Generational Differences:
Bridging the Generation Gap

Thomas F. Pedigo, MSc, PA-C
Asst. Fire Chief-EMS Administrator
City of Thornton Fire Department
tompedigopa@yahoo.com
Cell Phone: 303-994-7470
One of Many Tools in your Management Utility Belt

- Meyers-Briggs
- Mentoring Skills
- Communication Skills
- Conflict Resolution
- Strategic Planning
- Generational Awareness
- Team Building
What is the Point?

- Recognize Generational Differences
- Recognize Validity of Perspective
- Answer: ‘THE Question’
- Identify Effective Methods of Motivating Different Generations
Two Golden Rules

• Generations are Generalizations Only

• Only one tool on the Manager’s Utility Belt-
  – You must not assume you can address every situation based on the individual(s) generation, even if they fit the description.
4 Working Generations

- Veterans (years born)
- Boomers
- Gen X
- Gen Y (Nexters)
Each Generation

• Different Experiences Growing Up
• Different Hardships
• Different Decision-Making Processes
• Different Life Values
  – Work versus Play
  – Debt-to-Equity
  – Priorities
Veterans

• Growing Up:
  – Stock Market Crash
  – Great Depression
  – The Dust Bowl
  – Pearl Harbor
  – D-Day
  – Korea
  – Radio
  – Motion Pictures (morality: Good vs Evil)
  – Family: Strict, conservative.
Veterans

- Hardships
  - ‘We’d Like to Thank you Herbert Hoover’

- Hitler’s Evil Empire

- Command-and-Control business management
Veterans

• Decision Making
  – Respect Authority

  – Leadership by Heirarchy

  – Law and Order

  – Advance through Hard Work
Veterans

• Life Values
  – Conservative
  – Discipline
  – Family Values
  – Respect for Authority
  – Perseverance
Boomers

• Growing Up
  – Rosa Parks
  – Civil Rights Acts
  – Birth Control
  – National Organization for Women
  – Martin Luther King, Jr
  – Landing on Moon
  – Television
  – Family: focused on children, enjoying freedoms
Boomers

• Hardships
  – Competition in Job Market
  – Unreported Domestic Violence
  – Racism/Sexism
  – Vietnam
Boomers

- Decision Making
  - By Consensus
  - Gratification
  - Personal Growth
- ‘Get Involved!’
• Life Values
  – ‘Work Hard, Play Hard’
  – Personal Growth
  – Health and Wellness
  – Teamwork
Gen X

• Growing Up
  – Watergate
  – Stock Market Crash ‘87
  – Space Shuttle Challenger
  – Exxon Valdez
  – Rodney King
  – Computers
  – Family: Dual career, fewer siblings, ‘latch-key’
Gen X

• Hardships
  – Debt-to-Income Imbalance
  – Divorce Rates
  – Lack of reliable government or private sector jobs
Gen X

- Decision Making
  - Self-Management
  - Pragmatic
  - Global Ideas
  - ‘Ends Justifies the Means’
Gen X

• Life Values
  – Autonomy
  – Balanced
  – Fun
  – Diversity
Gen Y

- Growing Up
  - Oklahoma City
  - Technoliteracy
  - Multi-Living
  - Columbine High School
  - Internet
  - Family Life- ‘Soccer Moms’, Life outside of school
Gen Y

• Hardships
  – Single Parents
  – Sheltered
  – Technology-based Terrorism
  – Requirement for Degrees
Gen Y

- Decision Making
  - Morals
  - Civic Duty
  - Balanced Fun
  - Tendency to Follow Authority
Gen Y

• Life Values
  – Morals
  – Optimism
  – Civic Duty
  – Flexibility
  – Well-Roundedness
THE QUESTION:

How can I get them to see it my way?
THE ANSWER

You Don’t.
Bridging the Gap

– Learn how to motivate them

– harness their strengths

– identify/communicate organizational boundaries.
Veterans

• Motivation
  – ‘Personal Touch’ Communications
  – Ask Permission to Coach, and Coach Tactfully
  – Learn their Background
  – Ask about their concerns in non-threatening manner

• Strengths
  – Loyal
  – Stable
  – Detail-Oriented ‘Devil is in the Details’
  – Hard Working
Boomers

• Motivation
  – Public Recognition
  – Promote Opportunities for Change
  – Name Recognition
  – Building Consensus
  – Invite into Participative Management
  – Reward Long Hours

• Strengths
  – Driven to Success
  – Politically Correct
  – Team Players
  – Desire to Please
Gen X

• Motivation
  – Give a variety of projects
  – Autonomy of process
  – Constructive Feedback
  – Technology
  – Variable Scheduling Options

• Strengths
  – Adaptable
  – Techno-savy
  – Independent
  – Creative
Gen Y

• Motivation
  – Mentoring by elders
  – Heroism by example
  – Creative Teamwork
  – Multi-Learning

• Strengths
  – Optimism
  – Confidence
  – Work Experience
  – Highly Technoliterate
Pitfalls: Veterans

- Involving their personal life in the discussion
- Failure to Train to New Technologies, then **Support**
- Failing to Define Organizational Structure
- Failure to Learn about their Experiences
Pitfalls: Boomers

• Failure to Promote Change
• Failure to Demonstrate Promotional Pathways
• Failure to Recognize Achievements
• Failure to Provide Management Training (budget and spending)
Pitfalls: Gen X

• Failure to answer the question, “Why?” whenever plausible.
• Unnecessary Rigidity during informal communications
• Failure to help them develop more experience
• Failure to develop people skills
Pitfalls: Gen Y

• Lack of Mentoring
• Failure to Plan for More Orientation
• Failure to Provide Multiple Avenues of Learning
• Failure to Provide Avenues for Job Transition(s)
• Train to Deal with Difficult People (Patients)
MOTIVATING THE CROSS-GENERATIONAL TEAM

• ACORN Imperative
  — Accommodate Differences
  — Create Choices
  — Operate as a Sophisticated Manager
    • Flexible leadership style
    • Able to explain policies and exceptions
    • Fair, inclusive, establish trust
    • Great communicators
  — Respect Competence and Initiative
  — Nourish Retention
Conclusions

• Generations are Generalizations

• Only one tool on your Management Utility Belt

• Don’t try to make them be like you, accept them for who they are and where they came from.

• Focus on Motivation and Strengths.

• Define Organizational Boundaries that cannot be breached.

• Finally, educate your personnel about their generational differences!!
References

• When Generations Collide. By Lynne C. Lancaster and David Stillman

• Generations At Work. By Zemke, Raines and Filipczak

• Retiring the Generation GAP. By Jennifer Deal.