

How To Work With Different Generations

In attempting to evangelize the world, pastor a church, lead staff, organize volunteers, or work with fellow ministers, it is crucial to remember that each of the generations of the last century have a unique viewpoint of themselves and their world. Conflicts between individuals or groups from different generations are often the result if we fail to account for this. At our recent Retreat, Bro. Garth Hatheway gave us a useful summary of four of the generations of the 20th century. This article is condensed from his presentation.

Traditionalists (1925-1945)

Traditionalists tend to see the subsequent generation of Baby Boomers as disrespectful and blunt. They disdain their "warm and fuzzy" mindset, and view most younger workers as too impatient and even unethical. When it comes to church, the Traditionalists are Foreign Missions oriented and very committed to their home, church and denomination. They enjoy Bible studies and worship in reverence, and they tend to minister from a perspective of duty. They "need to be needed," and are generally loyal, dependable, hard workers who discipline themselves to save for a rainy day. They deal well with boredom, and are patriotic, respectful and stable. However, their tendencies to be frugal, private, cautious, and intolerant of differences can be vastly misunderstood by younger generations.

Baby Boomers (1945 - 1964)

The Baby Boomers see the Traditionalists as being caught in the "by the book syndrome," and perceive the older generation to be overly cautious, too conservative, and inflexible. However, the Boomers also have a natural prejudice against workers younger than themselves, viewing them as selfish, manipulative and aloof. The Boomers are a powerful group numerically, and "cause-oriented" because of their perception of conflict between rights and rules. They are generally supportive of others, independent thinkers, spiritual seekers, fitness-conscious, media-oriented and action-oriented. They question authority and want everything now, but are also tolerant of differences and committed to relationships. They are an educated generation that rises to the challenge of transition. They enjoy retreats, desire to live out their beliefs, and need to belong. The Boomers desire quality and want to lead a slower life style; therefore, they are not loyal to jobs, churches or institutions that prevent these goals. They dislike Christianity that is not functional; they left the church en masse in the 1980's, but are now returning with their children. They will not attend church because of guilt, tradition or someone else's expectations, but are impressed by a church that can provide help with marriage and parenting skills. Boomers tend to choose a church based on its style of worship (they like contemporary music and sermons), its "excellence factor," and the opportunity to build relationships.

Baby Busters (1965-1975)

The Baby Busters view the Traditionalists as old, outdated and rigid, and the Baby Boomers as workaholics, unrealistic and idealistic. Busters are community-oriented and willing to work, but they tend to be oversensitive and lonely. They desire a practical education, freedom from structure and a faith that meets their needs. They are music-oriented and slow to marry, and are prone to a short attention span and feeling neglected. Traditionalists drive the Busters crazy by saying, "We've always done it this way." (Busters reciprocate by breaking the rules.) Baby Boomers drive the Busters crazy by bragging about the idealistic accomplishments of their generation. (Busters reciprocate by refusing to "buy in" until they find out, "What's in it for me?").

Generation X (1971-1981)

For Baby Boomers, accustomed to working long hours and weekends, it is difficult to relate to the desire of Generation X for freedom at the office. While Boomers are busy with their meetings and strict schedules, Generation Xers prefer a less-structured work environment that can appear haphazard to an outside observer. The powerful Boomer generation can work harmoniously with the up-and-coming Xers if they remember the following:

- (1) Speak their "language" - learn to surf the net and communicate by e-mail.
- (2) Get to the point - provide key information in bullet points, make your pitch concise, and stick to the "bottom-line."
- (3) Be flexible - Xers shun the typical 9:00 to 5:00 workday, so let them opt instead for later office hours.
- (4) Don't judge a book by its cover - Xers like comfortable clothes and shun traditional attire, but can still get the job done.
- (5) Accomodate differences in work styles - Be open to meetings that occur away from the office, "on the spur of the moment" and via computer, and be prepared to cover numerous topics "rapid fire" in one meeting.

~ Rev. Garth Hatheway

SERMON SEED

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. (Colossians 2:9)

The word "**Godhead**" in this verse carries, among other things, the significance of perfection. You cannot add anything to godhood! But Paul adds another word anyway - the term "**fulness**," which also means completion. You cannot be more full or complete than to have fulness! Paul is being redundant - but he's not finished yet! He adds the word "**all**," which carries the significance of totality. You cannot have more than all!

Why does the Apostle Paul use a "**triple redundancy**" in this verse? Because he wants to emphasize, reemphasize (and even overemphasize to the point of redundancy!) that Jesus Christ is not just a part of God, He is Almighty God!

The Atlantic District Board was privileged to attend a seminar at World Evangelism Center in Hazelwood, MO on June 14-16 along with other district boards from the Northeast Region. One of the speakers was Rev. David Bernard, who left us with this thought during his presentation.