



Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: The Generational Divide

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Welcome

February – a month filled with the cold and snow in Chicago. I get warm feelings from the celebration of Valentine's Day and my birthday (yesterday). Although no special year for me (just wandering past middle age), I am using the passage of another year to discuss generational issues as it relates to meetings.

Abundant information exists about the generational differences in the workplace. This issue will build on that body of literature and research to address the challenges these generational "differences" create in meetings.

Another month. . .another year...another issue of T.I.M.E. I hope you enjoyed this month as much as I did.

Sue

[Sue Tinnish](#)

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Name your Generation

How are generations determined? There is no set range of birth years that determine a generation. I saw variety in the years assigned to each generation. There are also groups known as "cuspers" who bridge two generations and may show characteristics of both generations.

The generations are typified as:

- Traditionalists were born between 1925 and 1942 and grew up during war and reconstruction. Many in this generation worked for the same employer, or at least in the same field, their entire professional career. They thrive on stability, and are cognizant of rank and titles.
- Baby Boomers, born between 1943 and 1960, comprise a majority of today's workers. Most are team-oriented and driven individuals who work hard to further their career, raise a family and care for aging parents.
- Generation X, born between 1961 and 1981, are a vast contrast to prior generations. Often labeled as skeptical, they're independent and, unlike Boomers or Traditionalists, aren't afraid to switch jobs or careers several times in an effort to continue gaining experience and knowledge.
- The Millennials were born between 1981 and 1994 and are just beginning to enter the workforce. They are expert multi-taskers and are always looking to balance hobbies and volunteer activities with work.

Value Alignment

How each of us reacts to life is very dependent upon our experiences. Our experiences shape and filter our perceptions. Key events form the personality of a generation. These seminal events occur in our early formative years before we reach adulthood and include world events, like wars, depression, economic prosperity; technological change; politics; and social norms like social equality and family structure.

Not every member of a particular generation will share everything in common with other members of that generation. However, the vast majority of a generation's members will possess many of the generation's overall traits, characteristics, and values. You can use this list or others like it to find kernels of truth that help your understanding rather than simply continuing stereotypes.

Traditionalists

- Dedication/sacrifice
- Hard work
- Law and Order
- Delayed reward
- Duty before pleasure

Baby Boomers

- Optimism
- Health and wellness
- Personal growth
- Youth
- Work

Gen Xers

- Diversity
- Thinking globally

- Balance
- Self-reliance
- Pragmatism

Millennials

- Sociability
- Morality
- Street smarts
- Diversity

Throughout the issue, I will highlight other ways in which the generations differ.

Where the Clash Occurs

The ideals, values, traits, goals, and characteristics held by generations are increasingly different from one another. While generational differences have always existed, starting with the Baby Boomers, each generation now shares less in common with previous generations. And each generation is less interested in embodying or carrying forward characteristics of the previous generation.

Some of the common work clashes include:

- Communication styles and expectations
- Work styles
- Attitudes about work and life
- Comfort with technology
- Views regarding loyalty and authority
- Acceptance of change

How Generations Meet

The workplace and expectations have greatly changed. The way the younger generations view work is vastly different from Baby Boomers and especially Traditionalists. Consider a few differences which also impact expectations about the workplace and meetings:

- Structured **vs.** Flexible
- Job specific, clear delineation of duties **vs.** Many duties, cross training common
- Worker as instrument **vs.** Worker as human resource
- Labor intensive **vs.** Knowledge intensive
- Hierarchical **vs.** Participatory
- Education is completed **vs.** Life-long learning
- Focus on product **vs.** Focus on customer service

Complete list of workplaces differences available at:

<http://wsd.dli.mt.gov/local/kalispell/HRtoolkitV3/pdf/CatchingReleasingTalent/Generation%20Puzzle%20at%20Work.pdf>

Meaningful meetings for the younger generation will:

- Be customized to their needs
- Increase their skills, knowledge – even though they do not expect to stay with the same organization
- Provide information quickly in a variety of formats and methods
- Contain a larger element of entertainment and be fun
- Include sources of knowledge not exclusively limited to management and experts
- Use technology as an integrated tool

Meaningful meetings for Baby Boomers and Traditionalists are what we have been delivering! Broadcasting of information – often in a creative way – to generations accustomed to listening and absorbing a single feed. In addition, successful meetings are marked by:

For Traditionalists

- Courtesy and respect
- Not overly combative and argumentative, but instead more analytical and inclusive
- An opportunity to gain training and skills that will enhance their value to the company

For Boomers

- Efficient, factual, accurate, and thorough; Boomers want to know the “why” behind everything
- Visionary and bold, exploring new possibilities
- Social, with lots of human interaction

I found the following article particularly helpful in my research: Bridging the Generation Gap by Chuck Underwood. The article appeared in the February 2005 issue of Convene and you may find the article in the PCMA archives at:

http://www.pcma.org/resources/convene/archives/displayArticle.asp?ARTICLE_ID=4945

Bridging the different expectations is challenging. However, the truth about all generations is that no one likes to feel that they are not contributing or that a meeting did not answer the “What’s in it for me” question.

How Generations Get Informed

Different generations develop different learning styles and habits. Consider how differently generations grew up as it relates to their acquisition of information and entertainment:

- Traditionalists: Radio
- Baby Boomers: TV – all 5 channels!
- Gen X: PCs, multiple channels of TV including programming specifically focused at their generation, games
- Millennials: Integrated computers through the Internet, access to vast amounts of information
- Generation Z (those born after 1995): Customized information and entertainment

(Ipods), text messaging, instant messaging, instant access to people (cell phones)

The learning styles and habits of younger generations have been strongly affected by their use of technology. Mark Prensky, in *Digital Game-Based Learning*, calls the younger generations the Games Generation. He notes the Games Generation's:

- Need for speed
- Need for connectivity
- Need for activity
- Capacity to randomly access and parallel process a variety of information simultaneously.

This means that younger people in meetings have a comfort with technology, especially computers and the Internet. And it also means that they respond better to information given at a quicker pace, containing a high level of interaction, and providing choices and options.

Baby Boomers and Traditionalists approach information logically and in a linear fashion. They are accustomed to hearing information from a reliable authority. They grew up reading information.

Boomers are on a quest of personal growth. They also seek information for personal gratification. Traditionalists learn because it will help their company. They are the last generation to operate in that paradigm.

How Generations Team

A paradox of teams is that the more diverse a team is the better the decisions. Also true, the more diverse a team, the more difficult it is to get people to become a team.

Effective teams – including those with members from different generations - will value different views, encourage active listening, decrease ambiguity among team members' roles, support the sharing of expertise, and share recognition and appreciation.

The different "views" that may come into play on a team including the following:

- Traditionalists: Respect authority, adhere to rules, prefer explicit direction, and value conformity
- Baby Boomers: Are team oriented, look to build consensus, believe in a participatory process, and value involvement
- Gen Xers: Are informal, pragmatic, are not consumed by work or winning, and value informality
- Millennials: Are optimistic (like Boomers), focused on end results and achievement (not necessarily the process), have a global sense of duty and value autonomy.

Whether forming teams to brainstorm or solve problems, executing a teambuilding experience or attempting to get everyone on the same page during a meeting, these different viewpoints affect how teams perceive:

- Rules
- Established processes
- Change
- Sharing of information

- Non-verbal cues - Boomers are the "show me" generation and body language is important. Younger generations communicate more readily rely on communication mediums that don't contain any non-verbal cues (email, text messaging).
- Other teammates - One generation may typify another as being self-absorbed, negative, cynical, rigid, or impatient

Without generational awareness, it is easy to see how an intergenerational team could easily become de-railed.

Freebies: Bridging Tips

Freebies: Bridging the Generation Gap

Now that you understand more about each generation, you can continue to bridge the generation gap:

- Know your assumptions. Be mindful of how your assumptions are influencing your interactions.
- Avoid generational jargon. Speak in plain terms and avoid idioms that are not widely understood.

While not generational jargon, this example demonstrates how language affects us. Many of us know what it means to go "clockwise" around the table to introduce ourselves at meetings. Traditionalists, Boomers and Gen Xers know about analog clocks. Millenials inhabit a digital world where clocks don't have hands. Do you know what "counterclockwise" means? How would you respond to the questions "What time is it?" Would you say "about 20 minutes to 12." or "It's 11:42." ?

- Appreciate the strengths. Instead of harboring frustration over differences, focus on the positive attributes.
- Get to the bottom line. Like all difference, generalizations about generational differences should be used only as guidelines to help you understand what might be preventing understanding. The goal should be to move from general categories to forming an understanding of the people themselves.
- One final tip for people of my generation. (I am finding it astonishing that we are considered "old" and "stuck in the past" but none-the-less, I am taking this tip to heart.) This suggestion from Robert Wendover, managing director of the Center for Generational Studies, is that all Baby Boomers take an oath. He advises that we raise our right hand and pledge 'I will never start a sentence in the workplace with the phrase 'I remember.'"

More Freebies: Generational differences abound. If you are interested in learning how various generations perceive incentives and rewards - always important for meetings and incentive programs, email me and I will send you a short paper on that subject. [Sue Tinnish](#)

Future T.I.M.E.

In addition to writing and publishing T.I.M.E., I am also the founder and organizer of a women's networking and golfing group. We meet 8 times a year. Our activities include Clinics offered in March, April and May, golfing (May - October) and social events during the cold months. We golf in the North/Northwest suburbs of Chicago. If you are interested in joining our fun, supportive group of women golfers, please email me and I will send you information about our upcoming schedule. [The Links Golfing Group](#)

I have several speaking engagements lined up. Come and see me! I will be at Affordable Meetings in June. I will be part of Executive Meeting Center's (EMC) MEET education sessions in 4 locations this year. Atlanta in May. Other details forthcoming.

Finally, my subscriber base only grows through word of mouth of my subscribers. I would really appreciate it if you would forward T.I.M.E. onto your colleagues, associates, and clients. Just press the forward button at the end of the newsletter.

T.I.M.E. Gone By

If you are interested in past issues, please e-mail us with the month and topic and we will send you a copy of that newsletter. Here's what is included in past issues [Back Issue Request](#):

2000

Teambuilding (May), Green Meetings (June), Values (July), Minimum/Minimal Meetings (August), Evaluations (October), Politics (November), and Toys (December)

2001

Sales, Award Presentations (January), Change and Communicating Change (February), Open Space Technology (March), Adult Learning Styles (April), Trade Shows (May), Emotional Intelligence (June), Presentation Tips (July), Ice Breakers (August), Facilitation (September), Humor (October), Customer Care (November), Slack (December)

2002

Teambuilding Options (January), Promotional Products (February), Multicultural Communication (March), Outdoor Learning (April), Budgets, (June), (June), and ROK (May), Creativity (June), High Touch Technology (July), Economic and Business Cycles (August), Successful Environmental Factors/Conference Centers (September), Return on Investment (October), Incentive Meetings (November), Resource Recap (December)

2003

Everyday Meetings (January), Diversity (February), Problem Solving (March), Marketing Pre- and Post- Event (April), Entertainment (May), Balance in Meetings and child caret (June), Mobile Events (July), Last Minute Ideas (August), Training Meetings (September), Unique Venues (October), Data, Information and Number Crunching Privacy (November), Deja View (December)

2004

Branding (January), Audio Visuals (February), Networking (March), Strategic Budgeting (April), Sensory Meetings (May), Board Meetings (June), Leadership (July), Barrier-free Meetings (August), Time Management & Meetings (September), The Travel Experience & Stress (October), Voting Techniques (November), Deja View II (December)

2005

New Year's Resolutions (January), Brainy Side of Food and Beverage (February), Sarbanes-Oxley and Meetings (March), Visual Aids (April), Experiential Teambuilding (May), Emotional Meetings (June), Press Conferences (July), Green Meetings (August), International Meetings (September), Value of Entertainment (October), Copyright Laws (November), Deja View III (December)

2006
New Year's Resolutions (January)

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