Embracing Generational Differences

**Objectives**
- Define generational characteristics
- Review the factors that affect four generations
- Understand the importance of generational attributes and awareness
- Understand the effects of generational differences on families, organizations and businesses

**Advance preparation**
- Review the material provided (about 2 hours)

**Materials needed**
- Computer and projector
- CD with PowerPoint presentation
- Generational Quiz (Attachment 1)
- Generational Traits Worksheet (Attachment 2)
- Pens and pencils
- Markers
- News print or poster board
- Recorded music and CD player

**Time needed**
- 1 hour

**Background**
There is an old adage that says, “Everyone is part of something greater than one’s self.” There is great truth in that comment. Each of us is or has been a part of a family, neighborhood, city or country. We may also be a part of groups, organizations, religions, fraternities and work forces. But the largest group with which we are affiliated is a generation.

A generation can be defined as a group of people born within about a 20-year time period (Codrington and Marshall, 2004). Members of each generation experience similar social conditions, historical events, economic trends and technological advancements. They are influenced by noted personalities and cultural changes within that time period. The number of births in each generation also affects the group’s competition for education and jobs. Together, all of these influences help to mold and shape a generation’s values and thinking.

To identify the persona of a generation look for three attributes:
4. perceived membership in a common generation;
5. common beliefs and behaviors; and
6. a common location in history (Howe and Strauss, 2000).

When you identify these components, you will find four generations in today’s society. These are:
5. traditionalists;
6. baby boomers;
7. generation X’ers; and
8. millennials.
One should keep in mind that generational beliefs are not absolute. There may be significant differences between rural and urban settings and between low and high economic status. It is also important to note that being born early or late in a generational era may alter one’s viewpoints and opinions. Persons born within 2 to 3 years of a generational divide are referred to as “cuspers;” they may display characteristics from the past, next or even both generations. They are the folks who cement generations together. They function as mediators, translators and mentors (Lancaster and Stillman, 2003).

Specific generational age groups vary from one research study to another, and it is important to understand that there are no specific cutoff dates for defining each group. Generations are more readily defined by their personalities (Lancaster and Stillman, 2003). Generations are equally important; each makes lasting contributions and sets the stage for the successes and problems of the following generations.

Understanding the personality of each group is helpful in discerning the group’s attitude toward education, work, parenting, politics, religion, home, economics, leisure and retirement. Generational knowledge helps us interact with family members, strengthen relationships with different groups, manage the workforce, and set the stage for the future.

**Interest approach**

Divide participants evenly into small groups. Give each group markers and poster board or newsprint. Assign each group a generation and ask them to draw pictures identifying their assigned generation. Encourage them to highlight songs, modes of travel, technology, fashion and activities.

**Lesson**

1. Introduce topic (slide 1).
2. Read the quote from Homer’s *Iliad* (slide 2).
3. Read the definition of a generation (slide 3).
5. Read the definition of a “cusper” (slide 5).
6. What makes people tick? (slide 6)
7. Charting generational timelines (slide 7).
8. Generational Identity quote (slide 8).
12. Characteristics of the millennials (slides 31-37).
13. Have participants complete the Generational Traits Worksheet (Attachment 2).
14. Have participants complete the Generational Quiz (Attachment 1).
15. Why is it important to understand generational differences (slide 38)?
17. End with the quote from Franklin Roosevelt (slide 40).
All of us have thought or said, “What were they thinking?” or “People just don’t work the way they used to.” The way we think, act and react to situations has much to do with our generational place in history. We are shaped by what we have learned, what we have witnessed, and what we anticipate. How will you help to bridge the generational gap? Will you make an effort to coach or mentor someone? Will you be open to changing your mind about others? Will you be accepting of different dress codes or different ways of doing business? If so, perhaps someone will change his or her opinion about you.