

BRIDGING THE GAP



From millennials to the silent generation

BY MICHELLE KELLEY, LCSW

Do you ever struggle to understand someone from a different generation? Does their behavior or view seem foreign, confusing or annoying to you? Generational differences can feel overwhelming – causing irritation, perplexity and division among family members and society.

In other words, if you don't understand what your granddaughter is trying to tell you and vice versa, you are not alone. But how can you nurture a loving relationship when the generation gap feels like there's an ocean of

misunderstanding between you?

There's nothing new about the comments people make about "how kids these days" are different from previous generations. In fact, grown-ups have been saying this since ancient times. Plato is attributed with the following: "The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise."

Still, today's young adults seem unique in almost every aspect. Millennials are digital natives. They have grown up online and plugged in. A millennial would prefer to text or message someone whereas other generations would prefer face to face communication. While it's clear to everyone technology has changed the way we connect and communicate, we must continue to make an effort to bridge those gaps. The first step is to understand each generation values different things – not better or worse.

THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

(born between 1980 - 1995)

Millennials are surpassing baby boomers as America's largest generation. Typically, stereotypes about generations are overwhelmingly negative and millennials are no exception. They are often viewed as selfish and lacking in drive. A 2008 Pew Research Poll found that most millennials identify as liberals, are more socially progressive, and less religious than previous generations. They are more purpose-driven and more likely to place greater value on career and education – even above family.

Common characteristics of Millennials:

- More likely to live at home longer
- Less likely to be in a rush to own a home or purchase a car
- More likely to have student debt
- More likely to describe themselves as political independents

GENERATION X

(born between 1965 -1980)

Largely ignored by the media, Gen Xers are more autonomous and self-reliant than previous generations. Often identified as latchkey kids, Gen Xers were home alone since both their parents worked. Today, they are homeowners who are raising families and have a pessimistic view of retirement because they don't believe they will retire at the same age as their parents did. Many of their purchases are conducted online.

Common characteristics of Gen X'ers:

- Technologically adept
- Value freedom and responsibility in the workplace
- Eager to learn new skills
- Resourceful, independent, and self-sufficient

BABY BOOMERS

(born between 1946 - 1964)

Shortly after World War II, Americans experienced a postwar baby boom. With a bit more optimism, the Baby Boomers grew up in suburban developments as men and women settled in traditional roles. They watched the Mickey Mouse Club and danced to Elvis Presley's music.

Common characteristics of baby boomers:

- First generation to adopt a widely accepted label
- Covet the American dream of home and car ownership
- Strong work ethics, independent, self assured, team/family oriented



THE SILENT GENERATION OR TRADITIONALISTS

(born between 1925 - 1945)

As children, this generation was told they were to be “seen and not heard”, thus earning the title, the silent generation. They grew up during the Great Depression and World War II and many fought during the Korean War. They rarely focused on how to change the system, but rather how to work within the system and valued stability, safety and commitment.

Common characteristics of the Silent Generation:

- Raised in a paternalistic environment
- Loyal, strong work ethics, team players
- Resistant to change, conflict avoidant

Each generation brings its strengths, weaknesses, and viewpoints. When we embrace and try to understand a different generation's point-of-view, we not only grow closer to that person but we also develop our ability to empathize, listen carefully and make ourselves known. The answer to living and working side by side successfully lies in (1) understanding, (2) embracing differences, and (3) respecting someone else's worldview.

Be sure to ask Grandma to show you how to make her famous cheesecake; maybe she'll be brave enough to ask you how to download some Rolling Stones onto her mobile phone. ❖

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