

TAPPING INTO TWO NEW BREEDS OF VOLUNTEERS

Retiring “Boomers” and “Generation @”

We hear this question all the time: “How can we get the younger generation involved?”

In fact, we asked the same question of the volunteer manager at Shiners Hospital. Her answer was typical. She was quiet for a time and then answered, “We don’t, for the most part, except for school internships.”

A lot of volunteer managers don’t like working *with* the younger generation, and the younger generation does not like working *for* older generations. In case you didn’t notice, the two key words in that last sentence are *with* and *for*. The important question that you must answer is this: How do you create a volunteer culture that attracts the growing numbers of retiring Boomers and young professionals—and encourages them to work together?



Tom writes:

For years, I’ve divided a workshop that I teach into two groups: Baby Boomers (born roughly between 1943 and 1964) and Generation X (born roughly between 1965 and 1981). I always ask the groups to discuss the question, “What are the differences in the work ethic of the Boomers and Xers?” After about 15 minutes of discussion, I have the Boomers report first. I’ve listened to these reports for more than 10 years, and they nearly always say the same thing:

Xers aren’t committed. They often come late, leave early, and work on their own time schedule. They show no respect for authority. They don’t want to do any more than is expected, and they’ll jump ship as soon as a more lucrative offer is on the table. They’re

very knowledgeable about high-tech stuff, and they keep wanting to change things. But you can't depend on them when you need to get a job done.

Then I give the Gen X group a turn. I'll never forget when I heard an Xer give the following report:

What you've just said is true. We're exactly what you said because that's the way you brought us up. We watched you work for 70 or 80 hours a week for the same company for the last 40 years, and then that company dumped you. We watched you divorce each other and leave us home alone while you tried to make a living on your own. We were shuffled from one home to another, and we learned to be independent. We grew up with presidents who lie and company presidents who get rich while the rest of you make money for them. We've learned to look at work as a job to support a lifestyle while you look at work as a lifestyle. Don't ask us to work overtime, because we have a life outside of work. Don't expect us to devote our lives to your goals.

When the young man gave that report, the room was quiet. The Boomers looked at each other, and finally one woman spoke up and said, "Wow, what an indictment!" When I asked if they thought what the Xer said was true, the Boomers agreed that it was pretty much right on.

In 2006, I began to change the experiment. I did the same exercise, except the parameters were different. I simply divided the room by those under 25 and those over 25. As the room finished dividing, one side of the room was made up of Generation @ (those under 25 at the time, also called Millennials, Gen Y, or Nexters). The other side of the room was usually comprised of Xers and Boomers (25 and up).

I asked the same question. The answers didn't change.

The Gen Xers just joined up with the Boomers—finally agreeing on something—to criticize this new generation. They voiced almost the exact same complaints that the Boomers verbalized about Xers years prior. The new generation, those 25 and under, repeated the age-old complaints about the generations older than they are.

What does this tell us?

I've come to the following conclusion: Most of us simply see the world very differently when we're 20 than we do when we're 35 or 50.

I've been reading about and listening to people speculate about the differences in the generations for decades. To be honest, the complaints don't sound much different. Yes, a 20-year-old in 2007 has some unique differences from someone who was 20 in 1987 or in 1967. For example, most of us would agree that today's

20-year-old is more tech savvy and a better multi-tasker. In fact, entire books have been written on the subject. Yet I find that most people who want to compare the 20-year-olds of today with others don't compare them to 20-year-olds of the past. They compare them to the 35-year-olds of today or the 50-year-olds of today.

So what's my point? If we're going to make a comparison, let's not just look at generations. Let's look at life stages.



LIFE STAGES

In our research for this book, we surveyed a large number of ministers about their volunteers. We asked specific questions about the differences between the generations. As the responses poured in, we began to notice a pattern. Most people didn't compare the generations to each other—like “apples to apples.” Most of the volunteer leaders in the world of children's and youth ministry compared today's life stages to each other. One of the responses we received from a 20-something youth minister was classic:

What I've found with older people is that, yes, they might be loyal to me as a leader. But they view youth ministry or their volunteering as exactly that, *volunteering*. Don't get me wrong; they love students. But what I've noticed is that if you call them to give more of their free time, they won't do it. Or you have to beat them to do it. I'm not quite sure why, but it just seems that they view ministry as more of an event on a night of the week. Now that being said, the college students are quite the opposite as far as involvement, passion, and their ability to follow. (Brandon)



Jonathan writes:

I loved Brandon's answer—first, because I forced him to qualify the word *older*. He replied by saying, “Old like you [referring to me].” After I finished beating the crap out of him, I asked him if he actually knew how old I was. He was close. He guessed that I'm 35, and I was 36 at the time. Either way...Dad...that makes you ancient!

Second, I loved his reply because it shows the disparity in how different ages view each other. Brandon would rather recruit “young singles” than “married with kids.” So was he making a comparison between Generation @ and Gen X? Far from it. Even if he didn't use the term, he was really comparing life stages.

I'm textbook Generation X. When I was 20, I volunteered with a youth group. I helped out on Sundays and Wednesdays, I led a small group of guys, and I regularly had all-night lock-ins at my house. I was 20 and full of spunk.

But now I'm 37, and I have three kids. Let's just say that I've been “despunked.” During the week, my wife and I pick up the kids from school at different times, and take them to swimming, gymnastics, and karate (they all have their own

sport). In our “spare time,” we try to get all of them to their separate school and youth group activities. Recently, we even blocked out Tuesday nights just so we could have a family night with no other activities. On this night, our girls skip swimming and no one is allowed to book any activities. Why? We’re overloaded. And most of my friends in this life stage find themselves in the same boat.

This doesn’t mean that people in this life stage don’t volunteer. Last year, my wife and I both volunteered in the junior high group at our church. And we were just like Brandon described. We volunteered on Wednesday nights only. Why? We were already driving our son there for youth group, and our daughters were in activities in the building across the quad. So we thought, “Might as well stick around and help.” But we were too swamped with other activities to volunteer beyond that.

Is that the stigma of Generation X? Not at all. It truly is a life stage thing.

In fact, a decade ago, I was in Brandon’s shoes. I was a youth worker who, looking for “loyal” volunteers, found the majority of them in Gen X young singles. Now those same people—that same generation—is “married with children” and less likely to become loyal volunteers for Brandon or any other youth minister.

Same generation, different life stage.

Most “married with kids” won’t volunteer overtime. They’re tapped out. Don’t call it a Gen X thing. Wait a decade or two until their kids are out of the house, and you’ll see that it was a life stage thing. They’ll be available like increasing numbers of older Boomers are now.

TWO WILLING GROUPS



So what? We could fill the rest of this book with a discussion about generations and life stages. But that doesn’t help us get volunteers. So let’s cut to the chase: Who should we try to recruit?

The 21st century has seen the rise of two huge groups that are ready, willing, and excited to help you accomplish your mission. If you’re not tapping into these two resources, you’re missing a great opportunity to expand your volunteer base.

We’ve hinted at this already, but these two groups consist of retiring members of the Baby Boomer generation and older members of Generation @. Some of the characteristics of these two groups are purely generational. But even more of their qualities are distinctive of a given life stage. Because these groups are available now as volunteers, it’s valuable to examine both their generational characteristics and their current life stage qualities.



Tom writes:

I am going to discuss my generation—the retiring professional culture. I’m just a bit older than the sociological definition of Boomers. But I do represent sort of an older professional Boomer culture that is just beginning to retire. So I’ll take a look at the best ways to recruit and manage us.



Jonathan writes:

Then I’m going to discuss members of Generation @ who are

volunteering in great numbers. Again, I'm a Gen Xer, but I've had a lot of contact with Generation @ volunteers and made some observations about how to recruit and manage them.

RETIRING BOOMER PROFESSIONALS



Tom writes:

Let's take a look at these older professionals who are at or near retirement. Paul McCartney included these words in his song "When I'm Sixty-Four":

*When I get older losing my hair
Many years from now . . .
You can knit a sweater by the fireside
Sunday mornings go for a ride,
Doing the garden, digging the weeds,
Who could ask for more . . .
When I'm sixty-four.*

This song came out when Paul McCartney was in his 20s, but he was only a teenager when he wrote it. That's how he viewed getting old—losing his hair, sitting by a fireplace knitting a sweater, going for a Sunday drive, and pulling weeds. But in 2006 Paul McCartney turned 64. This was the same year I turned 64. Although we're not officially part of the post-World War II babies called "Boomers" who started turning 60 in 2006, I identify with this growing number of potential volunteers. These older professionals are entering their retirement years with an unparalleled *vigor*—to use a John F. Kennedy word. Smack in the middle of the Boomer group are people like Robin Williams (born in 1951), Denzel Washington (born in 1954), and Tom Hanks (born in 1956).

To put it mildly, the retiring professionals of today aren't fulfilling McCartney's picture of the 64-year-old. We're a different kind of graying generation. Walk by any clubhouse of an "active adult living community" (you have to be over 55 to live there), and you'll find that Sinatra is out. You'll hear music by the Eagles and Sting. We're not your father's grandfather.

The young people of the 1960s were this leading edge of the Boomer generation. We challenged the system.

We grew up in an age of growth and prosperity. Our parents worked hard to make sure that they could send us to college. In the early 1960s, we heard President Kennedy say, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." And many of us did just that, volunteering for the Peace Corps and making an impact on the "Great Society."

But in the late 1960s and early 1970s, everything changed. Vietnam, the assassinations of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King, Jr., and controversies like

Watergate greatly influenced us. Many of us turned inward. During the 1970s and 1980s, many of our generation followed the advice of EST (Erhard Seminars Training) and *Self* magazine and read bestsellers like *Looking Out for Number One*. And during this time, we were raising Generation X.

Now that we've entered the 21st century, many of us realize that living for self has not been the fulfilling life we expected. In spite of our selfishness, we volunteer because the "I want to change the world" of the 1960s still beats in our hearts. The "graying of the Peace Corps" provides a good example, as people in their 50s and 60s leave lucrative careers to join the Peace Corps and other organizations with social or spiritual missions. Volunteering offers a way to fulfill our passions.

When Paul McCartney wrote "When I'm Sixty-Four," the average life expectancy was 69.7.¹ So he was singing about an age just five years away from death. Now, however, life expectancy is at least 13 years past 64 and growing each day with medical advancements and innovations. Paul and the rest of us in his "64 Club" (Harrison Ford, Aretha Franklin, Barbra Streisand, and Muhammad Ali) probably don't relate to the picture he painted back then of knitting by the fireside in a rocking chair.

In fact, many of my friends in this age group are more active in volunteer work than they have ever been. They bring their experience and professional skills to the volunteer organizations where they serve. Most of them say, "I've never been so busy, and I love it."

RECRUITING THE RETIRING PROFESSIONAL

While retiring professionals love to volunteer, volunteer managers must still be careful when they recruit this new and growing 21st-century resource. Here are three very important factors to remember.

Retiring professionals want to make a difference. Retiring professionals don't just want to make a contribution, they desire a significant role making a difference. These people were ready to change the world in the 1960s, and they still strongly believe in causes. So make sure that your mission is something that people can get excited about.

My wife, Susie—who will quickly point out that she is not yet 64—is an ESL (English as a second language) college professor teaching graduate students. I've been a speaker and trainer for more than 40 years, and we dream about volunteering to teach overseas. So the last thing we want to do is stuff envelopes somewhere. We want to fulfill a dream!

Does that mean we as boomers are not interested in getting our hands dirty or doing labor? Not at all! We're not afraid of jumping in with a team when a job needs to get done. In fact, we've stuffed thousands of envelopes, set up hundreds of chairs and tables, cleaned dozens of bathrooms, and swept countless floors. However, the organization that uses high-quality, professionally trained volunteers *only* to do unskilled labor will lose many retiring professional volunteers.

Boomers want to be recruited to use a lifetime of experience to help you accomplish your vision. And we're not alone.

In fact, you might be thinking, "That sounds like what you said about the younger generation." Yes, the younger generation also wants to use their professional skills to help accomplish your vision. The difference between the two is this: The younger generation will tell you upfront that they don't want to stuff envelopes or other trivial tasks. Retiring professionals will probably accept the job, but they won't volunteer for you again.



Jonathan writes:

Wow! You "really old" people are passive-aggressive.



Tom writes:

I guess we could be like your generation—disrespectful.



Jonathan writes:

Shut up! I mean, yes, Father, you're right. And truthfully, I gotta give you props for sticking it out for a day, even when you don't want to be there.



Tom writes:

Props?



Jonathan writes:

Oh, yeah—I forgot that I'm talking to someone who remembers what he was doing when Kennedy was shot. "Props" means credit or recognition. It's like, "Hey, Dad, props to you for making it through that movie without having to go to the bathroom!"



Tom writes:

"Fo' shizzle."

Now let's get back to retiring professionals.

Retiring professionals aren't afraid of commitment. Let's be more specific. This older generation of potential volunteers isn't afraid of commitment when there's a payoff. The payoff could be your cause, or a benefit to us.

A very popular volunteer program for retired professionals is the Master Gardener Program offered by many communities. New Master Gardeners are required to contribute 50 hours of community volunteer work over 12 months. Every year thereafter, the program requires 25 hours of volunteer activity.

Each spring, volunteers attend a one-hour class each week for 15 weeks. Applicants must attend all 15 classes and pay a fee for materials. University specialists, horticulture advisors, and community experts teach the classes. Topics include introduction to horticulture, water and fertilizer management, planting and maintenance of trees, and so forth. After attending all the sessions and after completing all the weekly quizzes and a final exam, trainees receive a graduation certificate. Retiring professionals willingly make the commitment to programs like Master Gardener because of the payoff. Part of the "what's in it for me" attitude remains relevant for Boomers, and they'll commit to training, study, dues, and even long-term obligations when they feel it's worth it.

Retiring professionals want flexibility. They're often on the go, so they appreciate flexibility. You might think this sounds like a contradiction, because the commitment of the Master Gardener program seems like a lot. It is at first—but after the 15 weeks, the program has a lot of flexibility. This just demonstrates that retired professionals are willing to pay their dues, but they want flexibility as part of the payoff, too.

Jim, a retired dentist, volunteers for the local chapter of the Rotary Club. He paints and cleans for an inner city project because he really cares about the problems of the inner city. Yet at times, the Rotary Club won't see Jim for a long time, because Jim and his wife, Sue, travel about six months of the year.

When Jim and Sue are home, they spend a lot of time volunteering. Jim would never volunteer to be on a board that required regular meetings. But he loves projects. Last year, Jim and Sue spent six months working in an orphanage in Eastern Europe doing dental work and even some basic construction work.

Don't miss the opportunity to recruit the retiring professional. They want to make a difference, they aren't afraid of commitments, and they like flexibility.

THE YOUNG PROFESSIONALS



Jonathan writes:

How would you describe the leading edge of Generation @—specifically, the part of this new generation of young professionals currently in their 20s? This includes people like LeBron James (born in 1984), Hilary Duff (born in 1987), and Lindsay Lohan (born in 1986). Are these 20-somethings a good source of volunteers?

Despite the sometimes negative headlines generated by some of the more well-known members of this generation, most of what we're learning reveals that this younger generation is volunteering in mass numbers. USA Weekend.com reported that 30 percent of Gen @ (the 68 million people born between 1982 and 1994) are volunteering more than 80 hours a year.²

Generational researchers Neil Howe and William Strauss make some extremely optimistic predictions about the generation born after 1981, who they call Millennials. They make the prediction that “by the time the last Millennials...come of age, they could become...the cleanest-cut young adults in living memory.”³ Howe and Strauss go on to say that this generation will also be known for its hard work “on a grassroots reconstruction of community, teamwork, and civic spirit. They're doing it in the realms of community service, race, gender relations, politics, and faith.”⁴ The researchers note that this generation will have a tremendous capacity to mobilize volunteers for worthwhile causes, largely by use of the Internet.

You might be wondering, if all this is true, then where are they? If this generation is so great, why can't we get them to help us?

You might also be skeptical, wondering how predictive studies like these can even be valid. After all, Strauss and Howe began making their predictions

about this generation back in 1991, when the oldest members of Gen @ were just 9 years old.

I understand some of your skepticism. Call me old-fashioned, but I don't give a lot of weight to statistics unless I also observe those conclusions firsthand. When it comes to Gen @, I immediately meshed this data with what I've seen of this generation when speaking at school assemblies and events across the country. In addition, I decided to do a little research of my own. I tapped into my database of more than 16,000 youth workers who are now recruiting older members of Generation @ to work with teenagers. I polled a group of them, asking questions about this young generation's reliability, passion, attitude, and skills. I then compared my results with existing research (like Strauss and Howe) as well as my own personal observations.

When all was said and done, I came up with a number of qualities that you need to understand as a volunteer manager so you can recruit and manage Gen @ volunteers—volunteers who are willing and excited to help you make a difference. Let's take a look at these seven characteristics, as well as a “*So what?*” for each one that provides a few tips on harnessing the potential of this generation as volunteers.

1. They're impatient. *Googled* is a verb—as in “I googled it”—that has replaced going to the library or the store. More than prior generations, this new group of young professionals shops online (often at 2:00 a.m.) and researches products on the Internet so they can be prepared and informed buyers. This generation grew up in the information age where everything is available at the click of a button. They grew up with computers in the classrooms, video games, and fast-paced television programming.

By playing video games, they learned that when you win, you're automatically promoted to the next level. So they're impatient to move up the organizational leadership chart. When this generation completes a task, they want to know, “Where's the next challenge?” or “When do I get to be in charge?”

So what? As a volunteer manager, give these young professionals an opportunity to use their gifts and abilities. If they perform well, give them a little more responsibility. Yes, they might be impatient, but be tolerant of this. Many of them really are quick learners. Look for the kernel of truth behind their impatience; you might expose some areas in your organization that need improvement.

2. They're multi-taskers. The Kaiser Family Foundation's 2005 report on media consumption notes that Gen @ regularly consumes more than one medium at once. The Internet has opened the doors to most of these media sources with social networking sites, chat rooms, and downloadable songs and videos. According to this Kaiser report, 20 percent of kids age 8 to 18 (the younger half of Generation @) can surf the Web from their own bedrooms—double the figure from 1999.

Researchers suggest that this saturation of available media has morphed kids into “media multi-taskers.” Nearly one-third of kids say they chat online, text or

talk on the phone, surf the Web, instant message, watch TV, or listen to music “most of the time” while doing their homework.⁵

The Kaiser Foundation argues that we need to give our full attention to anything that takes up this much space in young people’s lives:

This generation truly *is* the media generation, devoting more than a quarter of each day to media. As media devices become increasingly portable, and as they spread even further through young people’s environments...media messages will become an even more ubiquitous presence in an already media-saturated world.⁶

Reports like these make note of multi-tasking in their statistics. When Kaiser reported that this generation averaged six and a half hours per day of media consumption, they had to qualify the statement. A large percentage of these kids are actually “exposed to the equivalent of 8½ hours a day (8:33) of media content, even though they pack that into less than 6½ hours of time.”⁷ In other words, it’s not uncommon for kids to watch a DVD while listening to iTunes and browsing MySpace.

I came face to face with this younger generation’s skill for multi-tasking when I tried to battle my son at one of his new Xbox games. Call me old, but I used to be pretty good with an Atari joystick. It was easy—a stick and a button. Have you seen an Xbox controller? It’s like the front of a cockpit! We’ve come a long way from Pong. My son can work all the buttons on the controller with ease while I’m still trying to figure out how to get my character to walk without bumping into walls. He’ll do a quick move and then tell me to do the same. “It’s easy, Dad,” he assures me. “Just move around the corner (with the left joystick), jump (using the A button), punch the ‘Grunt’ (B button), aim at the ‘Elite’ on the balcony (right joystick), throw a grenade (L trigger), and fire your SMG (R trigger) as you strafe sideways (left joystick again).” Of course, my son can do that in two microseconds while chewing gum and whistling to the music he’s blasting.

So what? As a volunteer manager, be tolerant when this generation does things differently than “the way we’ve always done it.” They might accomplish things faster and more efficiently (all while playing loud music). When possible, ask what they can offer to your mission. Instead of just giving them a “to do” list, ask them to help you achieve your desired outcomes.

3. They think “digital.” Have you ever tried to train a 23-year-old? They process data completely differently than retiring professionals. If you’re used to working with Baby Boomers, remember this: The retiring generation is analog. Young professionals are digital.

Retiring professionals think more like a videotape. If you don’t like a part of a movie, you have to fast-forward. Generation @ has never had to fast-forward. They just jump to whatever chapter they want on their DVD. “Hey, skip through the beginning. Let’s jump right to where Happy gets beat up by Bob Barker!”

Sorry, Boomers and retiring professionals, members of Gen @ don't even like your outlines. A lot of retiring professionals think in points I, II, and III, maybe with some neat little A, B, and C subpoints. But members of this younger generation aren't bound by such linear structure. They can jump to the last chapter without a fast-forward. They process information quickly and embrace change. They don't sit around and wait for things to happen when they know they can make things happen.

Marc Prensky, a pioneer of digital game-based learning and CEO and founder of games2train.com, coined the term "twitch speed." He says that this generation thinks and operates at higher speeds than previous generations: "They grew up on video games ("twitch speed"), MTV (more than 100 images a minute) and the ultra-fast speed of action films." If you want to see what Marc is talking about, watch five minutes of the newest *CSI*, and then watch a rerun of *Magnum, P.I.* You'll be surprised at how slow the show *Magnum* has become in its old age.

Marc contends that the "under-30 generation has had far more experience of processing information quickly than its predecessors, and is therefore better at it."⁸ Companies or organizations that hire this digital generation often make the mistake of boring them to death in a training class taught by a terrible communicator, or by forcing them to watch slow, out-of-date, anesthetizing training videos.

So what? As a volunteer manager, provide opportunities for young professionals to make an impact and to see the difference they're making. They don't want to wait for someone else to make a difference—they want to do it. Give them that opportunity, and they'll begin to grow roots in your organization.

And don't bore these potential volunteers right out of your training room. Use training as an opportunity to motivate and inspire your volunteers for your cause. Like no other generation before them, this younger generation is cause-driven. Hire a dynamic and cutting-edge trainer to capture the hearts of these volunteers and motivate them to make a difference. (I probably do about a dozen of these types of trainings each year for youth ministry organizations around the country, engaging these young workers with a lot of media and relevant examples from youth culture.)

4. They're tolerant. I probably don't have to tell you that this younger generation is growing up in a much more integrated world than even Gen Xers. Gen @ is growing up with friends and heroes of all types. Diversity is a value for this generation. They display an incredible tolerance and a slowness to judge other people.

You might be thinking, "What? These young people are rude and outspoken!" Valid observation, but don't confuse that with being judgmental. Young professionals have a great spirit of openness. True products of the civil rights movement, these young people don't display the same prejudices that divided earlier generations. They're great team members, ignoring gender and racial biases to work with anyone to accomplish common goals. My friend Lane Palmer from Dare 2 Share agrees with this assessment in an article he wrote about this generation posted on

Ypulse.com (one of the best Internet resources providing insight about Gen @). Lane says:

Like the young people of the 1960s, these adolescents do not have an inherent respect for titles and/or positions. Yet unlike the Woodstock folks, they generally aren't actively anti-establishment. What registers with them is personal authenticity and passion about life regardless of background, education, or societal "rank."⁹

So what? As a volunteer manager, make sure you practice diversity (i.e., ethnic, gender, generational) in recruiting, promoting, and hiring leadership. Most of this young generation ignores biases and works with anyone who can help them accomplish common goals.

Provide opportunities for this young generation to get to know each other and bond together with your entire team of workers. If you give them opportunities to grow as a team, they'll be great team players. Provide fun annual training retreats where they can connect. Use team-building games and activities regularly in your meetings.

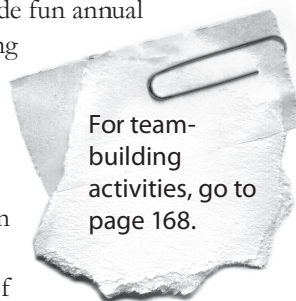
If you capture the respect of this young generation, they might easily prove to be your most valuable volunteers. Nearly all the youth and children's workers I surveyed noted how committed this young generation was to their team.

5. They're looking for causes. Although this is true of most volunteers across generational lines, this young generation is highly motivated by causes. They're always looking for ways to make a difference and to make their mark. Volunteering can provide that. When the match is right, they're highly committed and fiercely loyal.

Regina Brink, volunteer coordinator for the Society for the Blind in Sacramento, raved about Stacey, a high school student who called her and asked if she could do graphic art work for the organization as a school project. Regina e-mailed her the information, and Stacy developed a professional design for one project. The people at the Society for the Blind were thrilled, and that project extended into a two-year volunteer relationship between Stacy and the organization.

So what? As a volunteer manager, devote considerable time to communicating your cause to your young volunteers. In training sessions, don't just teach process, teach desired outcomes. Once they're convinced of your cause, these volunteers will seek out ways to make a difference for your organization.

Also, provide community service opportunities. This generation might come to you at first because they "have to" for a school project or required community service hours. But if you inspire them, making your passion their passion, you'll make incredible allies.



6. They're team players...but...In Chapter 1, we talked about the seismic shift of isolation. We painted the picture of today's young people alone in their house, but on the computer with hundreds of e-friends. Isolated, yet surrounded.

This young generation is often a living contradiction. They're a generation of loners that make for great team players. They love to seclude themselves with video games and iPods, but their favorite activity is to just "hang out" together.

In my survey about this generation, one youth minister said, "I had big-time 'hang out' people. I would sometimes need to fake a death scene for them to get the hint about leaving my house!"

Most volunteer managers that I've talked to seem to agree that this young generation loves opportunities to build "community." Maybe it's due to the fact that people have fewer close friends today than a decade ago. Maybe they're trying to fill an interpersonal void in their life that e-friends just don't fill.

Whatever the reason, they seem to be seeking community. And they seem to realize that volunteering might provide opportunities to build new relationships. Cash in on this opportunity.

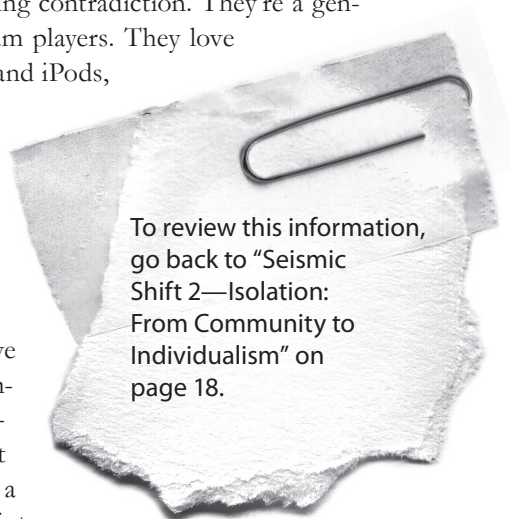
A desire to "hang out" doesn't automatically mean "team player." Is this generation truly a team player or a loner? My take is that many members of this generation want to be a part of a *winning team*—a team that makes a difference.

However, there is a *but*. They want to be a unique part of the team. They want to be able to use their gifts and abilities to make a difference. How many times have you heard, "There's no 'I' in 'team.'" Well, this younger generation might tell you that there *is* an "I" in "win."

Gen @, like the Boomers of the '60s, want to make a difference. Many young people are getting involved in world relief, either locally through their churches or through other random causes like the Gap/Bono iPod for AIDS relief.¹⁰

Chap Clark, professor of youth, family, and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary, presents another interesting perspective in his insightful book *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*. Chap claims that today's middle adolescents (ages 14-20) have been abandoned by a society that has moved from a "relatively stable and cohesive adult community intent on caring for the needs of the young to a free-for-all of independent and fragmented adults seeking their own survival." So today's teens have found themselves in a "deepening hole of systemic rejection," which Chap calls "abandonment."¹¹

Because of this feeling of abandonment and rejection, these young people



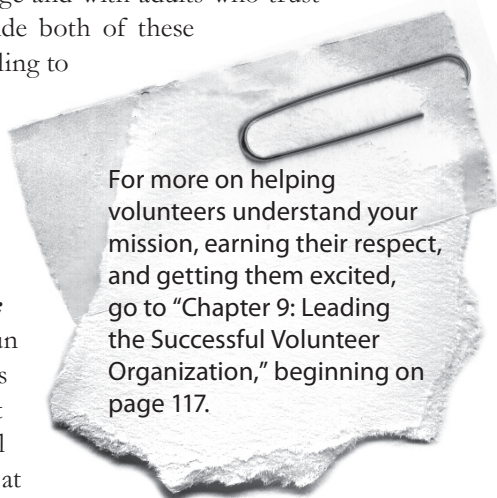
seek a safe place in their smaller group of friends that Chap calls “clusters.”¹² But their desire for community doesn’t stop with their own age group. Chap found that contrary to popular opinion, middle adolescents want significant relationships with adults as well, if adults are willing to trust them.¹³

What I found interesting is that I did my research for this book in 2007. Chap added to his extensive research by serving as substitute high school teacher while on sabbatical in the 2001-2002 academic year.¹⁴ The 16-year-old high school students of 2001 are now in the life stage that we’re focusing on—the young professionals of 2007. And although Chap focuses mostly on high school students, he notes that as middle adolescents mature and leave home for college or military service, they seem to have a willingness to explore new relationships.¹⁵ They move beyond their “clusters” and look for new groups. In my own experience, this group loves to cluster with people who share a similar mission or cause. And they still seek relationships with caring, older adults who will trust them.

So what? As a volunteer manager, make sure that you provide opportunities for these young professionals to get to know each other and bond together with your entire team of workers. But because these young adults want community both with people their own age and with adults who trust them, take the opportunity to provide both of these needs. However, you must also be willing to empower members of this generation and give them opportunities to share their insights and skills. This gives you an opportunity to win their trust as you provide a safe place of acceptance and service.

7. They don’t want to be managed; they want to be led. One of the best-run camping programs I’ve observed is Timber-Lee Christian Center in East Troy, Wisconsin. I speak there several times a year, and I’m always amazed at the quality volunteers who work at the camp. I asked Chris Radloff, director, for his take on working with young volunteers. Chris said:

They don’t want to be managed, they want to be led. By the time I have my staff for a few weeks, I don’t need to give them commands. If I said, “I don’t want you to leave the property,” they’d respond, “Forget you...you can’t stop me!” Instead I let them know, “My preference is that you don’t leave the property tonight.” By this time I’ve earned their respect. I’ve never had someone leave.



For more on helping volunteers understand your mission, earning their respect, and getting them excited, go to “Chapter 9: Leading the Successful Volunteer Organization,” beginning on page 117.

Chris states his *preference*, and his volunteers abide by it because they respect his leadership.

So what? As a volunteer manager, be careful not to micromanage this younger generation. Help them understand your mission, your cause, and your desired outcomes. Earn their respect. As you earn their trust and get them excited about your cause, they'll follow your lead.



QUICK REVIEW

We've covered a lot of ground in this chapter about two groups who make up part of the new breed of volunteers. So let's review.

Recruiting and managing retiring professionals. How can you recruit and manage the whole new group of retiring professionals who are willing and excited to help you make a difference? Ask these questions about yourself and your organization to see if you're really "retiring professional" friendly:

- Do you have a cause? Retiring professionals want to make a difference, not a contribution.
- Are you providing opportunities for retiring professionals to use their professional skills?
- Are you keeping the standard high? Retiring Boomers don't want to work alongside half-committed, unprofessional, "any old way will do" volunteers.
- Are you highlighting the payoffs? Make sure volunteers know what's in it for them, as well as how their work benefits your cause or mission.
- Are you providing flexibility? These volunteers are on the go and will often volunteer for more than one organization.

Recruiting and managing young professionals. How can you recruit and manage the whole new group of young volunteers who are willing and excited to help you make a difference? Ask these questions about yourself and your organization to see if you're really "young professional" friendly:

- Are you mission driven? Don't tell this young generation, "Please do this job and have it done by Friday." Instead, say, "What can you do to help us accomplish our mission?" Get to know them as individuals and listen to their input.
- Are you a coach to these young individuals? Be a coach—not a traditional manager. A coach challenges volunteers to do their best, yet nurtures individuals and encourages them to reach their full potential.
- Do you involve this young generation in decision making? They want to be a part of the team in making decisions.
- Does your group practice diversity (ethnic, gender, generational) in recruiting, promoting, hiring, and seeking leadership? This young generation ignores gender and racial biases and works with anyone who can help them accomplish common goals.

- Do you take advantage of the community service requirements that many schools require? This young generation puts in hundreds of hours of volunteering by the time they graduate from high school and/or college. Do you have opportunities where they serve *and* be inspired by your organization?