

Column Title: **As The Saw Turns**

Article Title: **Generational Perspectives**

A while back I wrote a column about immigrants and natives. Immigrants are those of us that are not native to this culture...this culture of DVD's, IPODS, MP3's, TIVO, and the like. Immigrants are those of us who were in the working world BC...before computers. What I thought was a simple matter of being one of the two – immigrant or native – I find out is actually more complicated than that:

A friend of mine recently gave me a copy of a document from his company called 'Generational Perspectives'. It outlines the major differences in work/life balance, career opportunities and connecting with management for four generations – (1) Matures, who were born between 1920 and 1944; (2) Baby Boomers, born between 1945 and 1964; (3) Gen Xers, born from 1965 to 1979; and (4) Millenials, born 1980 to 2000.

The report goes into detail on how each of these generations views the balance between work and life, how they approach their careers and how they relate to their management. It is not hard to read about any one of these generations and think of someone you know in that age group who seems to fit the description. It's actually pretty close to dead on. A friend showed it to his daughter – a Millenial – and she was shocked at how closely it fit, and almost offended that someone could figure their generation out.

A few examples:

**On Work/Life Balance:**

Initially, Matures were a workforce defined by time clocks, break bells and shift whistles. Work life balance was not an issue. Today, they are more and more interested in flexible hours. Think 'grandkid time'.

Boomers define themselves by their work, not by their life outside their jobs, and many think balance is a moment in time, not a lifestyle. They still spend about 55 hours per week on the job and are not slowing down.

Gen Xers have selected time as the one thing that they are unwilling to sacrifice in their lives. They define 'success' in their lives not by salaries, titles, or trappings, but by how they spend their time.

Millenials have been raised by people who have emphasized that they should 'enjoy what they do'. At this point in their lives, work is more about what they're doing between weekends than a calling.

### **On Connecting With Management:**

For Matures, bosses and employees were of a separate class and rarely mixed socially. Liking the boss was an unexpected bonus.

Boomers served as the boss' team members – executing the boss' plan. They sought 'face time' with the boss, when they were seen by the boss and had an opportunity to promote themselves. Liking their boss was not a requirement for the job.

Gen Xers determine whether they enjoy their job by including the criterion of whether they like their boss, and leave a job if they don't like the boss. They question their bosses' authority, accuracy, and information.

Millenials rely on their bosses to guide them in their careers. They seek bosses who acknowledge that they have a life outside of work and are defined by that life, not by their work life. They are loyal to people they like and will turn down higher paying jobs to stay with them.

I'll tell you where all of this got a bit frightening to me. Our sales force is all Baby Boomers, and a large percentage of the prospective client contacts we have spoken with lately are either Gen Xers or even Millenials. And when we look at who we are dealing with in our client companies on a daily basis, we are finding much the same thing. We really have to stop and think about how we are relating to them. With value systems that are sometimes vastly different than our own, we really have to consider what we are doing and saying while we are developing business relationships. Understanding where each of these groups is coming from is just the beginning.

We must get smarter about whom we are talking with, and we must understand what it is that is important to them, both professionally and personally, because it is probably not the same for us. This is such a relationship business that understanding these generational differences is a must.

This isn't just an issue for the sales department. Look around your company. Do you see representation from all four generations? How well do the different generations communicate? For us to perform at our best as a company, and to serve our clients well, we have to be able to cross these 'cultural' lines easily when working with and for them.

Wouldn't it be cool to build a team with representation from all four generations, so that no matter who your client was, you had someone who could relate to them on their level, and someone who could perhaps 'mentor' them as well. It would certainly go a long way to building loyalty...

See you on the show floor!

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