

March 6, 2017
By Rick Boxx

WHEN YOU ARE THE OLDEST PERSON IN THE ROOM

Not long ago a business leader, Kevin, mentioned he has found himself adjusting to the fact that he is often the oldest man in the room. Just as he used to look up to his elders, Kevin said he has now become one of those “elders,” and others are looking up to him for guidance. This reality, he admitted, can be both flattering and daunting.

It is like an athlete joining a professional sports team as a rookie, competing year after year, and one day becoming aware that he or she has become the seasoned pro, the person younger players look up to for leadership and experience. There is the sense of accomplishment that comes with longevity, but also the humbling sense of being the “wise old veteran” expected to set the pace and show the way.

For those of us who have been in the workplace for many years, insecurities can cause us to doubt we have much to offer, despite achievements and accumulated experience. Younger people typically display much enthusiasm and energy, along with fresh, innovative ideas. However, as we mature both personally and professionally, God may want us to embrace these times when our voices and perspectives, offered with humility, become useful for guiding the younger leaders in our organizations.

Some societies seem to defer to young, emerging leaders, recognizing they represent the future. And yet, we all would be in error if we failed to utilize the collective wisdom and expertise of older leaders who can draw from proven track records of performance and success. The Bible addresses this in many ways:

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Setting positive examples. Younger people need strong, consistent models of proper behavior, principles and values to use in the workplace. What they observe and learn will help in shaping how they approach their own careers. *“Encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned”* (Titus 2:6-8).

Passing on what we have learned and experienced. Life and work provide us with a rich storehouse of knowledge and experiences. We should consider ourselves stewards of these, being eager to share and pass them along to younger team members. *“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you”* (Philippians 4:9).

Establishing an enduring legacy. Part of our legacy, both professionally and personally, is established through the training, equipping and preparing of those that one day will succeed us in our jobs and other meaningful pursuits. *“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of man witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others”* (2 Timothy 2:2).

With age and maturity – in the workplace, our homes and communities – comes added responsibility. Before “turning over the keys” to newer colleagues and associates, we should plan to serve as examples and encouragers, guiding them in sound business practices and pointing them toward their own success.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Where do you rank among those you work with – are you one of the senior staff members, one of the younger ones, or somewhere in between? If you are one of the older ones, what do you think should be expected of you, drawing from your experience? If you are a newer team member, what would you like to receive from those having greater knowledge and expertise?
2. Why do you think suddenly realizing that you are the oldest – or one of the older – members of the workplace team can be unsettling for some people?
3. How can an older, more seasoned worker overcome a sense of insecurity in interacting with younger members of the team?
4. Which of the biblical principles cited seems most meaningful to you – and why? Is it the importance of setting an example, passing along what you have learned, or establishing a strong legacy? Explain your answer.

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

1 Corinthians 4:16-17; 2 Corinthians 3:5; Philippians 3:17; 1 Timothy 1:18-19; 2 Timothy 1:13-14

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