

The challenge of Generation X and Y in PFG's

Some sociologists suggest there are 6 generations alive today. Seniors were born before 1925 and are now at least 80 years old. They make up 5% of the population. Builders were born 1926-1945 so they are 60-79 years of age and make up 15% of the population. Boomers were born 1946-1964. They are 41-59 years of age and make up 25% of the population. Generation X were born 1961-1981 so they are 24-45 years of age and they make up 26% of the population. Generation Y, sometimes 'milenials' were born 1982-2000 so they are 5-23 and already they are the largest group at 28%. Generation Z were born after 2001 so they are still very young.

Generation X is the most experienced media generation in human history They can't remember that it was any other way. They have grown up with Walkmans, computers, television, personal CD players, mobile phones, etc. They have more CDs than books. They have lived in a world of instant information. They have been victims of divorce & they are wary of marriage. Many have suffered physical or sexual assault. They have been more influenced by television than by teachers. Some estimate they spent 5000 hours watching television and only 1200 hours with teachers. They have little sense of recent history as distinct from ancient history. The treaty of Waitangi and the landing of man on the moon are equally regarded as 'history' by Generation X despite 120 years separating the events.

They are the first generation of 18-30 year olds who have largely never married. They tend to gather in loose gathering of friends, teammates and co-workers. Special friends slip in and out of the group and often young married friends may be part of their group. They prefer to gather in groups more than in pairs. They sit around with friends and drink beer or coffee. This socializing is expensive, but they don't concern themselves with saving money.

They are looking for connections. They listen to CD's and watch TV or DVD's with friends. They attend movies with friends and go to special events in groups. They exercise at gyms and spend a lot of time shopping. Financially, they cannot afford to live alone. Many are living with their parents and many live with friends. If they live as a couple, both are wage earners. Their relationships are no longer geographical as used to be the case. Mobility (motor cars and freeways) has allowed this. Air travel is fast and inexpensive Mobile phones and the internet allow distant communication to be possible. A person can live in an urban suburb and work in a city or suburb 10-40kms away. His/her work may involve some intercity travel. Their parents or family may live in a different area and some of their friends or family may live overseas.

They often have little energy to give to other communities including the church. They are not in the one place (home or work) all the time, often moving from one location to another within the same week for recreation or employment. Their work or team associates are diverse in culture, religion and age. City dwellers and rural communities have the same culture which even spans other countries. They watch the same TV programmes, access the same internet sites, visit the same shop brands, buy the same brand of clothes and listen to the same music. Some have called this the 'McDonaldisation' of the world'.

Rapid globalisation has brought many differing people, cultures and lifestyles into the same space. Rather than living in small communities where similar beliefs and values are held by the vast majority, people now live next to, work alongside and play with people who may hold a wide diversity of view points. The more varied, or plural, the beliefs held in a community or society, the weaker the reinforcement is for any one particular set of beliefs. When individuals are faced with making choices now they are faced with a multiple options. There is no longer only one way.

In an increasingly pluralistic society it is a challenge to live alongside those who hold different religious beliefs, moral standards or gender and sexual preferences? A belief that you are right and they are wrong is increasingly difficult to hold. Tolerance has become the great virtue so that diverse and even opposed cultures, lifestyles and beliefs can coexist together. Younger people ask how Buddhism can be completely wrong when individual Buddhists are pleasant, caring, neighbours and your children mix and play with them.

Generation Xers are tolerant of minority groups and they take gender equality for granted, often unaware of the significant struggle the Baby Boomers had to achieve this. They are materialistic but they value relationships. This is one of several seeming contradictions. Those with children wish to spend time with them, while some couples do not want children and some working parents rarely see their children. Some are affluent, but many are poor. Whether they have money or not, they still tend to spend freely. Perhaps it is a bit like the man sitting with one foot in a bucket of iced water and the other in a bucket of hot water. He claimed 'on the whole, I am comfortable'.

Generation Xer's tend to have little trust in institutions. They have few heroes (everyone has faults). Their role models are lifestyle images rather than real people. They have seen 250,000 TV commercials so they don't believe what they are 'sold'. Friends and colleagues influence them more than sales pitches.

Most have never been involved in a church. They are interested in spirituality but not in formal religion. Their parents stopped attending church when they were young. They prefer to focus on personal experience. They can accept ambiguity in the sacred and secular, the spiritual and sensual, and the orthodox and profane. They don't reject religion, instead they are diffident and in fact more of them are willing to attend a church, read the Bible and pray than their parents! Many who are church attenders are genuinely seeking more. They are not attending out of obligation. Quite a few Generation X's seek spiritual direction, and are studying scripture and theology. They are attracted to lectio divina and they express a personal piety that their parents would often have rejected. They tend to be more orthodox rather than liberal. What they perceive as the hypocrisy of church communities pushes Generation Xers more to 'spiritual' than 'religious'.

What does this profile suggest about the likelihood of involving this age group in a PFG? If they are not associated with the church community how would they be 'sold' on the idea? If they tend to 'hang out' with groups of their own age, how might be the best way for them to 'fit in' to a PFG?

Generation Y (generally considered to be aged 5-24) is already the largest percentage of the population. Obviously many of them are too young to fully considered in their observable behaviour, but the influences on them are already clear. They are well educated & streetwise. They have high expectations. They display little brand or company loyalty, preferring to make their own choices. They have different priorities to older generations. Most have no financial commitment. The majority of their income goes on travel, food and entertainment. They identify their top three spare time activities as “going to a party” (74%), “listening to the radio” (74%) and “going to a movie” (72%). 75% of all text messages are sent by under 20's.

There is an ancient saying that “People resemble the times more than they resemble their own parents”. Baby Boomers were influenced by the advent of TV, rock and roll, the cold War, the Vietnam War, the threat of nuclear war, and decimal currency. They saw in the personal computer, mobile phones, AIDS, single parent families, growth in multiculturalism and downsizing of companies. They have lived through mobile phones and texting, and the age of the internet, Sky television, DVD's, globalisation, environmentalism and ipods. The Builders' generation was most influenced by authority figures. Baby boomers make decisions based on data and facts. Builders and Boomers had a strong work ethic, respect for authority, loyalty and commitment, financial conservatism, long-term planning and delayed gratification

Generation Y's and Xers are very different from the Boomers and builders (most of whom make up our PFG's). Generation Y's are more likely to make a decision based on the influence of their own peers (often 3 to 8 friends). 25% of them admit that they are most influenced by TV and movies. They want community, but this takes a particular form. They want to be understood, accepted, respected, and included. They spend most of their spare time with peers, but often fail to experience real connection when with them. They are disillusioned with materialism, though they spend freely.

They dislike being bored, which happens easily for most of them despite a plethora of options, and they need stimulation. Unfortunately, despite having so much entertainment possibilities, many are lured to drugs and alcohol for extra 'highs'. Perhaps because much of their television entertainment was interrupted by commercial breaks, they often have a poor attention span and tend to prefer short commitment to projects and relationships. A job merely provides an income to do what they want to do and they resign readily if they are dissatisfied or if they want to do something more attractive, such as travel overseas. They'd like to be paid volunteers, matching reluctant work with helping others. They are searching for fun, quality friendship, a fulfilling purpose and for spiritual meaning. They are concerned about the environment, social issues and human rights

They are sceptical because of all the advertising they have seen. They are not impressed by slick presentations. It is estimated that by age 18, on average they have viewed over 500,000 TV commercials. They want trustworthy guidance or direction in their life. They want guidance from someone who knows them, their situation, and has 'been there' themselves.

In 2004 in the USA, 8-12 year olds spent US\$19.1 billion, 13-19year olds spent \$94.7 billion and 20-21years spent \$61.2 billion. Generation Y is not motivated by money; they already have it! They have seen some people take short cuts to success. Some young innovative speculators, sports stars and musicians are multi-millionaires before age 24. Others acquire wealth through lotteries or such programmes as 'Who wants to be a millionaire'. Two months ago an American football fan won US\$1,000,000 for kicking a 45 metre goal during half time entertainment. This sort of short cut to wealth is seen as a possibility for many Generation Y's.

They are looking for real life role models and mentors and mentoring is a critical element in their lives. The film 'Finding Forrester' is an excellent example of the potential for good mentoring. Generation Y's still prefer to make their own choices. The ipod is a good symbol for them because it allows each person to be his/her own DJ enabling them to determine what music they will and will not listen to. Tivo is coming and similarly, it will allow the choice of personal TV programming.

Religion for this generation is 'mix and match' and therefore a 'make up your own'. Some seek Buddhist meditation, and a Baptist youth club while seeing themselves as Catholic. They belong to an age of diversity & plurality. Surveys indicate that only 7% say their friends share the same religion. Our style is structured, they want freedom. We stress learning, they like experiencing. We react, they relate. We focus on the individual; they are socially driven. We can't compete with their knowledge and use of advanced technology, movie special effects, video games etc, however they don't want a rehearsed talk, or a manufactured spiel. They want us to be genuine. They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care!" If we want to communicate effectively with them we need to appreciate that there is no point in giving someone music on a cassette tape if they only have a CD player, or on CD if they only use an ipod! "

Generation Y's are seekers, especially among their peers. They separate institutional religious attachment from spirituality and prefer the informal and expressive to repetitive ritual and institutional constrained forms. Not many of them will be at Sunday worship. Many have never belonged but they do want to get in touch with the deeper and more meaningful things

How can we (PFG's) be there to help this generation?

Our PFG's have few people from these two generations (under 45 years of age). Will we survive without them?

Does that matter to us?

Do we want to show them a way?

Can we reach any of them?