



INTER-GENERATIONAL COMMUNICATION HYPOTHETICAL SCENARIOS

1. Marie is a marketing and communications associate who has just received her six-month review. Her reviews were all excellent-to-outstanding, except her review from Communications Director, Ed. Ed reviewed Marie as middling-to-poor. Marie is upset by this review and comes to you for help. She says that she worked very hard on an outreach letter for Ed, that she believed it was good work, and she got him the work product in a timely manner. She even worked late into the night to finish it up.

You follow up with Ed to find out more about the situation. Three months ago, Ed had asked Marie to give him an outreach letter that could be sent to all new attorneys in the state. He gave her the assignment on Monday and asked for it back by Wednesday. At 5:15pm on Wednesday, Ed still had not heard from Marie. He stopped by her office but was told by Marie's secretary that Marie had already left for the day – she had a softball game that night. He texted her to ask whether she had finished the letter and received this response: “Hi Ed – thanks for your email. I thought we had agreed on Wednesday? I will certainly have it to you by today.” Sure enough, Ed received the letter at 10:30pm that night.

Ed agrees that Marie got the work completed and that it was well done, but he thinks she went about the work in a highly unprofessional manner, leaving the office early, not checking in with him, and not sending him the work product until late in the evening. He also doesn't understand why he would ever need to specify a time to an associate. The time should always be “as soon as possible and obviously before the end of the work day.”

What do you say to Ed? To Marie?

2. Kirsten, a Development Associate, has struck up a very good relationship with Dave, the Director of Development. They send frequent bantering emails between each other. At 4pm one day, Dave asks Kirsten to draft messaging for a new email campaign that they can discuss at a staff meeting tomorrow. Dave thinks this is a great learning experience since this will give her an opportunity to play an integral role in the creation of the Foundation's new development campaign. At about 8:30pm that night, he gets the email with the copy he requested. The subject header of the email says “#youoweme”. Dave thinks the hashtag comment went too far and stops by your office for advice on how to talk about the email with Kirsten.

What do you say to Dave?

3. Aisha is a young volunteer coordinator for the foundation who has shown herself to be quite adept at technology. She's also very approachable and friendly. As time passes, Aisha realizes that she spends a large part of her day helping a lot of her foundation and bar association co-workers navigate technology, whether it be redlines, Excel spreadsheets, Outlook messages or PDF conversions. They are usually very simple requests that take her a few minutes to do, but cumulatively, they are taking up significant time. She also thinks that her co-workers can easily learn the technology themselves but choose not to. The final straw comes when someone asks her, for the third time, to find a file on the association's cloud server. She would much rather be working on her projects than on others' basic technology tasks, but she does recognize the importance of being a team player. At the same time, she wants them to know that she's not free IT help. She comes to you for advice.

What do you tell Aisha? How do you approach the staff?

4. Andre just started as an entry level staff member at a bar foundation for which he previously volunteered. Over the summer, he worked primarily with one of the Event Coordinators on the annual gala. When his internship ended, he was given a great review, specifically commenting on Andre's ability to speak his mind and add value to the team.

On his third day at his new job, Andre is asked to help with final preparations for the gala. However, the Coordinator he worked with before has since left. Lisa, the Manager of Events who Andre has never met, calls Andre in to a phone meeting with other staff members and the event's sponsor.

During the meeting, Lisa incorrectly speaks about some of the logistics for the event. Andre wants to show his unique "value-add" to the team and the event. He raises his hand and asks to speak. Lisa acknowledges him. Andre explains that what she said was incorrect and then adds the correct information. The next day, Andre learns that he has been asked to help find volunteers for a different event. He thinks this is unfair, particularly since he was the one to ensure the correct information was presented.

What do you say to Andre? To Lisa?

5. Ming is working on three different grant proposals at the same time. Sylvia, the Director of Grants, invites Ming to sit in on a conference call concerning revisions to one of their proposals. Ming doesn't have any direct involvement in the revisions but she did work on the draft in its early days. Ming is under significant pressure to make edits to the other proposals and she has emails concerning those changes that she believes are urgent enough for her to respond to immediately. She has seen Sylvia emailing and texting in meetings so she thinks it's appropriate for her to do the same thing. She tries to do this as surreptitiously as possible but she does spend a large part of the 2-hour conference call replying to emails on her phone.

After the call is over, Ming goes back to her office. Later that day, she receives a voicemail from Sylvia telling her, among other things, that she needs to stop playing around on her phone and pay better attention to what's going on. Ming thinks this is both unfair and unrealistic considering her various commitments. She comes to you for advice.

What do you say to Ming? To Sylvia?

6. Karen has been a secretary at your foundation for 27 years. She used to work only with the Executive Director, but as time has passed, she now provides general help for the entire office. The executive staff all utilize her somewhat but none of the other employees utilize her at all. She has offered to organize files, draft letters, arrange travel plans, make bound copies, proofread documents, but no staff have taken her up on her offer. They all prefer to do those tasks on their own. She thinks that they are wasting time by doing these tasks on their own but she doesn't know how to talk about that with them. She also feels redundant since the executive staff often don't have that much to give her, and she is concerned her supervisor might lay her off if she is not busy enough. She loves what she does and wants to keep working with the foundation.

You talk to a couple of the staff members. They don't need Karen to help them with their basic tasks. It's much faster if they do it on their own. And besides, they know she works for the whole office. They think they're doing her a favor by not asking her for help, especially since they don't actually need her help.

What do you say to the associates? To Karen?