

# TRAINING

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## Letter from the Editor

# Generational Differences in Today's Workforce

Do your new-hires seem to be getting younger and younger? Relatively speaking, they are! Not only are they younger, but by most accounts, they are also significantly different in personality, motivation, and work style from those of us who have been around a while.

What used to be called the "generation gap" has become a more complex generational divide. One reason for the increased complexity is that people are staying in the workforce longer. This means that there are more generations working together, in the same place, at the same time.

Another factor is the increased rate of change in everything from family structure to communication technology. As each decade brings new norms and behaviors, each decade also brings different expectations into the workplace.

In addition, the increased importance of computers, software, and information technology in the workplace means that the experience hierarchy no longer corresponds to the talent hierarchy. Instead of building worth over years of experience, today's worker can find his or her education outdated in five to ten years. As a result, the new kid on the block may be worth more to the company than the experienced veteran.

These three factors create an unusual and difficult situation for workers, and for those of us tasked with improving their performance. It's not insurmountable, though. With proper foresight and understanding, new generations of workers can bring energy, enthusiasm, and a link to the younger consumers of our goods and services.

In this issue, several of our members provide their perspective on generational differences and the ways that we can deal with them. We also include an excerpt from a book by Claire Raines, one of the most prolific writers on the topic.


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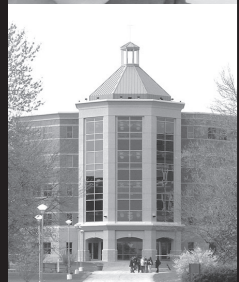
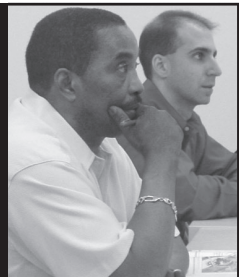
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# The Changing Transition to Adulthood: Impact on Training and Development

by Cathy Goodman, Ph.D.

My five-year-old daughter came home the other day singing the familiar tune, "First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in a baby carriage." I laughed appreciatively, so she would feel clever at having remembered a silly song to bring home to me.

If she were to expand the song to include leaving home, completing higher education, getting a job, falling in love, getting married, and *then* baby in a baby carriage, she would accurately describe the transition to adulthood for many of the Veteran generation, the Boomers, and Gen Xers. Today's young people, however, are mixing those milestones in a variety of ways, and delaying "adulthood" until their late twenties and early thirties (Furstenberg, Rumbaut, and Settersten 2004).

For many, the chain of events is closer to: get a job, complete higher education, leave home, fall in love through match.com, marry, and have babies. (The last two are increasingly being reversed, even for those not as famous as Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes.)

The impact of the changing transition to adulthood on corporate training and development programs is varied. First, since young people are more comfortable staying at home than previous generations (Grossman 2005), they may not be as hungry for advancement as their predecessors. In addition, despite media hype about their materialism and high debt, careful data analysis shows that they aren't bigger spenders than Americans in general (Chiteji 2006). Human resources policies that treat status and financial reward as primary motivators may miss the mark

with these kids. Programs that allow for socialization may be more effective than monetary ones.

Second, young people have seen their parents lose jobs due to "re-structuring," "reduction-in-force," and other lay-offs disguised in glowing pseudonyms. As a result, they will expect more churn in their career (Farber 2006), and will be thinking about educating themselves for the next job as much as for the current one. Training that focuses on developing broad capabilities instead of specific skills may be more popular with this generation.

Third, flexible schedules and accommodation for the multiple roles that young adults play today will help corporations keep their newer employees. Even as young women enter the workforce in increasing numbers, many still have traditional family obligations. Without flexibility, they may quit a job in order to take care of children, husbands, and elderly parents (Kelly 2007). When developing programs to increase corporate retention, this can play an important factor.

For young women and men, the requirement for a higher education in order to get a job that pays a living wage may force more young adults to combine a job and college than ever before (Fitzpatrick and Turner 2006). Flexible schedules that allow them to attend classes, study, and take exams may also help employee retention.

Fourth, a growing portion of young America is first generation from Central and South American, Asia, and the Pacific Islands (Portes and Rumbaut). Corporate training and development programs that embrace this diversity and help these young adults

function in the corporate environment may substantially increase workforce productivity.

I suspect that my daughter's daughter will still be singing about love, marriage, and a baby carriage in twenty years, but her transition to adulthood will be much more complicated. Training and development programs that take this into account will help her be more successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Cathy Goodman is a writer and editor for The Hired Pen in Chicago, Illinois. The Hired Pen is an academic publishing service for research, public policy, and non-profit communities. The Network on Transitions to Adulthood, funded by the MacArthur Foundation, is one of The Hired Pen's clients, and research from members of The Network is the basis for this article. More information about The Network can be found at <http://www.transad.pop.upenn.edu>.*

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# Preparing Your Twenty-Something Employees for Career Success

by Alexandra Levit

When I connect with a Training and Development manager or an HR professional, one of the first things I hear is that this new crop of twenty-something employees is *different*. I'm told that, although they're innovative, entrepreneurial, and devoted to changing business for the better, they also tend to come into their first jobs with a sense of entitlement. It's as if they believe it's the responsibility of management to advance their careers. Further, even though they have just finished school, where the rules of engagement were completely different, today's twenty-somethings believe they already know everything and they want to get ahead *right now*.

As training professionals, you are empowered to make the transition from the university to the workplace a bit easier for your young employees and their managers. Twenty-somethings need to be clearly taught that, unlike the situation at school, success in the business world isn't about how much information they cram into their brains or how well they exceed a set of defined expectations. Without

being told directly, it's hard for young employees to understand the importance of marketing themselves, getting to know the right people, adding tangible value to the organization, learning transferable skills, and charting their own career paths.

Because of what they don't learn in college, twenty-somethings typically experience lower productivity and higher turnover than other employees in your organization. You should recognize, though, that simple training can make a difference in the degree to which your twenty-somethings contribute to the bottom line and increase your organization's internal rate of return. I'll highlight five key lessons in this article.

**1. Teach them the role of a mature professional.** Camille Lavington, a personal marketing consultant, says that when you first meet someone, you have three seconds to make an indelible impression (Lavington 1997). The moment an individual sees you, he evaluates your clothing, hairstyle, grooming habits, facial cues

and posture. Without even thinking about it, he'll decide whether he wants to get to know you better and whether you are worthy of being taken seriously. No matter what you say or do going forward, his opinion of you will be heavily influenced by his initial perception.

Three seconds is not a lot of time, and in their first jobs, twenty-somethings meet a lot of people who are important to their future success. In order to make the most of these interactions, they must develop a strong corporate persona that is professional and competent. You can help them achieve this by providing instruction on appropriate dress and appearance, effective on-the-job communication, social behavior, and attitude management.

**2. Encourage them to establish profitable relationships.** Networking and making friends on the job drive career growth and give newly-minted



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employees a reason to come to work in the morning. However, many twenty-somethings think that it's up to their fellow employees to approach the new kid. We know better; the pace of business today is so frenetic that they'll be lucky if people even notice they've arrived.

The twenty-something employee needs to take responsibility for becoming professionally and socially integrated into her new department. You can help by teaching strategies for getting to know new managers and navigating your company's social scene. Basic networking skills and company-sponsored mentorship programs are useful as well.

One of the most important things you can do as an HR professional is to train your new twenty-something employees in the art of people management. This goes beyond providing a handout on "Managing Up." Young employees need to learn strategies for enlisting colleagues' cooperation so that they can increase the amount of control they have over their own success. They should also be schooled in how to show gratitude, cope with difficult personalities, and learn from constructive criticism.

- 3. Mold them as humble, can-do employees.** Many of today's twenty-somethings are blazing trails of ambitious fire. They can't wait to make their mark on the company and prove to everyone they're worth ten times what they're being paid. While you should certainly encourage initiative, you should also try to rein in your twenty-somethings so that they aren't perceived as over-eager or presumptuous by their new managers.

When looking for ways to prove their worth, twenty-somethings are safest if they start small. You can help them by asking probing questions such as, "What does the company or department need and how can you use your unique set of skills and talents to provide it?"

Twenty-somethings must also learn to manage the needs of the many individuals who supervise them. Inevitably, they won't be able to do everything for everyone all the time and will have to say "no" on occasion.

"No" can be a tricky word in business, however, because one wants to be perceived as a can-do employee. A good strategy is to teach your twenty-somethings how to pre-empt situations in which they will have to decline an assignment. Have them formalize their daily responsibilities with their official managers and find out who is authorized to delegate work to them.

- 4. Get them on the path of mastering skills that will take them anywhere.**

It's sometimes difficult for twenty-somethings to digest that their first jobs out of college are not the be-all, end-all of career stardom. How can they master the skills it takes to get ahead without spending any time in the trenches?

New twenty-something employees should be taught to de-emphasize the importance of getting promoted as soon as possible. Rather, they should focus on making the most of their first jobs by setting short and long-term career goals and developing critical, transferable skills like problem-solving, time management, oral and written communication, and risk taking that will be useful no matter where they go or what they do.

- 5. Show them how to be proactive about their own career growth.**

In today's era of streamlined organizations, companies have been flattened and downsized so that there are fewer middle management positions for twenty-somethings to be promoted into. Also, a "do more with less" mentality often translates into increases in responsibilities without additional compensation or acknowledgement. Therefore, while the first priority is to focus on learning transferable skills, twenty-somethings must also do what they can to ensure their future suitability for promotion while they're young and unencumbered.

In many organizations, the quest for promotion begins with a positive performance review. Rather than merely facilitating the review process, HR professionals would be well-served to coach new twenty-something employees on how to approach reviews strategically. Performance review objectives that you can share include soliciting feedback from the manager on the employee's progress, identifying new goals and growth opportunities, and hammering out a long-term promotion plan. While twenty-

some things shouldn't reasonably expect to be promoted after every review, they should at least leave with an understanding of where their current responsibilities are leading.

These recommendations require an investment in twenty-something employees that your company might be reticent to put forth. In questioning the value, however, just think about how much productivity you can conserve by doing a day of "Welcome to the Business World" training at the very beginning of a career before a single preventable mistake is ever made. And, since well-prepared and successful employees are happy employees, you'll keep your twenty-somethings longer than your competitors – long enough for them to make measurable contributions to the organization.

*Twenty-nine-year-old Alexandra Levit worked for a Fortune 500 software company and an international public relations firm before writing They Don't Teach Corporate in College: A Twenty-Something's Guide to the Business World (Career Press 2004; <http://www.corporateincollege.com>). Known as one of the premiere career experts of her generation, Levit speaks frequently to new twenty-something employees at major corporations around the country and teaches strategies for adjusting to working life, overcoming challenges and building a successful career. Formerly a nationally syndicated columnist for Tribune Media Service, she has recently appeared in media outlets such as the Associated Press, ABC News, USA Today, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, Fortune, Money, and National Public Radio.*

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# Defining, Nourishing, and Retaining the Multi-Generational Nurse Workforce: How WLP Professionals Can Help

by Julie Lichtenberg, MA, RN

## The Shrinking Nursing Workforce

The nursing industry needs our help! Fewer young people are entering the nursing profession and experienced nurses are leaving for other professions and retiring. (Santi 2005, 1; Advisory Board 2002a, 14). The industry needs more Workplace Learning and Performance professionals to develop programs that will help recruit and retain nurses and nursing students in the hospital setting to maintain quality health care in this country.

As a leader and director of education programs in the health care industry, I have personal and academic experience with these issues. In this article, I want to present to you, the developers and implementers of Workplace Learning and Performance programs, the generational issues affecting recruiting and retaining nurses. (Many other, non-generational issues could benefit from focused training programs as well (Martin 2003, 25) but are beyond the scope of this article.) I will also give you recommendations for the types of training and coaching that need to be presented in this particular workplace setting.

## Baby Boomers

A majority of the workers in the current healthcare setting are members of the Baby Boomer Generation; born between 1940 and 1960. Why is the nursing workforce filled with a majority of Baby Boomer nurses? When this generation was growing up, women had few work choices available to them. For many, there were only two choices: to become a nurse or a teacher, both service industry-related fields.

Baby Boomers are driven, competitive, and are motivated to make the world a better place (Weston 2001). Because there are so many of them, they have always had to strive in order to stand out from the crowd. I have observed this in nursing units as a Baby Boomer wants to be known as the best at starting a percutaneous line, running a code, or making out the schedule. To get ahead, Baby Boomers are not afraid to work long arduous hours and they may be perceived as workaholics (Bertholf, & Loveless 2001).

## Tips for Nourishing and Retaining Baby Boomers

To motivate Baby Boomers, managers should treat them as a peer or as the star of the team. Notice them. They want their longevity and loyalty to be rewarded. Baby Boomers thrive on status markers such as nurse of the year, preceptor,<sup>1</sup> leader of a committee, and the professional excellence award.

In addition, send them personal thank you notes. Encourage peer-to-peer awards, highlight a Baby Boomer in a newsletter or on a hospital communication board, or recognize them for going back to school. Recognize the impact they have on patients and their families (Weston 2001).

Due to the demands of a hospital's grueling hours, caring for children, aging parents, volunteering for their community and having the strong drive to be successful, Baby Boomers would appreciate time saving measures such as automatic teller machines and on-site postal or laundry services.

Provide yoga, tai chi, massage, aromatherapy, or an onsite exercise center. Encourage them to take advantage of tuition reimbursement as they are life-long learners and offer flexible scheduling so they can attend classes. Have an on-site learning library, offer "lunch and learn" sessions and after hour training classes on current clinical topics.

When dealing with this generation, it is also important to remember that although their competitiveness and striving results in proficient workers, it can have disadvantages for the younger workers around them. Horizontal violence, where the Baby Boomers take out stress on their colleagues and treat new nurses poorly, decreases the hospital nurse retention rate. We need to develop management strategies to integrate the generation Xers and Nexters into the predominantly Baby Boomer workforce if we are to preserve the profession (Bertholf and Loveless 2001).

<sup>1</sup> Preceptors in the nursing field are registered nurses who act as the role model, educator, advisor, and evaluator for one or more new staff in a clinical setting.

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## **Xers**

The generation following the Baby Boomers (born between 1960 and 1980) is often referred to as the Xer generation. They are the most misunderstood, often maligned, generation. With a population of 46 million, they are small in numbers but are still important because they are difficult to retain in professions such as nursing (Cowin & Jacobsson 2003).

Xers experienced a drastically different childhood from Baby Boomers. As Baby Boomer children ate breakfast they would search into the cereal box for the prize inside. Xers experienced a different wake up call each morning as Lancaster and Stillman pointed out; “Children mysteriously disappeared from neighborhoods, and showed up frighteningly on the breakfast table on milk cartons. The message served up is that the world isn’t as safe as it used to be” (Lancaster and Stillman 2002, 25).

Most Gen Xers were raised in single-family households as youths. They came to be known as “latch key kids,” who came home to empty houses from school systems “that emphasized social skills and self esteem rather than academic achievement” (Kupperschmidt 2000, 69).

They were under-supervised by self-absorbed parents, entertained themselves with video games, and cooked for themselves in the microwave. Left to themselves, they were exposed to adult subjects, e.g. violence, before they were ready (Weston 2001). Since close family was not always available, Xers formed very strong bonds with friends from a variety of backgrounds.

Xers are skeptical of institutions and personal relationships. They have seen crime in the presidency, the military, organized religion, and corporate America. They have seen the divorce rate double during their generation (Lancaster & Stillman 2002, 25). They have seen their parents and grandparents down-sized, reorganized, and reengineered out of jobs they worked long hours for (Weston 2001). Even so, with the proper measures, this group can be retained to do a good job for the organization (Kupperschmidt 2000).

### **Tips for Nourishing and Retaining Xers**

Xers prefer casual and fun work; they prefer to be informal. Xers will respond to a manager who will take off a lab coat, give them eye contact, sit down at a table with them, and share lunch and a laugh. They want a sense of teamwork and camaraderie.

Since skill development is important for them, build on that desire. Talk to them about opportunities that will further them in their career. Train them on the skills they need, check off the competency and let them do it. Explain and introduce them to all the latest technology your hospital setting offers.

Gen Xers want to hear the stories from the experienced Baby Boomer. Share the stories that have made nurses legends at the hospital. They would much rather listen to lessons learned in the past than risk learning by making a mistake themselves.

Xers view all team members as equally important and feel we all have a role to play. They want to be heard. Invite them to be a part of committees and have time with decision makers. But, make sure they have respect for the decision makers as well.

I have been amazed to witness an Xer confidently walking into the hospital CEO’s office and getting an audience! Remind Xers on the importance of the chain of command and they will listen (Weston 2001). To assist the Xers in getting to know the strategic players in the hospital encourage all leaders to make rounds in the department.

Xers like instant gratification. When training them, break down their tasks into smaller short-term goals so they can witness progress and achievement along the way to reach the ultimate long-term goals.

Work-life balance is important to this generational cohort (Weston 2001). If you ask them to work overtime, do not be surprised if they answer, “No.” If they have a difficult time with the 24/7 staffing demands in your department and they are top performers, guide the Xers to a department that has hours that can better meet their needs.

### **Nexters**

The Nexter generation was born from 1980 to 2000. They are also known as “Generation Y” or “Millennials” and with a population of more than 81 million, they make up approximately 30% of the population (Clausing, et al. 2003, 373).

Nexters have been well supervised by schools, parents, and even marketing organizations (Lancaster and Stillman 2002, 27). They have been raised by a variety of parenting styles including single, unwed moms and overachieving Boomers who postponed having children until their forties (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak 2000, 128).

Having been a generation that is hovered over, they have also been the busiest. They have attended scheduled activities such as tutoring, music and sports from morning to night. The days of getting on your bike and riding to your friends to spend your day off in whereabouts unknown, such as the Baby Boomer experienced, are long gone.

Lancaster and Stillman noted, “Millennials [Nexters] are realistic about the challenges of modern life for a modern kid. Never mind a missing kid on a milk carton, how about the fear of a missing classmate from the next desk as a result of a gun shot wound? Millennials [Nexters] have been directly affected by personal threats stemming from violent outbreaks such as Columbine, readily available street drugs, and the proliferation of gangs” (Lancaster and Stillman 2002, 29).

### **Tips for Nourishing and Retaining Nexters**

As Nexters join teams desperate for young players, it is important to remember that they may bring back the commitment, idealism, and growth of the Baby Boomers (Clausing, et al. 2003).

Give them a welcome basket on their first day of work, invite them for breakfast after the first few weeks, and make sure you sit down with them at 30 and 90 days for an evaluation of their experience and your observations.

Be sure to develop an orientation program for them. Help them get their work done while developing and spending time with friends (Raines 2003, 100). Team the Nexter with a recent hire she enjoys and delegate a project for them to do together.

Remind Baby Boomers that Nexters are willing to work extra hours and are committed to their jobs. But, they prefer a team approach and value collective action more than competition. This represents a stylistic approach, not a lack of interest (Clausing, et al. 2003, 375).

I have witnessed Baby Boomer nurses who are frustrated and did not want to precept the new employees for fear the new hire will just quit after a year. This is when you want to make sure the preceptor and orientee are a good personality fit. Make sure the Baby Boomer preceptor understands and values the Nexter’s attributes. The orientation program needs to be structured to last over several weeks and it needs to move slowly.



Remember that Nexters need to be well supervised since they have academic knowledge but not workplace experience (Cowin and Jacobsson 2003).

### Delivering Training in the Hospital Environment

The first thing that a training program aimed at retaining and recruiting nurses must do is target the nurse leaders. Chief Nurse Officers must find ways to keep the different generations of workers working well together (Advisory Board Company 2002b, 2). Nurse leaders who understand generational differences will be better at recruiting and retaining younger nurses (Parsons 2002).

For their part, nurse leaders who are themselves dissatisfied with their managers are most likely to leave the hospital. Managers need to understand how to resolve issues and prevent turnover (Advisory Board Company 2001, ix).

A program designed for leaders and managers should help them better understand and embrace the generational differences between the experienced Baby Boomer nurses on the unit and the newly graduated Nexters, as well as the independent, Xers. Training that includes the characteristics and tips that I've discussed above would make a big difference.

Nurse leaders also need to know how to coach and mentor the staff about what motivates them, how they can better understand one another, have fun and work as a team together towards a mission of healing and hope to reach the ultimate goal of excellent patient care.

A training program could also address ways to build relationships between the generations. Making mutual contact diminishes prejudices. Misunderstandings and stereotyping create barriers that focus on differences and perceived limitations rather than identification of common thinking and focusing on strengths of each generation (Weston 2001).

I remember having a conversation with two newly hired Neonatal Intensive Care Nursery Nurses. At the end of our exchange, they both looked at one another, then at me and exclaimed, "You are the only nurse who has been nice to us!" This is a point to remember as new nurses are orienting to the nursing unit.

Nurse leaders can help employees identify role models or mentors that can help all employees reach their highest level of competency. Partnering the different generations of employees, focusing on their strengths and how they can be a fabulous resource for one another, is essential to successful communication between generations. Workplace learning and performance professionals can facilitate this process.

### Do Resuscitate

I titled this article "Defining, Nourishing and Retaining the Multigenerational Nurse Workforce." If you look at the first letter in each of the words in the title they form the acronym, DNR; in the health care setting that stands for "Do Not Resuscitate." In fact we Do need to Resuscitate the multigenerational nurse work force.

Workplace learning and performance professionals can play an essential role in resuscitating the nurse work force by analyzing needs, coaching nurse leaders, and developing and facilitating instructional programs that promote understanding among the generations. Understanding, nourishing, and appreciating the different generations is the route to increased nurse satisfaction, increased retention, and creation of a vibrant work environment.

*Julie Lichtenberg, RN, MA is a registered nurse with over twenty years of leadership in Service Excellence, Patient Advocacy, Health Education and Neonatal Intensive Care Nursing. As a visionary leader she displays passion and optimism; inspires respect and trust; mobilizes peers and subordinates to fulfill the vision.*

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# Diversity & Generations by Claire Raines

This article is an excerpt from *Connecting Generations: The Sourcebook* by Claire Raines, California: Crisp Learning, 2003.

## Sorting the Cards

One of our trainers, Karl Krumm, got me to thinking about generational differences as one of a variety of ways to sort cards. If you had a deck of playing cards in front of you right now, you could sort the cards by suit. You could sort them by color. You could sort them into face cards and numbered cards. You could sort them by numerical value. This metaphor has been helpful to me in how I think about businesspeople and the issues they face. Play along here.

If your coworkers were a deck of cards, you could sort that deck in all kinds of ways. You might want to split the deck into two stacks—one for men, one for women. You could separate them according to ethnic background. You might stack the deck according to sexual orientation. You could sort according to coworkers' countries of origin. You could make sixteen piles that represent the Myers Briggs™ types.

Karl, who has a Ph.D. in psychology and is a student of human nature, believes—and I think he's right—that each time you sorted the cards and then explored the ways the stacks were different from and similar to the others, along with the ways all the cards in a stack were similar to each other, you would get helpful information that would give you valuable insights about every card.

Of course, sorting the cards would never give you a picture of the complete person; individual human beings are way too complex for that. But if you're interested in people and how to work more effectively with them, we're certain you'll find the generational sort to be an extremely valuable one. The ability to relate effectively to all types of people is one of today's essential leadership skills.

## Synergism

It seems like just a few years ago, most companies in the Western world operated on the model that the best organization was made up of ranks of similar, like-minded people. Orientation sessions and training programs sought to clone the best and brightest existing employees. I remember seeing a couple of surveys that showed the typical interviewer tended to hire the person who was most similar to him- or herself. Some organizations even became known

for the same-colored shirts everyone was expected to wear. It was a manufacturing model in which the company was judged on its success at churning out consistent carbon copies of human capital.

Synergism is a term popularized by Buckminster Fuller. Like the principle of yin/yang which has been known for centuries in the Eastern world, synergism recognizes that when we include divergent perspectives, the sum is greater than its parts. That, when a team includes people from various ethnic backgrounds, and all those perspectives are utilized, the team is more effective. That, when the marketing group incorporates people from all the generations, its campaigns are more successful. That, when the executive board includes men and women and listens to both perspectives, the board's decisions will be more sound.

## Stir-Fry

When it comes to diversity, our nation and most of its businesses have historically operated on the melting pot theory. It was great for forming a country, but it's time for a new metaphor. After all, when you melt everything down, it gets mixed together and it into a mass of gray sludge. The different groups lose their uniqueness. Everything becomes uniform and we lose that variety of perspectives. Potential goes untapped.

I think it works better to think of corporate diversity as a stir-fry where the cook adds a variety of things—genders, generations, ethnicities. Each retains its uniqueness and contributes flavor to the whole dish. Something wonderful is created that is far tastier, more nutritious, and more interesting than any one part. To lose even one ingredient would diminish the texture and taste.

Today's most effective organizations don't just tolerate diversity. They seek it out. They go looking for people of all nationalities, political beliefs, backgrounds, ages, and genders.

Today's best companies create competitive advantage by becoming employer of choice—by being the company all the best people want to work for. This requires a work culture that recognizes

and appreciates a variety of perspectives, styles, and opinions—where differences are sought out, valued, respected, and put to use. Business success requires a workforce that is educated about diversity, where associates have developed their awareness and appreciation for differences and have learned useful skills for bridging the gaps and tapping into the best of everyone.

*Denver-based consultant, speaker, and author Claire Raines is considered one of the nation's leading experts on generations at work. She has co-authored six books: *The Art of Connecting*, *Connecting Generations*, *Generations at Work*, *The Xers & The Boomers*, *Beyond Generation X*, and *Twentysomething*. She has been featured on CNN "Financial News" and "The Today Show". Publications include *Business Week* and *Fast Company*.*

*Her experience with generations at work led her to create the board game "Connecting Generations," and she has hosted three training videos on the topic. As a consultant, Raines has helped a wide range of companies more effectively manage generations at work. Her client list includes Microsoft, Toyota, American Express, McDonald's, Coca-Cola, MasterCard and Sprint.*

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# Adult Focused Training

► by Marianne Rowe-Dimas

Business trainers often find they have a mixture of age groups represented in a single training session, from Baby Boomers (born 1946 – 1964), to Generation Xers (born 1965 - 1977), to Millennials (born 1977–1995). There are myriad differences represented by these groups, but one thing they all have in common is they are comprised of adults.

Adult learning theory gives us guidelines about how we can help adults learn most effectively. This article provides information on how some of the basic principles of adult education can be applied to business training. It also outlines some of the things you as a trainer can do to engage your participants, and make your training sessions both beneficial and enjoyable for adults, regardless of age.

Malcolm Knowles, adult learning theorist who is considered the “Father of Adult Learning,” lists several characteristics of adult learners in his book *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*:

- Adults want to understand the reason or the need to learn something
- Adults learn by experimentation and by bringing their past experiences to new learning endeavors
- Adults are interested in learning when they believe the subject is of immediate relevance personally or professionally
- Adults want to solve problems and apply what they have learned immediately

## **Make It Interesting**

If your training is perceived by the adult learner as being personally relevant and practical, it will be of interest. Needless to say, participants are more likely to stay engaged and involved in the learning process if they feel it is of value to them. So, let your adult learners know up front the WIIFM (what’s in it for me). Make them aware of the benefits of the training, and explain how the concepts they learn can serve them in their personal or professional lives.

Regardless of how pertinent and meaningful the training may be, your delivery skills and training methods have an effect on whether participants’ interest will be sustained.

Your energy level, vocal variety, gestures, and posture play key roles in keeping your audience’s attention. If you are slouching, appear bored with the subject, or speak in a monotone, you can count on participants losing interest. In fact, you’ll probably put them to sleep.

Take into consideration that the average attention span of adults is approximately 12 – 20 minutes during uninterrupted lecture (Brookfield 1990). Certainly lecture has its place, but when you add variety by juxtaposing it with group discussion, role plays, and other types of participant interaction, you are much more likely to keep your audience’s attention and interest.

It is also wise to keep tuned-in to your participants’ body language. If they are yawning, staring out the window, or nodding off, take a quick break, quicken the pace, or have them engage in some type of activity. Once attention is lost, it is hard to recapture, so be alert to keeping it in the first place.

## **Make It Meaningful**

Adults come to training with different levels of knowledge about the subject to be covered. They also bring with them experiences they have acquired throughout their lives. These experiences contribute to their perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors. When adults use their past experiences in a learning situation, what they learn becomes more meaningful, and not only do they benefit, but other participants do as well. “Adults call upon their past experiences in the formulation of learning activities, as well as serving as one another’s resources in a learning event” (Merriam and Caffarella 1991). Adults want to feel like full-fledged participants in the learning process—so let them.

## **Make It Respectful**

Adults want to be treated with respect. They have questions to ask, ideas to share, and views to express. Let them know that their opinions are valuable and that their questions are important.

Adults do not want to be treated like students in a classroom, where the trainer looks, sounds, and acts like their high school teacher. This is true even for participants who have had positive school experiences. A trainer should instead take the role of encouraging and assisting participants to learn. He should respect different points of view, and never be condescending. If a participant is in a learning situation in which he feels uncomfortable, or one in which he is being “talked down” to, he is not going to learn and he may even become a distraction to others.

## **Make It Worthwhile**

Adults are very conscious of time because they realize how limited it is. “In the learning situation, adults prefer what can be learned today or in the near future to what can be learned over a longer period of time” (Draves 1997),

Most adults live accelerated business lives. They don’t want to feel they have wasted precious time in training that could have been put to better use back at their desks, or out in the field. In order for participants to perceive the training as worthwhile, they not only want to feel that it will benefit them, they want to be able to immediately apply the principles they have learned.

How can you help participants recognize the value of instructor–led training? At the end of the training session, or at the end of a particular section of the training, have participants identify what their personal objectives are relative to what they have just learned. Once the objectives have been identified, have participants list several things they can do in the upcoming weeks that will move them closer to attaining those objectives.

Let’s say that you facilitated customer service training and one of the participants identified the following objective: To improve my initial contact with customers. She chose to accomplish this by applying in the upcoming week the tips she learned about sounding more friendly and upbeat when answering customer calls. In order to chart her progress, she decided to record her side of customer phone conversations. She later played back the conversations, critiqued them, and noted areas for improvement.



While learners can't immediately achieve all of their objectives, they can work toward them by putting into practice what they have just learned. When this happens, not only is the learning more likely to stick, it is perceived as more valuable.

#### Final Tips

*Enjoy it.* The training itself should be enjoyable for both you and your participants. If you are doing what you love, your energy and excitement will be contagious.

*Be genuine.* Your adult learners will appreciate you being yourself, and it really helps not taking yourself too seriously. Showing yourself as a real person helps develop rapport with participants.

*Be flexible.* Sometimes we can't predict how our adult learners will react to what we have planned. Be prepared to change course to accommodate the needs and interests of the group.

#### Biography

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## CoPs for Cops:

by Kathleen H. Watland, B.S.W., M.S., Ed.D,  
William J. Kresse, M.S., J.D., CFE, CPA,  
Stephen M. Hallenbeck, B.S., J.D.

### Connecting Communities of Practice Through a MBA Program Offered to Chicago Police Officers

#### Connecting Communities of Practice and Academic Programs

A Community of Practice is a group of people informally bound together by a common interest, skill, and passion for a profession. These groups transcend organizational boundaries, generational divisions, and traditional hierarchies. They are sometimes viewed as a form of social capital that is directed at a specific profession or practice.

Communities of Practice (CoPs) are gaining recognition as effective organizational development and learning tools. They are particularly beneficial to organizations

that depend heavily on knowledge and information sharing.

Communities of Practice can serve as vehicles for sharing "Best Practices" in a profession or organization, and are especially valuable for communicating across divisions or organizational boundaries (Wenger 1999). They can also serve as effective learning structures to promote individual and organizational development.

Constellations of Communities of Practice, in unrealized forms, exist in most organizations (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002). Because of the joint interest

and passion for information related to the profession of the Community, innovation and creativity are often prevalent among members.

While interest in Communities of Practice is increasing, there has been little research on them in academic settings or professional programs. Ordinarily, continuing education programs offered at universities and colleges are viewed as beneficial only for the individual student, and not as having a direct role in organizational development or learning (Boyatzis, Cowen, and Kolb 1995).

However, the needs of individual learners and the needs of their organizations should

not be treated as being mutually exclusive. Rather, an academic program designed to address the intersection of the learning needs of the organization with the learning needs of the individual student has the potential to benefit both the organization and the individual.

The research presented in this paper demonstrates the effectiveness of a Community of Practice to solve many of the problems seen today with generational differences in one of the most hierarchical systems in our society; an urban police force.

### **Program Design**

In 1998, Saint Xavier University was invited to offer a Master of Business Administration (MBA) program for the officers and employees of the Chicago Police Department. Although introducing an MBA program to a law enforcement agency may seem an unusual fit at first glance, further reflection shows that it is not. Both private for-profit businesses and governmental agencies face identical challenges in the management of their three most essential resources: human capital, financial capital and intellectual capital.

In addition to providing a traditional MBA program that addresses the management of human and financial resources, we at Saint Xavier University wanted to serve the organizational needs of the Chicago Police Department. Specifically, Saint Xavier University sought to assist the second largest police department in the United States with the management of its intellectual capital through the brokering of knowledge and expertise across its organization.

While expecting the MBA program to assist the CPD with information sharing across the Department, Saint Xavier University also hoped that the MBA program would prove to be a forum where new officers, veteran officers, and officers of various rank and assignments could share their insights with each other. This additional benefit was viewed as especially important for a law enforcement organization, where the requisite paramilitary structure can inhibit the flow of information. As MBA graduate Lieutenant Bruce Lipman noted:

“In a department of 13,500 officers and 2,000 civilian members, you generally only share information with those officers that work in your area. The MBA classes provided an opportunity to meet and interact with department members from various units throughout

the city. Not only were professional relationships created, but friendships were as well. Five years after receiving my MBA, I regularly speak with my classmates about everything from work related issues to family matters.”

To encourage collaboration among the students, we included three specific design factors:

-we offered the program at the centrally located Chicago Police Department Education and Training Division facility rather than at an on-campus location

-we maximized opportunities for class discussions and group projects, enabling the officers to view each other as fellow students thereby neutralizing rank issues

-we provided meals at break time, encouraging students to stay and converse over the meal rather than leave the facility and go off in separate and individual directions

### **Studying the Program Design**

Approximately three years ago, we performed a qualitative study of participants in the MBA program at the Chicago Police Department. To gather data for this study, more than 100 officers and civilian employees participating in the MBA program at the Chicago Police Department Education and Training Division facility were surveyed, interviewed, and observed for the duration of an academic term.

Study participants represented various ranks throughout the department, all five detective areas, and more than two thirds of the CPD's geographical districts. Approximately 12% were considered “new officers” with less than 5 years experience on the job, about 58% were “veteran officers” having more than 11 years on the job, and approximately 10% of the participants had more than 20 years on the job.

The responses from the survey and the interview questions, along with the findings from the observations, provided valuable insights on the communication patterns of the program participants. Additionally, the areas of interest and themes of the participants' communications were also explored. Factors examined within this study included those specifics of the MBA program design that encouraged the emergence and connecting of Communities of Practice, the capabilities of these Communities, and the specific benefits that

their interaction and communication has provided to the Chicago Police Department.

### **Results**

Each participant acknowledged collaborating with, or serving as a resource for, other department employees whom they had met through the MBA program. Every participant also acknowledged becoming “better acquainted with” several department members through this collaboration. Approximately 78% of participants mentioned that they had learned new information about the department or policing through their collaboration with others in the MBA program, and more than 72% mentioned they shared this new information back at their district or unit. More than 69% of the participants believed that the opportunity to communicate and interact with others in the MBA program had a positive impact on the work of the department.

For example, Lieutenant Bruce Lipman, observed:

“The Saint Xavier University MBA classes, and specifically the lunch breaks, provide an opportunity to meet and interact with department members from various units throughout the city. The lunch breaks become a virtual information sharing session in relation to both what was being taught in class and ideas, experiences, knowledge and problem solving strategies relating to departmental issues.”

These relationships and communication patterns provided evidence of the emergence of Communities of Practice for stewarding information and knowledge across many “boundaries” within the department including rank, geographical locations, and years on the job.

### **Discussion**

This study has implications for organizations that offer training, provide support for academic programs, or design academic programs. Anecdotal data identified specific instances of improved processes within the department. These include:

- improved training opportunities
- refined district plans
- increased collaboration across district boundaries
- greater productivity for beat meetings
- additional access to departmental expertise
- a general feeling of increased confidence in the department

Additionally, participants who were new officers (less than 5 years) articulated numerous opportunities to interact with, and learn from, more veteran officers (11 to 20 years on the job).

### Conclusion

Institutions of higher learning routinely design programs that focus solely on outcomes related to individual learning. However, in designing the MBA program for the Chicago Police Department, we purposely planned to offer more than a traditional MBA educational program. Our plan provided learning opportunities and outcomes far beyond those capable of being measured by final examinations. Specifically, by intentionally designing an MBA program that would act as an incubator for emergent Communities of Practice, non-traditional and far-reaching learning opportunities have been created that impact and benefit both the individual learner and the sponsoring organization.

In the words of MBA graduate Sergeant James Marino:

“The classroom brought us together, creating a community of officers discussing and exchanging our thoughts and ideas on how we can solve problems and make our department better. We found encouragement to communicate and be creative; putting forth a solution and bringing it to life is empowering and contagious. We discovered a valuable resource in the free and open exchange of ideas and thoughts and could be applied to the Department’s goals and direction.”

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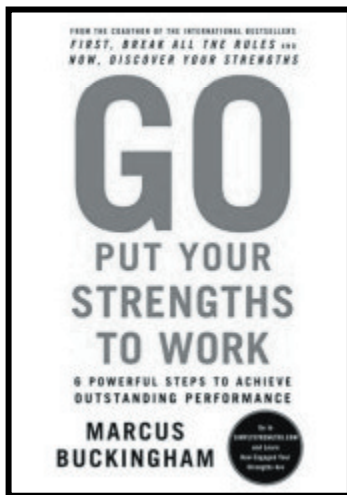
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CCASTD is sponsoring Marcus Buckingham, co-author of “First, Break All the Rules” and “Now, Discover Your Strengths,” in a special speaking engagement on March 13 from 10:30 a.m. to noon.



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