

A Look at Three Generations, or “You Just Don’t Understand Me”

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A generation is a birth cohort, a group of people born during a 12-16-year period that share similar life characteristics and experiences. Our groups include:

1. Those born prior to 1946 are the “Silent” Generation or the “Veterans”
2. Those born between 1946 – 1965, currently 39-58 years old, are “Baby Boomers”
3. Those born between 1965-1977, currently 27-39 years old, are Generation X or “Slackers”
4. Those born after 1977, currently 26 years and younger, are Generation Y or “Millennials”

Baby Boomers

ages 39-58

This is the second largest group. They are more independent, materialistic, and in-charge. They follow the motto “We Live to Work.” They have the largest divorce rate in history (4 out of 10). They changed female roles and sacrificed family life for careers. This group still spends the most money.

Generation X or “Slackers” or “13’ers”

ages 27-39

Many of these folk grew up in single-family homes or were latchkey children. They are information junkies. They value personal time over work time. Their motto is “We Live & Work.” They graduated during corporate downsizing. They work better alone, marry later and have stronger marriages. They are not motivated by money. Many comprise middle management. They are somewhat pessimistic and resentful. Their role models are Bill Gates and Ross Perot. Generations X and Y don’t like each other because Y thinks X are whiners and X thinks that Y feels entitled.

Generation Y

ages 10 – 26

This surprised us as being the largest generation ever. It is an upbeat group that has also been referred to as the “Echo Boom.” Their motto is “We Work to Live.” They resemble more the “Silent” Generation and are strong on values education. They are the Ritalin generation, who likes technology and the SMS (short message service), known as text messaging. They work best in teams or groups, lack initiative, and want to work for corporate values. They are lousy time managers. They want to a part of the decision process and have direct access to CEOs. They want to be judged on talent rather than appearance. They expect high pay and benefits and meaningful jobs. The explosion of the Internet changed their lives. This group is very open to diversity.

How to Attract Multi-Generational Involvement?

The message is the most important. It must be clear and straight-forward. Don’t bother with newspapers or direct mail. Radio time between midnight – 7 am weeknights and 7 pm to 7 am on weekends is more effective.

1. Know where they work -- reward achievement of when they work alone; provide instant gratification, give streams of information, use teamwork & technology;
2. Realize they may become involved later -- people change jobs or fields often, stay exposed, make a name for your association;
3. Update your mission statement -- become a community activist, get staff & board members involved, give back and let other know it;
4. Get hi-tech. Use your website. Develop “relationships” with leisure vendors.
5. Reverse mentoring. Give them technical projects and let them teach.

Summary notes taken by Diane Gallagher, Highland Community College trustee