

Generational Differences

Lesson Objective:

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:

Overview:

As a squadron commander, the success of making your unit a team 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 as seamless as possible and how to make your organization appealing to those who are already members, as well as those of another generation who may join.

Generational Divides:

A commander must think about how to make the _____ gaps _____ and how to make your organization _____ to, not only those who are already members, but those who may join, despite their generation.

CAP Unit Commanders Course: Student Guide

CAP is an organization of members spanning several generations. By understanding generational trends, you can plan how to properly motivate and work with members of all ages to realize their full potential as Civil Air Patrol members.

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.

Interestingly, social researchers have identified that historical events that occur within these life phases have more to do with generational trends than age alone. For this reason, a 30-year-old today has less in common with the last generation’s 30-year-olds.

Social researchers have looked at these trends and have identified observable behaviors that these generations emulate through time. Such research has shown that many children emulate not their parents or grandparents, but earlier generations, typically the great-great grandparents.

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

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.

Basic Generational Differences:

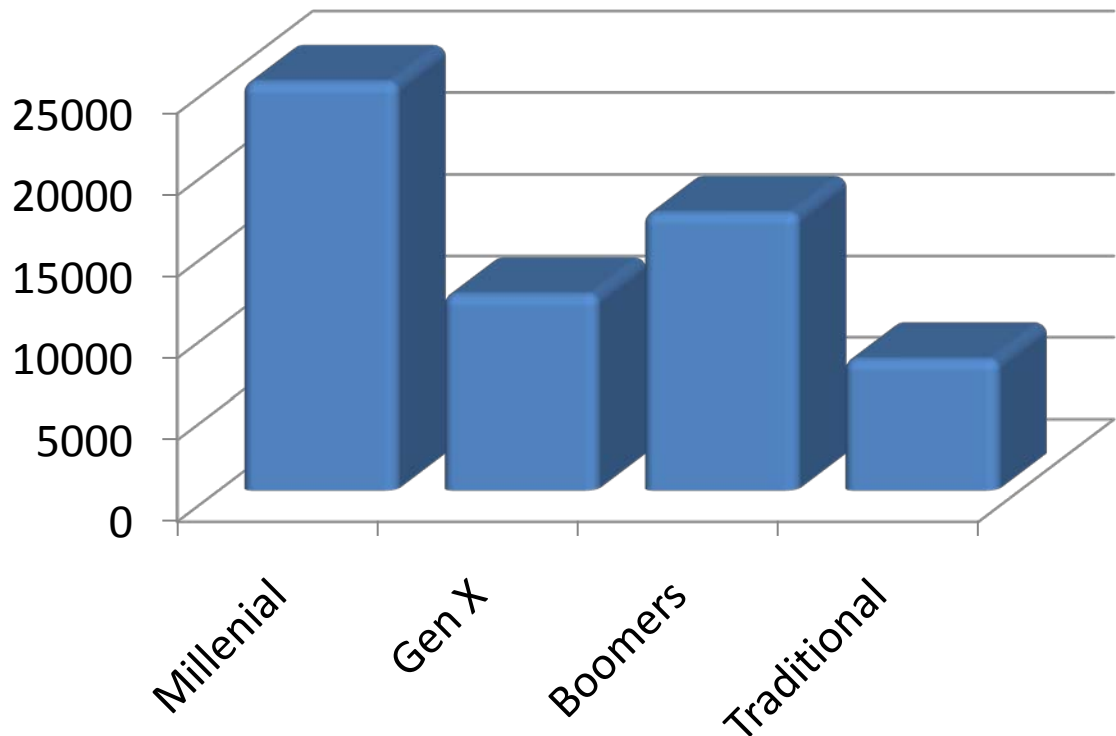
Understanding the differences between generations gives insight into how best to work with different people. Commanders may need to take a different approach when explaining or communicating goals with different generations.

Additionally, understanding what motivates individual generations can be a valuable tool in gaining additional performance from our members.

What Generations Represent CAP?

Civil Air Patrol is an old and young organization, with fewer members in between. Approximately half of our membership is comprised of members under age 21 and the majority of adult members are over age 50.

CAP Generations



Let's take an in-depth look at each of the Four Generations that make up CAP:

The Traditional Generation (Born before 1946): As young adults, they were the first Miss Americas and all-American athletes. In midlife they built up the postwar "affluent society," erecting suburbs, inventing miracle vaccines, plugging missile gaps, and launching moon rockets. They are greatly invested in civic life, and focused more on process, actions, and behavior than on values and beliefs. They have entered retirement with unprecedented affluence.

Common Characteristics of Traditional Generation (A.K.A., GI, Silent, Veteran):

- Extremely loyal and dedicated
- Prefer Hierarchal Organizational Structures
- Believe in putting in your dues
- Stick to the system and what has worked in the past
- Demand respect
- Like formality
- Private
- Their word is their bond
- Committed to teamwork and collaboration
- Display command-and-control leadership styles
- Reticent in conflict

Baby Boomers (Born between 1946-1966): During the Boomers' youth, crime rates, substance abuse, and sexual risk taking all surged while academic achievement and SAT scores fell. During the 1980's many Boomers refashioned themselves as yuppie individualists in an era of deregulation, tax cuts, and entrepreneurship. During the 1990s they waged scorched-earth political battles between "red" and "blue" zones. As parents, they have developed very close individual relationships with their children, sometimes to the point of hovering. Their generation has suffered declining economic prosperity.

Common Characteristics of Baby Boomers:

- Raised to respect authority figures
- Untrusting of authority (based on Korea, Vietnam, Watergate, etc)
- Raised to think they are special
- Their work defines them; work = self-worth
- Believe hard work and sacrifice leads to success
- Started work-a-holic trends
- Highly competitive (due to economic recession in the 70's&80's)
- Believe in loyalty towards employees from employers
- Goal-oriented, process instead of result
- Seek job-security
- Sense of entitlement
- Value chain-of-command and expect authority
- Fight for causes although they don't like conflict

Generation X (Born 1967-1979): This generation grew up in an era of failing schools and marriages. They learned early on to distrust institutions, starting with the family. By the mid-1980s MTV, hip-hop, and a surging interest in business and military careers had marked a new and hardening pragmatism in their mood. Over the next decade crime and teenage pregnancy soared. Many of them have begun to construct the strong families that they missed in childhood. In jobs, they prefer free agency over corporate loyalty. They are already the greatest entrepreneurial generation in U.S. history. Xers believe that volunteering or helping people one-on-one is more efficacious than voting or working to change laws.

Common Characteristics of Generation X:

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

Millennial Generation (Born 1980-1999): Millennials as a generation have seen steady decreases in high-risk behaviors. As the oldest of them graduate into the workplace, record numbers are gravitating towards large institutions and government agencies, seeking teamwork, protection against risk, and solid work-life balance. Their culture is becoming less edgy with a focus on upbeat messages and big brands. Their close relationships with their parents are carrying over into their young adult lives.

Common Characteristics of Millennials (A.K.A., Generation Y, Nexters, Digital Generation, Echo Boomers, and the Feel Good Generation):

- Shaped by parental excess
- Comfortable with technology
- Embrace diversity
- Like teamwork and collective action
- Desire balanced life (work & play)
- Optimistic
- Multi-taskers
- Most educated generation
- Thought of as demanding
- Most confident generation

Consider the following questions:

- A. Which type of characteristics fit naturally into the current organization of CAP?
- B. Are there any that aren't conducive to CAP?
- C. What types of challenges might a commander face with members of this generation?
- D. What benefits do this generation offer CAP?
- E. With Boomers being the largest represented generation of CAP adult members, do any of these characteristics appear to have affected CAP's culture?
- F. How do autonomous work habits fit into an organization with a hierarchal structure?
- G. How can commanders balance the need for instant feedback with other organizational demands?

Incorporating Multiple Generations in Squadron Operations:

Now that we understand different generations of CAP members and what their characteristics are, it's time to evaluate their impact on CAP and the local squadrons.

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

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

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.

Generational Differences Affecting Recruiting and Retention

Generational difference can also have an effect on other squadron operations, like recruiting and retention which is a challenge for all commanders. 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 that 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.

"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."

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, and what can we do to make it more appealing to people. How do we become the volunteer organization of choice for members of several generations?