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 (Co-drington 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:
1. perceived membership in a common generation;
2. common beliefs and behaviors; and
3. 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:
1. traditionalists,
2. baby boomers,
3. generation X’ers; and
4. millennials.

These four generations are roughly associated with the following time spans.

1901-1942 – traditionalists, veterans, GI’s, matures, silent or greatest generation
1943-1960 – baby boomers or boomers
1961-1981 – generation X, generation 13, or X’ers
1982-2005 – millenials, echo boom, generation Y, baby busters, generation next

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.

**Summary**

All of us have thought or said, “What were they thinking?” or “People just don’t work the way they use 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 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.

**References**

