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Bridging the Generation Gap: Teaching and Working with Different Generations

Highlights for teaching the Millennial Generation

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Objectives

- List the characteristics and learning preferences of various generational groups
- Compare and contrast influences of attitudes and behaviors of each generational group
- Describe tips for successfully teaching the Millennial generation student
The concept of generational cohorts

- For the first time in history four distinct generations are interacting in the classroom.
- Discovering strategies to work with others from different generations can promote understanding, cooperation, and respect for different ways of thinking.
- Ryder (1965), as well as Strauss and Howe (1991), were some of the first to study generational cohorts as groups of individuals with specific characteristics, attitudes and values.
- It is understandable not to stereotype a whole generation of individuals however this unique concept can assist with more successful teaching and learning. Additionally professional behavior and communication should be expected of all generations.

What generational cohort do you belong to or Who Are You?

- **GI Generation/Veterans/Traditionalists**
  - Born 1925-1945
- **Boomers**
  - Born 1946-1964
- **Generation X**
  - Born 1965-1979
- **Generation Y/Net Generation/Millennials**
  - Born after 1980 to 1994
- **Generation Z**
  - Born after 1994 to 2003 (teens coming to college next)
GI Generation/Veterans/ Traditionalists: Born 1925-1945

- Key events: WW I & WW II, Great Depression, Pearl Harbor, Korean War, atomic bomb, polio epidemic
- Values: Respect authority, Value loyalty and tradition, Conform to the rules, Sacrifice before fun, Maintain a defined sense of right and wrong
- Entertainment/Communication: Radio, slide rules, dictate a memo, enjoy meetings in person or sending handwritten notes, some are learning to use computer from their grandchildren

"Make do with what you have."

Boomers: Born 1946-1964

- Key events: Cold War, Civil rights legislation and racial tensions, Kennedy assassination, Vietnam, sexual revolution, Woodstock, free love, birth control pill, energy crisis, Watergate, first man on the moon
- Values: Grew up with 2 parent homes and stay at home moms, Women encouraged to pursue college and careers, Grand idealism and desire for self actualization, Challenging rules, Consensual and team oriented, Focused on quality and efficiency, Self help oriented, Creative
- Entertainment/Communication: B & W Television to color TV, rotary to touch tone phones, calculators, from electric typewriters to first generation to use computers

"Make a real difference."
**Generation X: Born 1965-1979**

- Key events: Challenger disaster, Fall of the Berlin Wall, Gulf War, AIDS, Clinton administration, corporate downsizing, computer technology explosion, Roe vs. Wade case
- Values: Latch key kids growing up with two working parents or single parent household, Fiercely independent, Unafraid to take risks, Grew up with computers for work and play, Want instant feedback, More informal than previous generations, Self directed
- Entertainment/Communication: VCR with either Beta or VHS tapes, cell phones, social networking online, Atari and Nintendo games, MTV generation, send an email rather than a memo or a handwritten letter

“Make it fun.”

**Generation Y/ Net Generation/ Millennials: Born 1980 to 1994**

- Key events: Oklahoma bombings, World Trade Center terrorism, Columbine shootings, Iraq war, Hurricane Katrina
- Values: Overly scheduled as a child with many activities and opportunities, Sheltered, Comfortable with many different versions of family, Confident, Tolerant of change, Multi-tasking is a way of life, Group oriented
- Entertainment/Communication: Always had computers, text messaging, DVDs, TV with >200 channels, distance education—Isn’t everything online?, pressure to perform educationally, prefer collaboration with others to solve problems, Wii, IPod, PDA/Smart phones, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, information should be easily accessible and free

“Make it meaningful to me.”
In the Workplace - Core Values

- **GI Generation**: loyalty, responsibility, strong work ethic, respect for authority, conforming to rules, disciplines, sacrifice before fun, do not mix family and work life
- **Boomers**: work addiction, optimistic about change, involved in groups/teams, efficient, quality, question authority, work is my life, “I can make a real difference.”
- **Gen X**: informal, skeptical, “Is it fun yet?”, want structure, self reliant, eliminate the task, balance my work and home life, autonomy
- **Gen Y**: realistic, confident, social, if it’s not fun will leave, meetings are useless, multitasking, entrepreneurial, outcome oriented rather than putting in hours, what’s important to me personally, “It’s gotta be meaningful or I’m outta here!”

What you see in the workplace

- **GI Generation**: Have a very defined sense of right and wrong, want others to see history of past decisions as a way to proceed for the future, prefer hierarchy in organizational structures with clean lines of command, detail oriented, sometimes technology is confusing and may consider email to be cold and sterile, “company person”
- **Boomers**: Will hang tough in the workplace through difficult times, focused on finding solutions rather than discussing what went wrong, long hours is worth it, not opposed to working above and beyond and cannot understand why younger workers do not volunteer to do the same, will work for an illustrious career rather than a good job now, willing to wait for delayed gratification, “idealistic and ambitious”
What you see in the workplace

- **Gen X**: High quality is worth pursuing, very productive in a short amount of time, flexibility in terms of time makes the job worthwhile, not impressed with titles but comfortable with authority, technically competent with computers and other devices, value diversity at work, this is a job not necessarily a permanent place of employment, “challenge the old ways”

- **Gen Y**: How can I move this company forward?, expressing myself in whatever fashion should be viewed as my active involvement, work should be a relaxed environment in terms of time, clothes, office; train me on the job if I don’t have the necessary skills, if projects or tasks do not interest me right away, I will drop it, move on, or get someone to do it, I have the right to be socially networked and access my network during meetings if I multi-task, “realistic, pragmatic”

Feedback and Rewards

- **GI Generation**: No news is good news, satisfied with a job well done, critiques from superiors is meant to improve

- **Boomers**: Money, public recognition (plaques, certificate to hang on wall, newspaper announcement), tangible reward, verbal or written feedback scheduled on an annual basis

- **Gen X**: Freedom is best reward, flexibility, want immediate feedback about performance, spontaneously asks “How am I doing? Tell me exactly how I can fix it.”

- **Gen Y**: Work has to be meaningful personally, feedback at their fingertips, “drive through evaluations”, what are my opportunities rather than what have I done wrong
Management Perspectives

- **GI Generation**: Directive, control though chain of command, “Read the hard copy memo on your desk.”

- **Boomers**: Consensual, collegial, collaborative, love/hate relationship with authority, “Let’s meet and discuss this before going on.”

- **Gen X**: Challenge the status quo, leaders need to walk the walk not just talk the talk, “Let’s just do it if the outcome moves the company forward.”

- **Gen Y**: “If I have the skills and motivation, make me the manager now.”

Use of time

- **GI Generation**: Work hard, do the time, punch in and punch out
- **Boomers**: Punctual, scheduled, linear, after hours
- **Gen X**: Work can happen anywhere so 8-5 is a relative term, process is not as important as outcome, so let me determine my own use of time
- **Gen Y**: Just in time, tell me ahead of time the absolute last minute that something can be turned in or done, I need flexibility to determine how I use my time
Motivation

• **GI Generation**: You are respected, build a legacy in one place
• **Boomers**: You are valued and needed, build a stellar career with focus
• **Gen X**: Self reliant, forget the rules--innovate, build a portable career with multiple talents
• **Gen Y**: Working with other bright, creative people is synergistic, build a meaningful career possibly in a nonlinear fashion in several places of employment

What works when managing several generations in the same workplace is:

• Allow for workplace choices
• Familiarize all workers with generational differences
• Respect competence, initiatives and multiple ways to get the job done

There are many ways to get from A to B

The ME Generation

• Taught to seek the dream but they worry about where is my beautiful house, where is my prince/princess, **where is the dream job with six figures so I can pay back my student loan which is also six figures**, where is the easy fame like I see on reality TV?
• Actually lonelier than past generations as evidenced by the way this generation has dozens of friends online on social media but few face to face.
• Difficulty handling disappointment or rejection well (**never had much experience with this-Remember No Child Left Behind**)
• PTSD from national or global events flashed 24/7 over and over. Fear of safety—this generation learned that life can change instantaneously.
The ME Generation

- Expects to go to college unless they can make lots of money faster (Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook) or get famous like Kim Kardashian of reality TV. Understands that getting into professional schools is a very competitive endeavor.
- Might need to be mobile to get a good job. Reality bubble bursts after college with the current job market and economics.
- Many women of this generation intend to delay having kids and once they have children, worry about how will they pay for child care.
- Optimistic as children, but cynical as adults
- Need to learn to accept delayed gratification

iGeneration—Digital Natives

- Continual connection to the Internet
- Knowledge is available 24/7 and everywhere
- Typing versus handwriting
- Why F2F on campus? Why not F2F online?
- Pull technology versus push technology? Email is passe’? How about texting me?
- Virtual handouts and downloadable books
- Desktops, oh pleeze no; laptops vs tablets becoming the new VHS vs Beta; phones—Yes!
- Meeting and working in the cloud
- I’m digitally literate, aren’t you?
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0eUeL3n7fDs
How my teaching has changed

• Computer testing is expected, no phones on the desk when testing
• Rules in my syllabus to turn off ringers in the classroom, rules about communication with the instructor, no texting in class, shopping online, or Facebook during class
• Electronic books are cheaper
• Group papers via Google docs. Grade papers electronically as well as return papers electronically
• Student presentations increasingly creative and fluid without “Death by Powerpoint” including embedded videos, games and other bells and whistles. You can provide more multimodal classroom lectures online with a flipped classroom

Millennial Attitudes

• **Overconfident** – Of course I’m the brightest and the best, everyone has told me that since I was in preschool. In health care education, it is excessively risky to be falsely overconfident. Does high self esteem really translate to academic success? This generation also has high rates of depression.

• **Individualism** - I just want to be ME! (Remember that Whitney Houston song—The Greatest Love of All)

• **Entitlement and narcissism** - But I tried really hard, shouldn’t that be worth at least a B+? Your plans don’t fit my leisure plans. Blame Game.

• **Cracking under the pressure to succeed** - Increased work with strong competition for grades; can the professional student sustain any type of extra curricular activity or work?
What Millennials Expect

- A new type of learner with a limited attention span for traditional lectures—we've developed multimodal learners and demand for active learning.
  - It's a good thing that health care education emphasizes learning by doing in tandem with acquisition of knowledge.
- How do the goals of each class session link to real life application—Make that intentionally explicit for me!
- Students desire clear course expectations and examples
  - How are points earned or discounted?
  - What is the penalty for late attendance or late submission of assignments?
  - Mechanics of large assignments
- Do I need to be in the classroom for all of the content?
  - Real time recorded lectures vs prepared recordings available in MP4, voice over recordings to slides, etc.

How my teaching has changed

- My personal philosophy on each of my syllabi includes the following statement in response to grading:
  - Grading is a professional judgment no matter how many rubrics, detailed descriptions, documented explanations, or studies there are to back the grading process. Students are encouraged to ALWAYS speak directly with the course instructor in a timely manner if there are concerns with this course.
- I don’t give points for attendance but for preparation. In real life health care jobs, you are expected to show up to deliver services and you do not get “extra points” for just showing up. Health care is outcomes oriented, and classrooms should be the same. I have installed accountability for readings, reviewing lectures or labs with reflection assignments, small group tasks, real time quizzes, comment on a blog, etc. The paradigm shift has been powerful.
Strategies for Success with Millennials

• **Identify timeline for responding to students in the syllabus**
  – Students expect quick response unless otherwise specified

• **Allow students to check in and see how they are doing**
  – More and more younger students are asking for quick feedback if they are on the right track. Formative feedback for students and teachers.

• **Students enjoy being self-learners but need structure**
  – Teach students how to be life long learners, let the student have choice of where or what

  ▪ **Team work**
    ▪ Team commitment, add peer feedback

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Strategies for Success with Millennials

• **Break lectures into shorter chunks and pair with some type of hands on learning or collaborative learning**
  – Think-share-pair
  – What are two key take home points

• **State that standards will not be lowered and when students do not learn the material well, it is not only unfair but dangerous in health professions.**

• **Teach students how to manage the bombardment of information and set goals with managing studying. Reward students for clinical reasoning, ethical behaviors and being responsible for their behaviors**
A Few Words About Testing, Collaborative Learning and Cheating

• Collaborative learning is commonly utilized with this ME generation.
• Is collaborative learning cheating? How do you assess individual performance with collaborative learning? What about collaborative testing? Is this absurd or wildly innovative?
• Technology affords great changes including computer testing. For overachievers there is a compelling need to succeed, does this cause pressure to be creative with cheating?

Millennials in the Workplace

• Salary and benefits are important to this generation. The job must fulfill personal or professional goals
  – Want to work where others inspire and motivate creative thinking
• Accepting of authority but let me be me
  – Express self in more casual appearance; more relaxed in terms of time and schedules
  – Access to social network or text or phone during meetings; Being connected is viewed as realistic and pragmatic rather than rude
  – How do you allow me to express myself
• Do not respond well to micromanaging or rigid schedules
  – Constructive feedback paired with a discussion of solutions
  – Life coaching works well to reassure individuals about decisions
  – “Tell me the absolute last minute drop dead deadline so I can schedule my own time and tasks.”
**Millennials in the Workplace**

- Promotions take too long
  - If I have the skills and perform well, make me the manager now.
- Drive through evaluations or instant feedback
  - Tell me what is needed and I can deliver; no need for formal meetings or discussions
- Workplace is too stressful—do you have avenues to de-stress at the office?
- Not used to boring conferences—bring the conference to me where I can fit this into my life
  - Just in time training—Train me for what you need
  - 9 to 5 is for my grandparents, what about telecommuting or can you put some of the training online?

**The Hope with the Millennial Generation**

A most exciting generation that will deliver well if we can learn about their perspectives, attitudes and beliefs.

A generation with heartfelt values for service.

Digital natives that embrace change.

Remember these Millennial students and co-workers will be the caretakers of the future so it is our legacy to teach and nurture well.
Conclusion

• Work to understand the different generational cohorts and honor how individuals bring unique talents and skills to the workplace.
• Celebrate the differences from other cohorts and optimize strengths.
• Set aside pre-conceived stereotypes.
• Learning and working with persons from other generations can lead to a rich experience.

Questions or more information

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