
Bridging the Gap:

How Understanding Generational Differences
Can Grow Your Association



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Introduction

For the first time, bar association membership encompasses four generations at once:

- Silents (Born 1926-1945)
- Baby Boomers (Born 1946-1964)
- Generation Xers (Born 1965-1975)
- Generation Y (Born 1976-1999)

Each generation has a great deal to contribute. But how they want to contribute and what they expect in return varies as much as their ages. Associations that understand these differences and adapt their programs and services to meet the needs of each generation will benefit not only in increased membership but in happy, productive and engaged volunteers and leaders, and ultimately contribute to the ongoing viability of the association.

Conventional wisdom over the past decade has told us that the differences between the generations can tear a business – or an association apart. The good news is that, according to research conducted by Jennifer Deal, with the Center for Creative Leadership, the chasm in values between older and younger people is a myth. In her book, *Retiring the Generation Gap: How Employees Young and Old Can Find Common Ground*, Deal argues that all generations have similar values, we simply express them in different ways. In other words, our values may be the same but our behavior – the outward expression of our values – may be very different. Deal's findings are based on seven years of research in which she surveyed more than 3,000 corporate leaders.

According to Deal, the common denominator between all generations is that family is most important. But how different generations express this value may be

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quite different. Silents and Boomers have expressed this value by working long hours to provide for a secure home and future for their family. Not surprising, as many of them either lived through the Great Depression or heard stories of it from their parents. Gen Xers and Gen Y also put family first. They've seen the sacrifices their Boomer parents have made - the long hours, giving everything to an employer, only to be laid off shortly before reaching retirement. So they express the "family first" value by demanding work-life balance, and refusing to work 24/7 for their employer.

So what does this mean for your association? Successful bar associations will be those that create specific programs and services that take into consideration each generation's unique perspective and talents.

Differences Across the Generations

You know you're a "Silent" if . . .

- You remember when TV was all black & white
- You remember actually ballroom dancing, not watching it on TV
- You use a computer, but you're still afraid you'll break it
- You listened to Ricky Nelson on the radio

You know you're a "Boomer" if . . .

- You thought you might one day join the Mickey Mouse Club
- You used a typewriter to write your term papers
- You saw every episode of "Leave it to Beaver"
- You remember Woodstock

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You know you're a "Gen Xer" if . . .

- You remember Atari and Asteroids
- You couldn't wait until 1999 to play "I 999" by Prince
- One of your first favorite movies was "Star Wars" or "ET"
- You typed your term papers on a word processor

You know you're a "Gen Y" if . . .

- You've always had an answering machine or voice mail
- You were using a computer by the time you were learning to read
- You've always had cable TV with remote control
- The Internet has existed as long as you can remember

From *Bridging the Generation Gap*, by Linda Gravett and Robin Throckmorton, 2006, The Career Press, Inc.

What Different Generations Expect

Different generations have different expectations regarding what they want from their bar association and how they want to contribute. With respect to recruitment and membership development, the most successful associations will tailor their message to the particular group they are targeting. Understanding the expectations of incoming Gen X and Gen Y attorneys is critical to attracting them as members. Understanding what is important to Silents and Boomers will keep them engaged in the association. In order to thrive (not just survive) in the coming years, bar associations will also need to review everything from how they interact with their members, how members are encouraged (allowed) to contribute, the format for committee structures, how meetings are held, and, ultimately, the length of the leadership track in the association.

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Getting Their Attention - Recruitment & Membership Development

In order to get the attention of potential members, consider creating a Member Value Proposition for your association. A Member Value Proposition is the sum total of all your association has to offer designed to appeal to a particular generation. Custom tailor your message. What might be very exciting to one generation may be boring to another.

Who are we?

- Silents (Born 1926-1945) – A sense of community, loyalty, “waste not, want not”
- Baby Boomers (Born 1946-1964) – Pay your dues, competitive, optimistic
- Generation Xers (Born 1965-1975) – Rewarding work now, self-reliant, highly adaptable
- Generation Y (Born 1976-1999) – Work-life balance/blending, flexible, motivated, globally concerned

What do we want? What is important to us?

Silents and Baby Boomers

The Silent Generation values loyalty and people of this generation are known for their work ethic. Baby boomers tend to lean toward more creative solutions to issues, many having grown up during the turbulent times of the 1960s.

Both Silents and Baby Boomers can contribute a great deal to an association because of their belief in hard work. Given where they may be in their careers, both Silents and Baby Boomers are perfect mentors and can make significant contributions to the work of the association.

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- Silents and Baby Boomers: Show appreciation for their experience, use their expertise, let them know they are needed, put them to work, keep them engaged.
 - Listen to their ideas
 - Include in strategic planning, focus groups
 - Provide opportunities to mentor
 - Request that they write articles for the association's newsletter
 - Ask them to participate in a Speaker's Bureau or give them other opportunities to speak on behalf of the association
 - Provide recognition for their contributions

Generations X and Y

In their book, *The NeXt Revolution*, a mother-and-daughter team of researchers, Charlotte and Laura Shelton, polled 1,200 Gen X employees and asked them to rank, in order of importance 15 job characteristics. What they found was that the top three things Gen Xers want in a job are: positive relationships, interesting work, and continuous opportunities for learning. Why would we think they would want anything different from their bar membership?

- Generation X and Y: Rewarding work now, self-reliant, highly adaptable, work-life balance/blending, flexible, motivated, globally concerned.
 - Provide opportunities for relationship building
 - Listen to their ideas
 - Create committees that foster a team-oriented approach to accomplishing goals, providing both team and individual recognition

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- Make online meetings available
- Create virtual communities for members with similar interests
- Ensure the association offers state-of-the-art technology (or at least not outdated technology) for its services and communication
- Provide mentors and offer ongoing feedback

Strategies for Member Satisfaction & Retention

In *Generations and the Future of Association Participation*, author Arthur C. Brooks, Ph.D. identified five critical areas that associations must take into account in order to effectively attract and maintain younger members:

- *Services.* Members may require more services that are of immediate tangible use. For bar associations this could include different CLE delivery services such as downloadable MP3 files and podcasts.
- *Accountability.* Members might seek greater evidence that associations are accountable to members. Bar associations could provide ongoing information about the association via its web site and blogs.
- *Career advantages.* How does association membership advance a member's career? For example, bar associations could create more opportunities for interaction between senior members and ambitious younger members.
- *Community.* Members of certain industries or professions may seek the communities that associations can provide. Providing a sense of community among members has long been the role of bar associations. In the coming years, bar associations will be challenged to create that sense of community in ways that appeal to younger members.

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- *Opportunities to serve.* Charitable nonprofits find that younger donors want to know how they are helping others with their gifts. Bar associations can increase the opportunities for their members to serve beyond traditional pro bono work. Younger members will bring a global perspective to the association and may look for ways to reach beyond their own community to affect the larger global community.

Brooks also identified three approaches relevant to the satisfaction of older members:

- *Enhancing work and career satisfaction among older workers.* Can associations provide new opportunities for older workers? Bar associations can play a vital role in enhancing the career satisfaction of senior attorneys by seeking ways to keep them involved through special programs or committees, valuing their contributions, and actively seeking their feedback.
- *Finding semi-retirement employment options.* In many careers, retirement could be more gradual than it currently is. Bar associations could assist attorneys who are nearing retirement by creating networks of similarly situated professionals and providing educational opportunities regarding the options when moving from a full-time practice to part-time or semi-retirement.
- *Keeping retired workers involved in association communities.* Many retired workers would undoubtedly like to stay involved in their fields, if not in a day-to-day work capacity. Bar associations can provide ongoing networking opportunities and service committees for senior attorneys.

Adapted from *Generations and the Future of Association Participation*, Arthur C. Brooks, Ph.D., 2006, The William E. Smith Institute for Association Research, Smith Bucklin Corporation.

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Building a Bridge Across Generations

In *Bridging the Generation Gap*, the authors suggest several keys to building a bridge across the generations. Although the book is written in terms of the employer/employee relationship, its advice is equally valuable to associations.

1: One size does not fit all

The most successful associations understand that one size does not fit all. Tailor your message, your programs and your services to each generation. Seek feedback from your members and then build your association around your members' needs.

2: Leverage the skills and competencies available in all age groups

Look for opportunities to create reverse mentoring programs. Younger attorneys who would benefit from the skill and experience of more senior practitioners could share their “techie” expertise in return.

3: Build a brand that values diversity

An association's brand expresses the essence of the association. Strive to create a brand that values diversity across the entire association. Communicate this message to members and non-members, alike. Make it clear that you value not merely racial and ethnic diversity, but that you welcome all generations, as well.

4: Respect differences in communication styles

Gen X and Gen Y rely heavily on technology for communication. Instant messaging and texting are a big part of their daily lives. However, these methods can be infuriating and frustrating to older members who believe that face-to-face conversation is the best means of communication. Bar associations need to offer their members a variety of ways to communicate – discussion groups, blogs, online meetings. Balance and respect for the preferences of all members is key.

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Magazine and Web Site Resources

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Inc. Magazine

www.ypulse.com

www.myspace.com

www.facebook.com

www.generationwhy.com

As a coach and Practice Advisor with Atticus, Nora is dedicated to helping attorneys create the lives and law practices they dreamed of when they were in law school. She knows the frustrations that attorneys experience every day and is committed to helping them change their lives for the better.

Nora brings a deep understanding of the practice and business of law to her work as coach and Practice Advisor. She has practiced as an employment law attorney and certified mediator and has served as a professor at both Stetson University College of Law and the University of South Florida, teaching courses in alternative dispute resolution and negotiation. In addition, Nora has been a speaker at conferences for the American Bar Association, The Florida Bar and other regional and national legal associations. She has also served as the executive director of the St. Petersburg Bar Association.

Her background as an attorney, law professor and bar executive gives her a unique perspective on the challenges lawyers face and makes her a powerful coach. In addition to her broad experience with all aspects of the law firm, Nora understands the importance of, and is committed to, helping attorneys leverage technology in order to maximize their ultimate success.

Nora is a graduate of the Leadership Development Program (LPD) at Eckerd College, and is certified in the Conflict Dynamics Profile[®] developed by the LDP to help individuals and organizations learn how to deal with conflict constructively. She is also certified in the DISC Behavioral Style Assessment.

Nora received an undergraduate degree in journalism, *summa cum laude*, from the University of South Florida and her J.D., *cum laude*, from Stetson University College of Law, where she was a member of the law review and served as a mentor for incoming students.



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