

The Director's Link

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Crossing the Generational Divide

Patricia Scallan Berl

On a daily basis, directors must confront diverse voices and views, each underscoring the distinct motivations, values, and ambitions of their teachers. One key element driving reoccurring differences among the mindsets of teachers is intergenerational conflict. On the job, these generational distinctions are becoming increasingly complex as multi-generation gaps emerge, with three or more generations defining roles and expectations, each vying for positions in a work world of shrinking upward opportunity. Experience and loyalty to an employer, once the principal factors for advancement, are quickly being replaced by merit, education, and advancing technological skills of younger workers.

Generations at work include at least four segmented population groups defined by common birth years or years entering the workforce. They include the Veterans (born 1929-1942), Baby Boomers (born 1943-1960), Generation X (born 1960-1980), and Generation Y (born 1980-2000). Recognizing and understanding the characteristics underlying each generational viewpoint can help managers decipher the unspoken assumptions beneath employee attitudes and actions.

Veterans: "The Greatest Generation"

Veterans grew up under the influence of the Great Depression and WW II, entering the workforce through the 1950s. Frequently referred to as "Traditionalists," they tend to be loyal to their employers, believing in hard work, the status quo, and respect for authority figures. Veterans share a belief in the intrinsic value of work. They grew up in times when people were trained for a specific profession or trade, holding just one to four jobs over a lifetime. Their work ethic hinges on loyalty, dependability, and a "stick-to-it" mentality. They gain job satisfaction from the work itself and from doing a job well, and do not necessarily believe one must derive extraordinary meaning in the work they do.

Directors can support the teachers of the Veteran generation by valuing and respecting their life experiences. They can encourage younger supervisors to listen more to what they have to say, especially what has and hasn't worked in the past. Veteran teachers are the "keepers of organizational history and values." They are the most knowledgeable about family relationships and have nurtured deep and satisfying personal connections. Above all else, supervisors should honor the perseverance, loyalty, and dedication

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Veteran teachers have given to children and families.

Baby Boomers: The "Me Generation"

Boomers, those born between 1943 and 1960, grew up during a time of economic expansion and dramatic population growth, entering the workforce from the mid-1960s through the mid-1980s. The overall feeling of optimism and promise, characteristic of the times in which they grew up, influenced this generation's current mindset of infinite possibilities, taking charge, and personal gratification.

Modern day Boomers place a great deal of emphasis on a sense of accomplishment, achievement, and social recognition. Media have labeled Boomers as the self-absorbed "Me Generation," but they are, in fact, service oriented, driven, and willing to "go the extra mile." They are good at building relationships and effective team players. Their approach to career building has created a work ethic that coined the term "workaholic" by younger generations. Driven and dedicated, Boomers regularly work 50-60 hours a week, loving it, while at the same time fulfilling a need to be needed and worthy. Boomer offspring view their parents as "living to work" versus "working to live."

Generation X: The "Latch-Key Generation"

Generation X is comprised of the 40 million Americans born between 1966 and 1980, growing up in the mid-'70s and '80s. They've been branded the "latch-key generation," as this cohort was frequently left home unsupervised when their Boomer moms entered the workforce at an unprecedented rate. As a result they are more independent and more self-reliant than their elders were at this stage in development.

While growing up, Gen X-ers were allowed a great deal of independence and unsupervised time. Consequently, they have a non-traditional orientation about time and space. As one Gen X-er remarked, "As long as I get my work done, why does it matter when or how I get the job done?" For some managers, the propensity to show up late or leave early has earned them the reputation of being unprofessional, or lazy, when neither is true. Gen X-ers are not

"slackers" as the media has labeled them, but they also don't buy into the concept of "line of sight" managing.

Gen X-ers place a high value on "hands off" supervision and will flourish in settings that foster independence and opportunities to manage projects and assignments on their own. They like to multi-task and are comfortable with simultaneous tasks and projects. Remember to keep the work culture fun and flexible where they have a variety of projects to engage in. They thrive on change and more easily adapt to new systems and approaches.

As students, Gen X-ers were encouraged to challenge others' thinking and debate with classmates, so be prepared for questions and lively discussions when initiatives are rolled out at your center. Supervisors will also need to be clear in communicating the importance of repetitive tasks that are part of the job. Mundane tasks can be boring to them, and Gen X-ers will need to be reminded from time to time that many quality outcomes for children require attention to detail, consistency, and verification along the way.

Perhaps the biggest difference between Generation X and preceding generations is how they perceive work/life balance. Gen X-ers saw their parents measure self-worth by their work. Gen X-ers want a better balance; they don't buy into the "super mom" or "super dad" theory that you can have it all. As parents, Gen X-ers are extending time for maternity leave and entering the workforce later than their boomer parents. When they do work outside the home, Gen X moms are more apt to request flexible schedules and job sharing. They are more willing to jump on and off the career track than their parents. For this generation, it is no longer about living large, it's about getting the best they can afford and what is right for their kids.

Generation Y: Millennials Rising

Seventy one million Generation Y children are now coming of age. Following Generation X, they are sometimes called "nexters" or "echo boomers" due to the tremendous size of their generational cohort. Born between 1980 and 2000, the eldest are now in their early to mid-20s. By

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Our Mission

The McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership is dedicated to enhancing the management skills, professional orientation, and leadership capacity of early childhood administrators. The activities of the Center encompass four areas: training, program evaluation, research, and public awareness.

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The Director's Toolbox

Supporting Generational Differences in the Workplace

Generational characteristics can be a helpful tool in understanding the diverse attitudes and mindsets of employees. Here are a few tips for making the most of these differences for a positive impact on communications, motivation, and job performance.

Motivating and Developing Veterans

Veterans want to work in an atmosphere with living and breathing humans, not voicemail, e-mail, and fax machines. Use the personal touch in providing feedback and provide hand written notes. Consider certificates, plaques, framed photos, and other memorabilia that recognize their accomplishments and contributions to the organization.

Teachers of the Veteran generation are more comfortable when training formats consist of lectures, seminars, or presentations given by topic experts. They like information that is well researched, organized, and supported by facts, figures, and examples. They will prefer a book, tape, or article to resources online or computer-based training.



Motivating and Developing Boomers

Boomers value personal growth and self improvement, often describing themselves as "life long learners." Coaching is their preferred style of development. You can address performance issues more effectively by asking questions to help them identify issues. When possible gain their permission every step of the way, saying for instance, "Would it be okay if we talk about your conference with Mrs. Green this morning?" Recognize their efforts to improve, while stressing to a Boomer what he or she could be achieving or might try for better results.

Motivating and Developing Generation X

Gen X employees are independent, learn quickly, and develop skills easily on their own. They will need a variety of experiences to develop and refine their judgments and prepare them for future advancement or leadership. Mentors can be more effective than an immediate supervisor in coaching younger Gen X employees to take responsibility for their own issues by asking questions like, "How do you plan to go about solving this?" or "How will you approach this parent about...?"



Motivating and Developing Generation Y

By promoting your center as a learning organization, Gen Y-ers will gain knowledge, new skills, and responsibility. Help new employees inventory, understand, and value the applications of what they are learning at the end of each day. Help them to realize that training is an important part of their duties, both in addressing real time job responsibilities and in professional development.

When training, keep content in presentations brief, with bullet points, lists, and graphics. Steer away from articles and books and encourage them to access resources online or direct them to computer-based training. Be sure to provide opportunities for socializing at work and support the development of networks with colleagues.

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Professional Development Opportunities

Program Administration Scale Assessor Reliability Training

August 11-14, 2008

The *Program Administration Scale* (PAS) measures leadership and management practices of center-based early care and education programs. Assessor reliability training includes an overview of reliability of the instrument, interview protocol for collecting data, and information on how to score indicators and items. Individuals who successfully complete the training are eligible to become certified PAS assessors.

This four-day training is designed for technical assistance specialists, quality monitors, management consultants, researchers, and other professionals interested in using the PAS to reliably assess early childhood leadership and management practices and help center directors improve the quality of their programs.

Location: McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership
NLU Wheeling Campus Annex

Fee: \$850, includes all texts, handouts, and meals

Participants may receive two semester hours of graduate credit (ECE582C, Early Childhood Program Evaluation) by paying an additional fee.

Fall Management Institute: The Family-Friendly Director

October 24-25, 2008

The Fall Management Institute is designed for directors, assistant directors and owners of early care and education programs who are interested in examining their center's policies and practices through a "family-friendly" lens. Participants will look at the social, economic, and technological factors impacting families in contemporary society and explore ways to make their centers a part of a community-wide support system for parents. Emphasis will be given to developing a family-responsive mission statement as well as marketing and enrollment literature that engages parents as true partners in their children's care and education.

Guest presenters are Karen Stephens and Cynthia Stringfellow. Karen is director of the Illinois State University (ISU) Child Care Center. A long-time contributor to *Exchange* magazine, Karen is author of *The Child Care Professional* and co-author of *The Child and Adult Care Professional* and *Block Adventures*. Cynthia is director of the Midwest Learning Center for Family Support at Family Focus where she helps organizations build their human capital through a commitment and investment in training and staff development.

Location: McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership
NLU Wheeling Campus Annex

Fee: \$199, includes meals

For more information on these professional development opportunities, contact Debra Trude-Suter at (800) 443-5522, ext. 5056 or debra.trudesuter@nl.edu.

NLU Online Courses for Early Childhood Administrators

Fall term begins September 15, 2008

ECE519 • Infant-Toddler Curriculum (3 sh)

ECE530 • Children's Play (2 sh)

FND503 • Historical & Philosophical Foundations of Early Childhood Education (3 sh)

For more information about the Early Childhood Administration degree program, contact Candice Dowd at candice.dowd@nl.edu.

Awards Presented at 2008 Leadership Connections Conference

The McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National-Louis University proudly honored the recipients of its annual leadership awards. The award presentations took place at the opening of the 2008 Leadership Connections conference at the Westin Chicago North Shore Hotel.



Target Corporation was recognized with the Corporate Champion for Change Award for its leading role in promoting national partnerships and local education initiatives. Target's education programs reach children from birth through high school, with a focus on early childhood. Through its national reading programs and local grants, the company provides resources to encourage adults to foster a love of reading early in children's lives and reinforce the importance of reading as a foundation for lifelong learning.

The 2008 Visionary Award was presented to Gwen Morgan to honor her significant role in increasing public awareness of the importance of strong leadership in early care and education. At Wheelock College, Gwen founded the Center for Career Development in



Early Care and Education where her work was instrumental in jumpstarting the director credentialing movement across the United States. She has served as a leader in the National Association for the Education of Young Children and many other national boards. In her home state of Massachusetts, she helped launch the Campaign for Early Education for All, which led to the creation of a new Department of Early Education and Care. Through her teaching, consulting, research, and advocacy efforts, she crafted a vision of professional development systems that has lifted the field of early childhood education and supported best practices.

LEADERSHIP CONNECTIONS 2009

Westin Chicago North Shore

Don't miss out on this highly acclaimed professional development opportunity for early childhood leaders.

Leadership Connections is an energizing three days of professional development that focuses on YOU, the early childhood administrator. As the gatekeeper to quality, you are the key to creating exemplary early care and education programs. This conference will validate what you know and are already doing while challenging you to think about your work in new and different ways.

"I gleaned so many concrete ideas from every workshop I attended. Quality and professionalism were #1 as always. Thank you!"

– Carol Sternal, Cherished Children's Early Learning Center

"The best part of Leadership Connections was networking and meeting with strong leaders in the field. Every workshop was informative and useful. Loved it!"

– Shaundra Ceaser, Champaign County Head Start - Savoy

**LEADERSHIP
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2010 they will outnumber both Boomers and Generation X in the 18-49 age brackets.

Generation Y is truly the digital generation: the first kids to be born into homes that already had computers. Weaned early on video games and surfing the Web, using technology is as natural as air to them. Their constant connectedness has given them a new orientation in space and time. They see the world as global, connected, and 'round the clock.

Growing up on MTV, Nexters may learn differently than previous generations. MTV and videos are creating a propensity toward a type of visual style that speaks specifically and effectively to this generation through loud sounds, graphics, rapid edits, and moving cameras. This influence is extending into the classroom and the workplace as teachers and trainers move away from traditional training methods, using film, video formats, and PowerPoint® presentations that appeal to younger employees.

For every younger generation, there is the challenge of being heard and having your

say. To Gen Y, becoming well known is not only easy, but natural. For them, everyone deserves to have their say and anybody can be a star. You can create your own Web site, make a movie with your own Webcam or digital camera, post your thoughts, pictures, and write online, or even be on reality TV. In a culture immersed in talk shows and Internet blogs, where the mindset is every voice gets an equal hearing, Gen Y adults are less likely to believe that there is one right answer. Some psychologists suggest that ubiquitous "talk show mentality" affects the way teenagers learn and interact and the "prove it to me mentality" is breeding an attitude that it's okay to be disruptive and challenge what is being said.

Benefits of Generational Mixing

In no time in previous history have so many diverse generations worked side by side. Each generation has its unique perspective on job priorities, supervision, commitment, loyalty, and work/life balance. The experiences and heroes we share, the music and images that speak to us, and the passions and causes that unify or embroil us,

become the formative elements that shape and define each generation. While generational differences can be tension producing and challenging, the benefits of generational blending are greater diversity of thought, tolerance, and creativity. When people of different generations and perspectives come together, they have the potential to bring greater creativity of thoughts and ideas to problem solving and goal setting.

Success in delivering the very best care to the children and families we serve, and the very best leadership to staff we supervise, will rest on our willingness to understand and overcome generational and communication differences. In seeing these differences as strengths, and not as detriments, we embrace our mutual interdependency and foster greater collaboration across our organization.

Patricia Scallan Berl is division vice president of mid-Atlantic operations for Bright Horizons Family Solutions. This article appeared in its entirety in the March 2006 issue of Exchange. This adaptation is reprinted with permission of the author.