

## Generations United FCE Member Handout



***“Every person is like all others, like some others, and like no others.”***

Adapted from quote by Clyde Kluckhohn, American anthropologist (1905-1960).

### **Lesson Objectives:**

- 1 – Understand the historical perspective of each generation.
- 2 – Understand the values and communication preferences of each generation.
- 3 – Identify strategies for more effective communication with those in different generations.

### **Introduction:**

A generation is defined by the year of birth which influences the common tastes, attitudes and experiences of people who were born during that particular time. A generational group (cohort) is a product of its time and taste which include such things as economics, social aspects and demographics. Of particular importance are a generation’s defining moments: events that capture the attention and emotions of individuals at a formative stage in their lives – childhood, adolescence or young adulthood.

An old adage holds that “People resemble their times more than they resemble their parents.” The music they hear, the heroes they share, the passions they agree or disagree about, and their common history shape and define a generation. And because generations share a place in history – in time – and have events, images and experiences in common, each generation develops its own unique personality, since this is a group of people who were programmed at about the same time. For example, a cohort that joins the workforce begging for jobs feels very differently about life and work than one who joins the workforce when jobs are plentiful.

But, not every individual fits their generation’s personality profile exactly. As unique as a person’s individual experiences may be, they share a place in history with their generation. Generalizations are helpful, as a way to begin understanding someone else. They are guidelines. As these generalizations are presented, remember generalizations are flexible, while stereotypes are rigid.

There are currently four adult/young adult generations in the U.S. that are clearly distinguishable by these criteria – their demographics, their early life experiences, the headlines that defined their times, their heroes, music, and sociology and their early days in the workplace. Understanding generational differences is important to creating harmony, mutual respect and joint effort in families, community groups and the workplace.

We all interact with people of different generations/ages on a regular basis – whether within a family, at work or in volunteer activities, at church and in the civic groups to which you may belong. The more you learn about other generations and understand their point of view and events that shaped their lives, the more you will be able to interact with others harmoniously.

Take a minute and write the names of 3-5 people you know (friend, spouse, child, grandchild or other relative, or someone you interact with in the community) who are in the following age groups (born during the following years):

**Late 60's and older - Born 1922-1945**

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|----|----|
| 1. | 4. |
| 2. | 5. |
| 3. |    |

**Late 40's to Mid 60's - Born 1946-1964**

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|----|----|
| 1. | 4. |
| 2. | 5. |
| 3. |    |

**30's to Mid 40's - Born 1965-1980**

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|----|----|
| 1. | 4. |
| 2. | 5. |
| 3. |    |

**Teens – Early 30's - Born 1981-2000**

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|----|----|
| 1. | 4. |
| 2. | 5. |
| 3. |    |

## The Traditionalists

This is the Dole/Bush/Kennedy/Carter generation. Beboppers and bobby soxers, Rosie the Riveter, and “Don’t sit under the apple tree with anyone else but me” help define this generation that came of age before and during World War II. When you think of “American Values” like civic pride, loyalty, respect for authority and apple pie – you think of this generation. They are more likely to attend a symphony than a rock concert and prefer meat to tofu.

<b>Common Names</b>	<b>Traditionalists/Silents/GI’s/Veterans/Seniors/Matures/ WWII Generation/Greatest Generation Born 1922-1945/Late 60’s and older</b>	
<b>Life Defining Events</b>	Great Depression New Deal WWI & II (Pearl Harbor) Korean War GI Bill	Golden Age of Radio Silver Screen Rise of Labor Unions Roaring Twenties
<b>Influential People</b>	Joe DiMaggio Joe Louis Joe McCarthy Dr. Spock Alfred Hitchcock Rat Pack Franklin Delano Roosevelt Duke Ellington Elizabeth Taylor	Ella Fitzgerald Charles Lindbergh Edward Murrow John Wayne Bob Hope Elizabeth Taylor Betty Gable Betty Crocker
<b>Generational Outlook</b>	Loyal/Practical	
<b>Predominant Value</b>	Patriotism	
<b>Perspective</b>	Civic	
<b>View of Authority</b>	Respectful	
<b>Compelling Messages</b>	Make do or do without Stay in line	Sacrifice Be Heroic Consider the common good
<b>Parenting Style Experienced as Youth</b>	Discipline/schedules/conformity/strict obedience/ Spare the rod and spoil the child	
<b>Preferred Leadership Styles</b>	Hierarchy/Top down/Formal/Centralized authority Directive with concern for command & control (as learned in the military during WWI, WWII & Korean wars)	
<b>Preferred Work style</b>	Work together toward common goals.	
<b>Work Ethic</b>	Dedicated/Hardworking	
<b>View of Paid Work</b>	Obligation that must be meet	
<b>Relationships Defined By</b>	Personal sacrifice	
<b>Preferred Communication</b>	Face-to-Face	
<b>How they Consume Information</b>	Conversation/Newspaper	
<b>Current demographic trends</b>	Retirement if possible, but continuing to work due to economy	

## Boomers

These postwar babies are graying. They were born in an optimistic time to parents who wanted them and are the largest generation. Their motto may be “Me first, me last, me only.” This is also the group that invented “Thank God, it’s Monday!” and the 60 hour work week. Boomers are defined by their work, yet they are also the generation of civil rights, empowerment and diversity. They devote energy and enthusiasm to causes, starting with civil rights, equality for Women, and Vietnam in their early years. Remember when “don’t trust anyone over 30” was the rule of cool? Now, how about “life begins at 50” or the workplace motto “Hell No, we won’t go!” And instead of retiring they are retreading – retiring from work and moving to another career or into community service.

<b>Common Names</b>	<b>Baby Boomers/Boomers Born 1946-1964/Late 40’s to mid-60’s</b>	
<b>Life Defining Events</b>	Prosperity Suburbia TV in every home Vietnam Assassinations	Civil Rights Movement Women’s Lib Cold War Moon Landing Woodstock/Rock ‘n Roll
<b>Influential People</b>	Martin Luther King, Jr. John F. Kennedy Gloria Steinem Richard Nixon Eldridge Cleaver Beaver Cleaver Rosa Parks Monkees, Beatles, & Stones	Manson Family Osmond Family “Deep Throat” Barbra Streisand John Belushi Janis Joplin Captains Kangaroo & Kirk The Partridge Family
<b>Generational Outlook</b>	Optimistic/Idealistic	
<b>Predominant Value</b>	Independence	
<b>Perspective</b>	Team	
<b>View of Authority</b>	Love/Hate	
<b>Compelling Messages</b>	Be anything you want to be Work well with others Live up to expectations	Change the world Duck and cover
<b>Parenting Style Experienced As Youth</b>	Dr. Spock Throw away the schedule Love and nurture, pamper and cherish Stay-at-home moms	
<b>Preferred Leadership Styles</b>	Consensus; Collegial attitude; Deal with people one-on-one	
<b>Preferred Work style</b>	Look for Consensus	
<b>Work Ethic</b>	Driven; Competitive	
<b>View of Paid Work</b>	Adventure - should be interesting/exciting; job change expected	
<b>Relationships Defined By</b>	Personal gratification	
<b>Preferred Communication</b>	Face-to-Face; Voice message	
<b>How they Consume Information</b>	Phone/TV	
<b>Current demographic trends</b>	Retreading instead of retiring	

## Gen-X'ers

This is the smallest generation, sometimes labeled the “unwanted generation,” born during the women’s rights movement and when birth control became readily available. During their formative years, divorce was prevalent and mothers entered the workforce, leaving this generation as latchkey kids. They learned to take care of themselves and not to trust anyone. They heard “when you get home from school - lock the door and don’t open it for anyone” and spent their time watching MTV music videos or playing video games alone. They are technologically adept, clever and resourceful and are comfortable with change – they’ve changed cities, homes and parents all their lives. This group prefers doing tasks alone, instead of working in teams. Their motto is “life/work balance” and their preferred bonus is time to spend with family over financial rewards. Because of their solitary childhoods, they put their own children first as parents –attending school activities, sporting events & family vacations.

<b>Common Names</b>	<b>Generation X/Gen X'ers/X Gen/Baby Busters Born 1965-1980/30's to mid-40's</b>	
<b>Life Defining Events</b>	Oil Embargo/Persian Gulf War Watergate/Nixon resigns Latch Key Kids Stagflation MTV Multiple media – personal computers, cable, digital & satellite TV; video games; faxes; pagers; cell phones; Palm Pilots	Fall of the Berlin Wall Reagan elected Single Parent Homes Challenger explosion AIDS
<b>Influential People</b>	Brat Pack Bill Clinton Bill Gates Monica Lewinsky Ayatollah Khomeini Ted Bundy OJ Simpson	Beavis & Butt-head & Dilbert New Gingrich Clarence Thomas Madonna Michael Jordan & Dennis Rodman Al Bundy Supermodels
<b>Generational Outlook</b>	Skepticism	
<b>Predominant Value</b>	Family/Children	
<b>Perspective</b>	Self	
<b>View of Authority</b>	Unimpressed	
<b>Compelling Messages</b>	Don't count on it Survive-stayin' alive	Get real Ask "why?"
<b>Parenting Style Experienced As Youth</b>	Parenting by Proxy Soaring Divorce Rates	Working moms/Latchkey children Autonomy and independence
<b>Preferred Leadership Styles</b>	Direct, Challenge others, Ask "why", Self-command	
<b>Preferred Work Style</b>	Self-determined	
<b>Work Ethic</b>	Balanced life with family & work	
<b>View of Paid Work</b>	Entrepreneurial, a personal challenge	
<b>Relationships Defined By</b>	Reluctance to commit	
<b>Preferred Communication</b>	Online (Facebook, Twitter), Text, e-mail	
<b>How They Consume Information</b>	E-mail/Cable TV	
<b>Current demographic trends</b>	Change jobs frequently/multiple careers	

## Millennials

This generation is the “smartest, cleverest, healthiest, most-wanted ever to walk the earth,” according to their parents. As kids they had soccer moms and Little League dads. During their school years, this was the busiest group ever – taking dance or music lessons, participating on sports teams, attending computer camp and.... They’re optimistic and what their parents think is important to them. And they think their parents are cool! This is the “Baby on Board” generation with helicopter parents hovering over them. They appreciate diversity – racial, gender, cultural, etc. and are part of the digital generation – think texting, iPads & iPhones, Facebook & Twitter. Millennials feel a great affinity to the Traditionalist generation and appreciate listening to the stories of their grandparents and great grandparents and others in that generation. They are likely to boomerang because home is special.

<b>Common Names</b>	<b>Millennials/Generation Y/Gen Y/Generation Next/Nexters/ Echo Boom/Digitals/Internet Generation Born 1981-2000/20's-early 30's</b>	
<b>Life Defining Events</b>	Internet Enters mainstream Schoolyard Violence/Bullying Iraq/Afghanistan Wars Bombing in Oklahoma City Obama TV talk & reality shows	Technology in your pocket Cell & iPhones/iPads/texting Arab Spring 9/11 – World Trade Center Girls Movement Multiculturalism
<b>Influential People</b>	Prince William Tinky Winky/Barney Leonardo DiCaprio Country Love Backstreet Boys Sammy Sosa	Chelsea Clinton Ricky Martin Kurt Cobain Britney Spears Buffy Heroes of 9/11
<b>Generational Outlook</b>	Realistic/Hopeful	
<b>Predominant Value</b>	Service	
<b>Perspective</b>	Civic	
<b>View of Authority</b>	Relaxed/Polite	
<b>Compelling Messages</b>	Be smart – you are special Connect 24/7	Leave no one behind Achieve now! Serve your community
<b>Parenting Style Experienced As Youth</b>	Parent Advocacy Supervision/Strictness on drugs, drinking & driving	Put children first Soccer moms
<b>Preferred Leadership Styles</b>	Participative decision making with leadership by achievers	
<b>Preferred Work Style</b>	Collaboration	
<b>Work Ethic</b>	Determined/Ambitious	
<b>View of Paid Work</b>	Want participative workplace with other like themselves doing fulfilling work as means to an end	
<b>Relationships Defined By</b>	Loyalty	
<b>Preferred Communication</b>	Online (Facebook, Twitter, Texting, e-mail)	
<b>How They Consume Information</b>	Wikipedia/Twitter/Facebook/iPhones & iPads/Online News	
<b>Current demographic trends</b>	Technically savvy	

**So try these supportive behaviors and tips for communicating with each of the generational groups:**

### **Traditionalists**

- By nature this group is private, so don't expect members of this generation to share their thoughts immediately.
- For this group, a person's word is his/her bond, so it's important to focus on words rather than body language or inferences.
- Face to face, phone or written communication is preferred.
- Don't waste their time or let them feel as though their time is being wasted.
- Avoid the use of acronyms, slang or foul language.
- Keep communication style more formal, use handwritten notes.
- Utilize the history they hold.

*If you are a traditionalist: share your history; be a mentor and stretch your "adaptor" muscles.*

### **Boomers**

- This is the "show me" generation" so your body language is important when communicating.
- This group is very relationship oriented, so take time to establish rapport and show a personal interest in them. Be friendly, welcoming and inclusive.
- Speak in an open, direct style, but avoid controlling language.
- Allow plenty of time for questions and answer questions thoroughly. Expect to be pressed for details.
- Present options to demonstrate flexibility in your thinking.
- Solicit their opinion, ask for their input. Give opportunities for feedback.
- Provide acknowledgement to this generation for what they do/have done.

*If you are a boomer: walk your talk; don't take it personally; be sincere; and spend less time processing.*

### **Gen-X**

- Use technology & email as a primary communication tool.
- Use a direct, straightforward style and get to the point. Start with the bottom line. Tell them up front what you need or expect from them.
- Show respect for their time, avoid too much small talk.
- Talk in short sound bites to keep their attention
- Ask them for feedback and provide regular feedback.
- Share information with them on a regular basis and keep them "in the loop."
- Use an informal communication style.

*If you are a Xer: engage with the "team;" ask for what you need; and be patient with the process.*

### **Millennials**

- Nurture them. But, don't talk down to this group, they will resent it.
- Be open and friendly.

- Use action words and challenge them at every opportunity. Encourage them to take risks and explore new ways.
- This is the “instant” message generation using technology. Utilize technology.
- Give them opportunities for collaboration. Seek constant feedback from this group and provide regular feedback to them. Ask for their ideas and input.
- Make it fast and fun. Use humor and create a fun environment. Don’t take yourself too seriously.
- Don’t pressure for on-the-spot decisions, allow time for reflection and further suggestions.

*If you are a Millennial: strive for independence; look for a mentor; listen more- talk less; learn to deal with conflict.*

**Use the following suggestions to overcome generational differences:**

- Know each other’s preferences – learn about each generation and think about those you know who belong to each of the four generations – including your family members and those you interact with regularly at church, in civic organizations and in volunteer/work commitments.
- Spend time with each other – learn from each other. This is a two-way street. Just as younger people can learn from older people, the older generation can definitely learn from the kids.
- Be open to talking things out. Instead of wondering in silence why younger people are tattooed or older people can be so loyal to a company, etc. have a respectful conversation to gain a broader understanding of each other.

Claire Raines, author of *Connecting Generations* points out that the golden rule “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” works well when people are alike. But since people are all different, including those from different generations – a better rule might be what she calls the titanium rule “Do unto others, keeping their preferences in mind.”

**Summary:** A generation is a group of people who are programmed at about the same time. The shared experience during their formative years unites them as a generation and gives each generation its unique character. Generalizing – not stereotyping – about generations is useful to understanding others, giving insight and awareness. Other factors that influence our values and perspective include ethnic background, family unit, economic circumstances of a family, and the place you grow up.

**Resources to learn more:** These books are written for the business world, but the first chapters of each review the characteristics of each of the generations if you want to learn more.

- Lancaster, Lynne C & Stillman, David. When Generations Collide – Who They Are. Why They Clash. How to Solve the Generational Puzzle at Work. First Collins Business Edition, New York, N.Y., 2005.
- Raines, Claire. Connecting Generations: The Sourcebook for a New Workplace. Crisp Publications, Menlo Park. CA., 2003.

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