
Office's Most Important 30 Meters

International speaker and activist Christine Caine spoke on the topic of leadership with author and pastor Craig Groeschel

last year. During this very compelling exchange, Christine used track relays and in particular, the 30 meters that contains the “exchange zone”, or the zone in which the baton must be transferred from one runner to the next, to impart the critical handoff of leadership from one generation to the next. Races are won and lost inside of that relatively short 30-meter space. The more she described this defined and critical window, the more I felt like she was describing what I witness in Office on a frequent basis and what will in large part dictate how quickly or slowly we materially improve and transform this too-big-to-fail segment of commercial real estate.

The Boomers: It sounds almost trite to say but it becomes hard for the next generation to grab the baton from the previous generation if that generation refuses to give it up. Just ask Tom Brady – one of the hardest things to gracefully navigate is knowing how and when to transition to a new phase of life (I’m not a believer in “retirement”). Here are the strengths and attributes Office really needs from these Boomers in this exchange zone right now: personal experience with a variety of market cycles, deep rooted understanding of industry fundamentals, and maturity, discernment and instincts that come with decades of scar tissue. However, here are some of the key hinderances putting this transfer at risk: refusal to accept new way of working and intimidated by and unwilling to fully embrace today’s technological advancements, frustrated by and unwilling to engage with younger generations, and content to hijack organizations by sitting in key decision-making roles but absent the desire and intentionality to groom and raise the next generation of leaders.





The Millennials and Gen Z: It's so hard to acknowledge and face in today's instant results world but some things take time, especially when it comes to leadership development. The mid-20's me would not have liked to hear that, but a humbler, more life-worn mid-40's me appreciates that the battled tested version of me with a slight limp is easier for people to feel comfortable following behind into battle. There is a lot to like here – these next generations of leaders are: intellectually curious, technologically fluent, and passionate. So where are the risks? They live life behind a screen and lack the needed face to face experience and EQ to handle the less glamorous but critical parts of leading. They want roles without necessarily investing the energy and time into the lead up roles that provide valuable tools for future toolboxes. They don't always accept and appreciate the benefit that feedback provides into their growth. In Office speak, this means that to extract all that is possible for hospitality, community building, and technologically connected assets (ie. creating work environments worth coming to), it is also necessary to discover and fully appreciate all the basics that go with operating these assets. You still needed to do the Office basics well, problem solve for the unexpected, pay bills, and manage people and projects.



X'ers moment to shine: You never grow up thinking you'll be part of the oh-yeah-that-group generation (good to remind myself that "the greatest generation" didn't dream that up... they lived that out and were assigned that title), but here I sit with other Xer's in this critical exchange zone, with an opportunity to embrace this moment and help leverage a mix of experience and passion to help facilitate this important change in Office over the next 10-15 years. I call this the bridge group. This group grew up in Office, in many ways trained to work hard in pursuit of big payouts and titles. Somewhere in there you had to figure out how to manage the younger generation while still working for the Boomers. It's go time – time to be part of the exchange zone and lead and help raise up many more leaders behind you – servant leadership at its finest.



I'll admit, I only really pay attention to the fine art of the baton handoff inside of that 30 meters once every four years for the Olympics. But somehow it is those handoff moments that make for some of the most compelling viewing. 400M run 100M at a time by 4 different runners (each one essential to overall success) happens significantly faster than one person running 400M. However, there are 3 risky moments in that relay that can result in that team never being able to finish at all. What will Office do? What seems to be happening right now is far less, in many ways, about the philosophical or technical changes to workspaces. It has to do with a transfer of both knowledge, experience and leadership that results in work offering that most appropriately and perfectly aligns with today's (and tomorrow's) needs.



Sincerely,
Mike Fransen
Founder / CEO, Workng

