THE ADVISING WORKPLACE: GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES AND CHALLENGES

Margaret (Peg) J. Steele
steele.87@osu.edu

Virginia N. Gordon
gordon.9@osu.edu

The Ohio State University
NACADA 2004
SESSION’S PURPOSE

To examine how generational differences influence our communication patterns, attitudes, and behaviors in the advising workplace.

We will:

• Provide an overview of the characteristics of different generations now working as academic advisors and how our histories, experiences, and values influence how we interact.

• Discuss how advisors can use this knowledge to work together more effectively and how to incorporate generational preferences into our workplace and training programs.
FOUR GENERATIONS IN THE ADVISING WORKPLACE

- TRADITIONALISTS – 1934-1945
  (59-70 yrs. old)
- BABY BOOMERS – 1946–1964
  (58-40 yrs. old)
- GENERATION X – 1965-1980
  (39-24)
- MILLENNIALS – 1981-2000
  (23-4)

Lancaster & Stillman, 2002
A “cusper” is a person positioned between two generations.

Types of Cuspers:

• **Traditionalist/Baby Boomer** (born 1940-1945)
• **Baby Boomer/Generation Xer** (born 1960-1965)
• **Generation Xer/Millennial** (born 1975-1980)

“Because Cuspers stand in the gap between the two sides, they become naturals at mediating, translating and mentoring.”

*Lancaster & Stillman, 2002*
The generational descriptions used in this presentation are from the literature and are only intended to be general guidelines.

“A generational identity is a state of mind shaped by many events and influences.”

Only you can define into what generation you fit.

Lancaster & Stillman, 2002
NACADA
ADVISING ADMINISTRATORS
WORKPLACE SURVEY

- Respondents:
  - 69% Boomers (58-40 yrs. old)
  - 24% Gen Xers (39-24 yrs. old) 77% females
  - 5% Traditionalists (59-70 yrs. old) 23% males
  - 2% Millennials (23-4 yrs. old)

- Satisfied with:
  - 70% communication patterns in workplace
  - 71% level of staff morale
  - 90% teamwork and decision making behaviors
  - 90% sensitivity to diversity and cultural differences
  - 74% clarity of performance standards
  - 74% training necessary to perform their jobs effectively
  - 80% their role and mission of their unit consistently made clear to staff members and that staff is committed to unit’s goals

Joseph & Carty, 2002
EACH GENERATION’S FORMATIVE YEARS ARE INFLUENCED BY THE HISTORICAL, CULTURAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EVENTS THAT TAKE PLACE.

THESE AFFECT HOW EACH GENERATION PERCEIVES THE WORLD AND ITS PLACE IN IT.
WHERE DO YOU FIT?
FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT YOUR GENERATIONAL IDENTITY

• Ethnic Background
• Country of Origin
• Family Configuration
• Gender
• Religion
• Economic Factors
• Regional Differences

Raines, 2003
BOOMERS  
Born 1946-1964  

XERS  
Born 1965-1980  

Defining Events and Trends

Prosperity
Television
Suburbia
Assassinations
Vietnam
Civil Rights movement
Cold War
Women’s Liberation
The Space Race
Heroes – Gandhi, Martin Luther King, John Glenn, John Kennedy

Watergate, Nixon resigns
Latchkey kids
Single parent homes
MTV
AIDS
Computers
Challenger disaster
Fall of Berlin Wall
Wall Street frenzy
Persian Gulf
No heroes

Zemke, Raines, & Filipczack, 2000
THE BABY BOOMERS

CULTURAL MEMORABILIA

“The Ed Sullivan Show”
Quonset huts
Fallout shelters
Poodle skirts and Pop Beads
Slinkies
TV Dinners
“The Laugh-In”
Hula Hoops
Beaver
The peace sign

Zemke, et al., 2000
THE GEN XERS

CULTURAL MEMORABILIA

“The Brady Bunch”
Pet Rocks
Platform shoes
“The Simpsons”
“Dynasty”
ET
Cabbage Patch dolls

Zemke, et al., 2000
## Core Values

### Boomers
- Optimism
- Team orientation
- Personal gratification
- Health and wellness
- Personal growth
- Youth
- Work
- Involvement
- Build a stellar career
- Money, title, recognition
- Help me balance everyone else and find meaning for myself.

### Generation X
- Diversity
- Thinking globally
- Balance now (not at 65)
- Technoliteracy
- Fun
- Informality
- Self-reliance
- Pragmatism
- Build a portable career
- Freedom is ultimate reward
- Enjoy things most important in career
BOOMER and GEN Xer TRAITS

BOOMERS
• Fight against authority
• Media darlings
• Workaholics
• Political
• Political at work
• Nostalgia for the 1960’s

Xers
• Go around authority or turn it in your direction
• Avoid the limelight and don’t let them label you
• Get a life
• Politics never solved anything and usually made it worse
• Corporate politics wastes time
• Oh, God, not again

Zemke, et al., 2000
WHAT BOOMERS SAY ABOUT GEN Xers

• They’re slackers.
• They are rude and lack social skills.
• They’re always doing things their own way, instead of the proscribed way (our way).
• They spend too much time on the Internet and e-mail.
• They won’t wait their turn.

WHAT GEN Xers SAY ABOUT BOOMERS

• They’re self-righteous.
• They’re workaholics.
• They’re too political, always trying to figure just what to say...to whom...and when.
• They do a great job of talking the talk. But they don’t walk the walk.
• Get outta my face.
• Lighten up, it’s only a job.
• What’s the management fad this week?
• They’re clueless.

Raines & Hunt, 2000
# Key Generational Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Boomers</th>
<th>Xers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perspective on Work</td>
<td>Career</td>
<td>Job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Diplomatic</td>
<td>Blunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Impressed</td>
<td>Unfazed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>Seek Validation</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Abundant</td>
<td>Scarce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies &amp; Procedures</td>
<td>Protective</td>
<td>Mistrustful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliance</td>
<td>Team-oriented</td>
<td>Self-reliant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Ethic</td>
<td>Driven</td>
<td>Balanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Relationships and results</td>
<td>Task &amp; results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Acquired</td>
<td>Assimilated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entitlement</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Merit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective on the Future</td>
<td>A better world</td>
<td>Survival</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Raines & Hunt, 2000
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tradition-alists</th>
<th>Boomers</th>
<th>Xers</th>
<th>Millennial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outlook</strong></td>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>Skeptical</td>
<td>Hopeful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work ethic</strong></td>
<td>Dedicated</td>
<td>Driven</td>
<td>Balanced</td>
<td>Determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>View of authority</strong></td>
<td>Respectful</td>
<td>Love/hate</td>
<td>Unimpressed</td>
<td>Polite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership by</strong></td>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Pulling together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
<td>Personal sacrifice</td>
<td>Personal gratification</td>
<td>Reluctant to commit</td>
<td>Inclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Turnoffs</strong></td>
<td>Vulgarity</td>
<td>Political incorrectness</td>
<td>Cliché, hype</td>
<td>Promiscuity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE BABY BOOMERS ON THE JOB

ASSETS

• Service oriented
• Driven
• Willing to “go the extra mile”
• Good at relationships
• Want to please
• Good team players

LIABILITIES

• Not naturally “budget minded”
• Uncomfortable with conflict
• Reluctant to go against peers
• May put process ahead of result
• Overly sensitive to feedback
• Judgmental of those who see things differently
• Self-centered
THE GEN XERS ON THE JOB

ASSETS
- Adaptable
- Technoliterate
- Independent
- Unintimidated by authority
- Creative

LIABILITIES
- Impatient
- Poor people skills
- Inexperienced
- Cynical
MESSAGES THAT MOTIVATE

Boomers
- You’re important to our success.
- You’re valued here; you’re worthy
- Your contribution is unique and important.
- We need you.
- I approve of you.

Xers
- Do it your way.
- We’ve got the newest hardware and software.
- There aren’t a lot of rules here.
- We’re not very corporate.

Zemke, et al., 2000
## Leadership Style

### Boomers
- Collegial
- Consensual
- Benignly despotic
- Management by buzzwords
- Passionate
- Bring heart and humanity to office

### Xers
- Encourage diverse opinions
- Straightforward
- Disagree and debate
- Always ask “why?”
- More altruistic
- Fair
- Competent

---

*Zemke, et al., 2000*
HOW TO MANAGE BOOMER ADVISORS

• Be future oriented.
• Focus on challenges.
• Use personal approach.
• Give them perks.
• Use consensus.
• Reward their work ethic and long hours.
• Ask questions to get to issues.
• Coach tactfully.
• Be nice. Find opportunities for agreement and harmony.
• Ask, don’t tell
• Feedback once a year with documentation
• Don’t use “Sir, Ma’am, Mr., Ms.”
HOW TO MANAGE GEN X ADVISORS

• Create a fun, flexible, educational, nonmicromanaged work environment.
• Be frank and honest.
• Tell them “we want you to have a life outside of work.”
• Evaluate ideas on merit not on years of experience.
• Understand that change means opportunity to them.
• Emphasize “hands-off supervision.”
• Keep training materials brief and scannable; always learning new skills.
• Give constant, positive feedback on the job they are doing.
• Give them leading edge technology.
• Provide mentors who care about them and will support them.
• Give them a lot to do but freedom as to how it gets done.
• No clock watching.
• “More they learn, more they will stay”
THE CROSS-GENERATIONAL MANAGEMENT GRID

**Boomers**

- Work long hours
- Do what they’re told
- Complain that GenXers
  - are not loyal
  - just “do their own thing”
  - won’t stick to something long or go into it deeply enough
- Want things in “order”
- Struggle with change
- Wait for opportunities
- Have learned to wait
- Ask “Who’s in charge?”
- Tend to believe that things will get back to “normal,” that the current situation is a short-term problem and that the “kids” will grow up.

**Gen Xers**

- Balance in life
- Gripe about senior managers
- Complain that Boomers
  - are promoted based on tenure vs. performance
  - are too slow in making decisions
  - just can’t “get on with it”
- Bring flexibility
- Bring comfort and ease with change
- Seize opportunities
- Like immediate gratification
- Ask “What’s the deal?”
- See the evolving workplace as the workplace of the future where knowing the rewards of the job well done ahead of time is the priority.

*Rock, 1999*
ISSUES IN THE GENERATIONAL MIX WORKPLACE

- AUTHORITY
- WORK ETHIC
- MANAGEMENT EXPECTATIONS
- REWARDS
- LEADERSHIP STYLE
- RELATIONSHIPS WITH CO-WORKERS
- WORK ATTITUDES
- CONFLICT RESOLUTION
- WORK ATMOSPHERE
- DRESS
- WORK HOURS
- REACTION TO CHANGE
- TRAINING METHODS
MANAGING THE GENERATIONAL MIX

• Recognize authority and work ethic differences
• Understand management expectations
• Be sensitive to how advisors react to change
• Engage in positive communication
• Be aware of your own age stereotypes
• Value uniqueness; concentrate on what unites
• Consider implementing “two-way mentoring”
ADVISOR TRAINING
Learning Preferences

Generations have their own learning style depending on the way they were taught when they were in school:

**VETERANS** – traditional classroom environment; lectures by experts; prefer summaries

**BOOMERS** – like training seminars/workshops with casual atmosphere; prefer scannable materials

**Xers** – learn from computer programs; role play; learn by doing; like to practice skills; like immediate feedback.

**MILLENNIALS** – are used to learning interactively; like role-playing

Zemke, et al., 2000
ADVISOR TRAINING

BOOMERS
- Variety of formats (e.g. participative, interactive, case studies)
- Books, videos, audiotapes,
- Team building
- No role playing
- Feedback later

GEN Xers
- Computer-based learning
- CD-ROM, Internet
- Skill practice
- One-on-one
- Role playing
- Feedback now
Advisors of the Future
THE MILLENNIALS
Born 1981-2000

Also called: Generation Y, Dot-coms., Generation Net, Nintendo Generation, The Nexters

Defining Events: Technology, schoolroom violence, Oklahoma City bombing, TV talk shows, multiculturalism, *It Takes a Village*, Iraq War

Core Values: Optimism, civic duty, confidence, achievement, sociability, morality, street smarts, diversity

Work assets: Collective action, tenacity, heroic spirit, multitasking capabilities, technological savvy

Work liabilities: Need for supervision and structure; inexperienced, particularly with handling difficult people issues

Zemke, et al., 2000
Recipe for a Post-Millennial “Gen Z” (2001-2020)

1. One part introspective intellectualism from the Silent Generation
2. Half part outspoken idealism from the Baby Boomers
3. Two parts action-not-words from the Gen Xers
4. One part communal optimism from the Millennials
5. Dash of salt, pinch of thyme
6. Serve with rice or saffron rice

William Thomas
*The X Zone, 1999*
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

• What generational differences have you noticed in your advising office?
• What generational conflicts have emerged?
• What positive influences have resulted from the generational mix in your office?
SUMMARY

• Advisors from different generations bring different strengths, beliefs, and attitudes to the advising workplace.

• Advising administrators can use their knowledge of generational differences to work toward a common goal.

• Acknowledging and incorporating the ideas, values, and perceptions that advisors from different generations bring to the workplace can have a positive impact on its climate, collegiality, and overall effectiveness.
POST SCRIPT

“The most successful people in the twenty-first century will be true ‘Gen Mixers’ who bring to work every day their enthusiasm, flexibility, and voracious desire to learn.”

Martin and Tulgan (2002)
REFERENCES


