



WELCOMING ALL GENERATIONS

Sue Froggatt gives advice on communicating with members based on their year of birth.

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A better understanding and appreciation on the different needs, aspirations and drivers from the four different generations can help club leaders engage more members and motivate staff. The opposite is also true and so without this, you can create frustration and disengagement and you can lose members and staff.

By way of background, one's view on life and expectations have been shaped by early years. The four generations that have been identified are as follows:

1. **The Silent Generation** (Born between 1925-1942): These are your older and retired members. Exposure to war during upbringing has given them a sense of duty and camaraderie, they are comfortable with structures and leadership based on hierarchy.
2. **Baby Boomers** (Born 1943-1960): Born after the war, these were generally indulged by their parents and were free from financial fears. They tend to be idealistic, but have a driven work ethic, are team orientated and like to choose leaders based on consensus.
3. **Generation X** (Born 1961-1981): They grew up in a consumer culture and watched their parents work long hours to pay off their homes. The world did not present them with what they initially expected, so they are sceptical in outlook. They want a balanced work-life, are unimpressed by authority and like their leaders selection to be based on competence. They are self-reliant.
4. **Millennials** (Born after 1982): They have grown up in an era of relative prosperity, so are optimistic, but their outlook could change. They have energy, are respectful of authority, like leaders to be selected on a basis of achievement and have a global perspective. They are also sometimes referred to as Generation Y.

Whilst these are 'generalisations' it does give leaders and managers a useful perspective on the aspirations and motivations of members and staff. Just like the need to consider the impact of ethnic diversity, we need to look at generational diversity. If you do not support each generations distinct needs you can easily create generational tension, with different age groups not understanding each other and not seeing each others virtues.

Each group needs to feel valued and welcomed otherwise opportunities are squandered.

For example:

- ☛ Silents make great mediators and mentors for Generation X members
- ☛ Baby Boomers will be interested in legacy opportunities and mentoring Millennials
- ☛ Generation Xers are great for challenging and difficult tasks where innovation and creativity are required because they are at ease with questioning and challenging the status quo. They will also take risks. They will engage in things which are relevant, particularly if they are fun.

Here are some practical actions that you can take to make all generations feel valued and welcomed:

1. Review the generation profile of your members and staff. Do they match? Where are the gaps?
2. Review your members' lifecycle in terms of their personal development, and for trade associations, their business lifecycle. Consider how members' benefits appeal to people at different age levels. If there are gaps, develop products and services to support them at each stage and help them advance and progress to the next.
3. Brainstorm with members and staff if there are any barriers in place or tensions that prevent involvement of each generation? What can you do to remove any negative stereotype impressions that exist? In the past some clubs have been seen as 'old boys networks' that lack appeal to younger people.
4. Develop a culture that promotes the value of generational differences. Launch a generational diversity initiative with staff. Hold intergenerational training for staff to sharpen their communication skills. Ask members and staff how you can take full advantage of the distinct attributes of each generation.
5. Introduce 'reverse mentoring' for older leaders so they can get a perspective of how actions will be seen and affect different age groups and how to engage and involve them.
6. Have a generational impact statement against key actions and decisions.
7. Have a position on each committee for people from each generation
8. Tap into the time and wisdom of older members by introducing volunteer vacancies for them to engage as mentors, negotiators, press contacts or ambassadors. Help them develop and hone their skills in these areas and consider the needs of older people, for example using bigger print to help with failing eyesight.
9. If you want to inject some fun in to your club meetings, involve Generation Xers in the planning.
10. Give your recruitment messages a cross generational message.

However, do not fall into a stereotyping trap and use this generational framework only as a guide. It is by engaging in an ongoing and rich dialogue with members from all generations that you understand their current and future needs and build a stronger membership for your club.

Sue Froggatt 2006

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