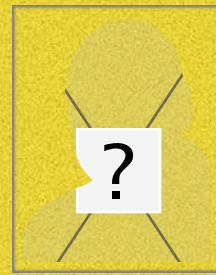


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



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Today we're going to talk about age. No, not that age. Professional age. Professional age? How is that different from actual age and why do we want to talk about that? I'm Jerry Roberts and today we're going to mess with a topic that just might ruffle some feathers. That's up next on The Extra Point.

I picked up on a story recently about Ryan, a guy who had been laid off his job. He was 42 and included with the severance paperwork was a list of the ages of all his coworkers. This is a requirement for layoffs of people over 40 under the Older Workers' Benefit Protection Act of 1990, meant to prevent discrimination.

He's looking at the list and noticed that he was older than everybody else, but then he wondered if his "professional age" was even older. Professional age would be how he acted in the organization. He shook his head a little as he remembered how frequently he seem bored and tired, and more like 52 or 62, instead of 42.

Ryan recalled arguments he'd had with coworkers over little irritants. He didn't like someone's music on their Spotify account. Another time he yelled at another person over leaving a couple of open containers in the employee break room. His professional age those days was probably 82, and he'd forgotten that he'd also done those things when he was 22, just starting out.

What worried Ryan more was that he was becoming less and less tolerant of the mistakes and differences of those younger people. He felt with his outlook he was acting much older than his actual years; that he was now a drain of energy from a team, not an infusion of energy.

He also knew it was likely that in his next job, his boss would be younger than him and he wasn't sure if he could handle that. When he was hired it turned out Ryan's age difference

over his coworkers was even greater than it was with the former employer. The boss was indeed younger and Ryan felt he had to prove himself all over again in the new setting, and to someone with whom he felt he had very little in common.

Ryan is struggling. He's finding it hard to stake out common ground with the younger folks and he has very little social connection with anyone from work. He keeps to himself most of the time and doesn't get involved in discussions other than work related. Most of the young troops go for food on Fridays after work and he's never been invited.

He had high hopes that his professional age would drop lower in the new job, but he realized that he was acting and was seen as older than his years.

Ryan's story isn't unique. Most of us gravitate to people who are more like us. Younger people generally hang out with younger people and older people do the same. The language is comfortable and all of it is understood. People talk about things that appeal to those in their group. When you get the two groups mixed together, that's when there can be misunderstandings and feelings that, "Hmmm, this is not my crowd."

None of this is exclusive to the mainland. It goes on here in Guam, even if we don't talk about it as much as folks back there. Different generations have different ideas about what a good work ethic is. Some think a long time on a job is 20 years, some five years, and still others believe one year is a major commitment.

We see social media differently. We see workers' rights differently. We view responsibility and accountability differently.

(Con't.)



We're all just different. It's not a simple matter of right and wrong all the time. It's also about upbringing, indoctrination, and beliefs.

So, what can help bring people together? If I was Ryan's boss I'd think about working on company activities, with emphasis on teaming older and younger workers. Mentoring plans with both parties teaching the other. Monthly brainstorming sessions, and company sponsored social activities where everybody gets a voice in the planning.

Collaboration helps to break down barriers. Once people understand the skills and contributions of others, the issue of age frequently goes away. They'll care less how old you are, but more how old you seem.

Is it a perfect system? No. There will always be people on all sides of this that make things more difficult than they have to be. The antidote to that is to avoid being judgmental and just try to enjoy being around other people who may not be the same as us...and giving them a break to be who they are.

So, how old are you, professionally?

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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