberate Creative Podcast in [iTunes](#) and click on Reviews and then yeah, let me know what you think. It is always good to hear from you. If there is a specific topic that you want me to cover in a future episode, feel free to send me an email. Just go to climerconsulting.com and you can send me an email from the website.

You all, I hope this is a great way to kick off your new year. And let me know how it goes. Let me know what happens when you have these conversations within your team. You can email me or you can make a comment on the shownotes. Have a wonderful week and I will see you next time. Bye.