

Generational Differences

Lesson Plan:

Duration: 50 Minutes

Teaching Method: Informal Lecture/ Guided Discussion

References: Student Guide/Generational Trends Handout

Teaching Aids/Handouts: Instructor Guide, Slide Presentation, and CAP Generational Trends 2007

Reading Assignment: Student Guide

Lesson Objective: The purpose of the lesson is for unit commanders to understand how to incorporate generational differences to increase their unit's appeal and performance.

Desired Learning Outcomes:

1. Identify basic generational differences.
2. Describe how to incorporate multiple generations in squadron operations.
3. Explain how generational differences affect recruiting and retention.

Lesson Strategy:

If commanders are going to get the most out of their people, they must understand them, and understand that all members have value. During this lesson, students will assess the generational demographic of Civil Air Patrol and compare how it matches their individual units.

Once the assessment is made, the unique characteristics of each of those generations will be assessed. The students should be provided an opportunity to talk about their impressions about the characteristics.

Using the assessments made previously, students should discuss the generational challenges that they face and how it has affected their units, as well as discuss methods to recruit or retain generations that are under-represented.

It is anticipated that the discussion will be fairly organic in nature as students ask questions, express their own challenges, and offer suggestions. It is important to

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remember that the purpose of this lesson isn't to say that one generation is preferred over another, but rather that all generations have something to offer CAP.

Throughout the lesson plan there are suggested questions to spark discussion among the students. Feel free to use some or all of them based on how the discussion is flowing or what the individual groups needs are.

Lesson Outline:

MAIN POINTS:

- I. Basic generational differences.
- II. Incorporating multiple generations in squadron operations.
- III. Generational differences affecting recruiting and retention.

Teaching Plan

Lesson Objective: The purpose of the lesson is for unit commanders to understand how to incorporate generational differences to increase their unit's performance and appeal.

ATTENTION:

Let's start a squadron newsletter. What type of media should it be published in?

[Let students respond]

ANSWER: While there is no correct answer, expect suggestions of making the newsletter online, distributed through e-mail, or printed form. Some may suggest mailing the newsletter to each member.

Which members suggested electronic formats? Which suggested printed media? Were all the answers the same? Was there a generational difference or similarity in the answers?

The point of the brief exercise is to highlight that something as small as the media that a squadron uses to distribute their newsletter can have an impact on the members.

For example, a member of the Traditional generation may be intimidated by electronic format, while a member of Millennials may find printed formats to be a waste or too inconvenient.

Either way, part of your membership has been alienated and left out. Would you feel accepted or wanted if your unit left you out of its communications?

MOTIVATION:

As a squadron commander, the success of your unit is your responsibility. One of the greatest challenges you face is creating a team from the diverse membership that comprises our organization.

Generally, when talking about diversity and incorporating different viewpoints, we focus on race, gender and socio-economic backgrounds. Generational divide is commonly ignored but can be a tremendous contributor to a unit's culture, and ultimately success. It is important to remember that every member can contribute something.

As a squadron commander, you must think about how to make the generational gaps seamless and how to make your organization appealing to, not only those who are already members, but those who may join, despite their generation.

OVERVIEW:

We'll begin today by taking a look at the generational demographic that comprises CAP. Then move to the attributes that comprise each of those generations. Afterwards, discussing how the current demographic can influence your unit and things that you can do to make the generational gaps seamless.

TRANSITION:

This first segment is designed to give you a global perspective of CAP's generational demographic. While we talk about the topic, keep in mind any under-represented generations.

[Switch to bar chart slide showing CAP's generational breakdown.]

Now that we know how CAP is represented generationally, let's take a look at the differences between those generations. While we discuss them, take note of contrasting characteristics and potential conflicts.

CAP is an organization of members spanning a number of generations. By understanding generational trends, CAP can plan now to maximize potential future growth.

Defining what exactly constitutes a "generation" is difficult. Some might say that a generation is the span of time between when a person is born and his or her offspring are born. Generations can also be defined as a "coming of age" period.¹ Most social researchers have labeled these "coming of age" periods as phases like young adulthood, midlife or senior adulthood.

Main Points:

This lesson uses the generational definitions and age ranges identified by *Harvard Business Review*.²

MP I. Basic Generational Differences

There are currently four generations serving in Civil Air Patrol.

- **Traditionals:** Also called, GI, Silent Generation, Veterans, and the Greatest Generation
- **Baby Boomers**
- **Generation "X"**
- **Millennials:** Also called, Generation "Y", Nexters, Digital Generation, Echo Boomers, and the Feel Good Generation.

A. Traditional Generation (Born before 1946):

1. Extremely loyal and dedicated
2. Prefer Hierarchal Organizational Structures
3. Believe in putting in your dues
4. Stick to the system and what has worked in the past
5. Demand respect
6. Like formality
7. Private
8. Their word is their bond
9. Committed to teamwork and collaboration
10. Display command-and-control leadership styles
11. Reticent in conflict

B. Baby Boomers (Born between 1946-1966):

1. Raised to respect authority figures
2. Untrusting of authority (based on Korea, Vietnam, Watergate, etc)
3. Raised to think they are special
4. Their work defines them; work = self-worth
5. Believe hard work & sacrifice leads to success (sacrifice family over work)
6. Like teamwork and group decision making
7. Started work-a-holic trends
8. Highly competitive (due to economic recession in the 70's & 80's)
9. Believe in loyalty towards employees from employers
10. Goal-oriented, process instead of result
11. Seek job-security
12. Sense of entitlement
13. Value process, use the chain-of-command, and respect authority
14. Fight for causes although they don't like conflict

C. Generation X (Born 1967-1979):

1. Grew up in a period of financial, familial and societal insecurity
2. Families had high-divorce rates, double working parents, latch-key
3. Grew up with world-wide competition – the first generation to do so
4. Expect instant feedback, basis in video games and computers.
5. Have a desire to balance work and home-life
6. More autonomous and self-reliant than previous generations
7. Not loyal to employers
8. Strong loyalty to family and friends
9. Desire for continuous learning
10. Result focused
11. Question authority and are not impressed by it
12. Money doesn't motivate
13. Prefer flexible schedules
14. Entrepreneurial and tolerate work as long as it's fun

D. Millennial Generation – Born 1980-1999:

1. Shaped by parental excess
2. Comfortable with technology
3. Embrace diversity
4. Like teamwork and collective action
5. Desire balanced life (work & play)
6. Optimistic
7. Multi-taskers
8. Most educated generation
9. Thought of as demanding
10. Most confident generation

State: Now that we understand how many of each generation are in CAP, and what their characteristics are, it's time to evaluate their impact on CAP and the local squadrons.

MP II. Incorporating Multiple Generations into Squadron Operations:

Look at the telephone, and how it has affected each generation:

- A. Millennials - everyone has a cell phone and can be reached anytime, anywhere.
- B. Generation "X" - home phones became cordless and cell phones were introduced but, early on, were too big to fit into a pocket.
- C. Baby Boomers - push-button phones were the new innovation.
- D. Traditionals – rotary & party line phones were not unusual and phone numbers often started with letters, not numbers.

So, it can only be assumed that the way we communicate has changed. This tells us that the way we communicate with our Generation Y members may have to be different than the way we communicate with our Traditionals.

MP III. – Recruiting & Retention

Perhaps, one of the most daunting challenges commanders face is how to recruit and retain members. Often times, squadron demographics will mirror the demographic of the commander. Commanders are usually successful in keeping people who think and behave similarly to the way they do.

The challenge, however, is keeping people who don't.

What makes Google a company that people want to work for? They've adapted their work environment to meet the needs of their employees.

- A. "Talent sometimes comes through experience from old people like me, but sometimes talent comes from that 18- or 25-year-old," said Pamela Ostrom of Creative Process Consulting in Brooklyn Park. She works with Fortune 500s and mom-and-pops to make businesses work more effectively. "Companies are going to fall down if they don't understand how to recruit younger talent."
- B. Connecting with younger volunteers is about more than Facebook, blogs and Twitter, however. In job interviews, they like to turn the tables, and find out what makes the company so special. The same is true for the places they volunteer.

So, look at your units and ask yourself, is this somewhere that people want to volunteer with and what can we do to make it more appealing to people. How do we become the volunteer organization of choice?

Other Aspects of Squadron Operations

How can generational differences influence other aspects of squadron operations?

- A. Emergency Services
- B. Cadet Leadership
- C. Public Affairs
- D. Other areas

Incorporating generational diversity and different viewpoints can provide a distinct advantage in a challenging and competitive world when working together toward a common goal. Generational differences and their varied approaches to getting things done can be a tremendous asset to a unit's culture, and ultimately its success. It is important to remember that every member can contribute something.

Lesson Summary

SUMMARY:

You now have an idea of what CAP looks like generationally and can compare your unit to the national picture. Adding to the national picture, we have also examined the characteristics of each generation and discussed how the generational differences can aid you unit locally.

REMOTIVATION:

Reflect on what you've learned here and consider how you can make the generational gaps seamless in your unit and how to make your organization appealing to, not only those who are already members, but those who may join, despite their generation.

CLOSURE:

Understanding your membership is the most valuable tool that a commander can have. Understanding generational differences is just as important as understanding different personality types. Taking the time to adjust policies and procedures in your unit to ensure that members aren't alienated because of generational differences will ensure that you get the most out of each of your members.

Suggested Questions:

1. **Ask the class: Looking at the chart, what trends do you notice?**

ANSWER:

- There is a significant drop between Millennial and Generation "X".
- Boomers make up the largest adult demographic.
- The Millennial Generation is the greatest represented.
- The Traditional Generation is least represented.

2. **Which of the Traditional Generation's characteristics fit naturally into the current organization of CAP?**

ANSWER: Most likely, students will identify the characteristics that fit well with hierarchy, rules, regulations and obedience, which lend themselves well to CAP's paramilitary organizational and governance model.

3. **Are there any of the Traditional Generation's characteristics that aren't conducive to CAP?**

ANSWER: All attributes can be beneficial so long as they are expressed at the appropriate times. For example, sticking to the system is beneficial, but as the world changes, does sticking to the system continue to work?

4. **What types of challenges might a commander face with members of the Traditional generation?**

ANSWER: Members of this generation might have difficulty with change, especially at a fast pace. Additionally, continued moves to the online environment might alienate members of this generation.

5. **What benefits do the Traditional generation offer CAP?**

ANSWER: Members of this generation bring significant real-world experience with them. They are often times well connected with local civic groups and community leaders.

6. **Are there certain areas in which specific generations would be more valuable than others?**

ANSWER: Answers will vary based on the student's perception and experiences. It is important that the discussion does not become accusatorial or demeaning. Steer the discussion toward the positives.

7. **With Boomers being the largest represented generation of CAP adult members, do any of these characteristics appear to have affected CAP's culture?**

ANSWER: Answers will vary based on the student's perception and experiences. It is important that the discussion does not become accusatorial or demeaning.

8. **What challenges should commanders prepare themselves for in dealing with members of the Boomers generation?**

ANSWER: Many boomers are more concerned that the established process be followed when working towards a goal than the result. This can lead to overly-bureaucratic processes and limited communications between levels in the chain-of-command.

9. **Why is Generation "X" so under-represented in CAP?**

ANSWER: Generation X's life stage is such that family and work obligations often severely limit their ability to volunteer. Additionally, members of Generation X may not be drawn to CAP's para-military governance model due to their attitudes towards authority.

10. What potential conflicts can be seen between Generation “X” and the Boomers in regards to leadership?

ANSWER: Student responses will vary based on experience and perspective; will likely include different work ethics and views toward authority.

11. How does Generation X’s autonomous nature fit into an organization with a hierarchal structure?

ANSWER: Student responses will vary based on experience and perspective; will likely include responses on how their inquisitive nature will help improve the processes.

12. How can commanders balance the need for instant feedback into the other organizational demands?

ANSWER: Student responses will vary based on experience and perspective. However, commanders can offer feedback on smaller portions of projects or duties.

13. Do commanders need to deal with Millennial members differently than Traditionals? Boomers? X’ers?

ANSWER: Each generation will need a variance in approach to get the maximum benefit. Commanders that can vary their approach will be most successful.

14. What types of suggestions or changes might a Millennial member need or want that would affect members of other generations in the same unit?

ANSWER: Many of the students will probably suggest that the biggest changes would be technological, especially in terms of communication.

15. How do we communicate things like squadron activities, community events, etc without alienating members of certain generations?

ANSWER: Communication methods may have to vary depending on the local demographic. Gen “Y” members may be most comfortable with things like Facebook and Twitter, while Gen “X” members may see them as unreliable, preferring e-mail. Traditionals may prefer traditional phone calls or printed media forms to communicate. The important thing is that it is evaluated to meet the unit’s needs and ensure that everyone is communicated with.

16. Locally, how can squadron’s recruit members who don’t match the dominating generational demographic? For example, how can a unit comprised of all Baby Boomers recruit and keep generation X’ers?

ANSWER: This is going to vary depending on the target demographic. The key, however, is to show how CAP fits into their ideals and be mindful of their individual needs.

References:

¹ Princeton.edu WordNet.

² *Harvard Business Review*, “The Next 20 Years: How Customer and Workforce Attitudes Will Evolve,” by Neil Howe and William Strauss, July-August 2007, pgs. 41 - 52.