



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

January 9, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

I attach a very interesting article submitted by Louie Sarmiento, based on scientific studies. I encourage you to read the article, as it details the principal constraint to growth of our Order. There are Lodges out there - in fact, your Lodge may be one of them - that are, essentially, composed of members the vast majority of whom are of one generation. These Lodges have literally skipped an entire generation - and sometimes have skipped TWO generations. These Lodges are composed of members in their 60's and 70's and 80's - and have failed to bring in members of the prior generation. And even when these Lodges bring in a few younger members, the older generation fails to cede power and authority to the new generation. All this discourages growth.

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Dave Rosenberg
Grand Warden

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

By Louie Blake S. Sarmiento, MA

According to researchers Smola and Sutton (2002), a generation refers to people born in the same general time span who share key historical or social life experiences. Behavioural sociologists suggest that each generation lasts approximately two decades, after which it fades into the background as the next generation comes into its own. Various research studies claim that each generation is unique and has its own identity that includes values, maturation cycles and birth years that translate into differing personality traits, attitudes, mental health, and behaviors (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010). According to Gursoy, Maier and Chi (2008), there are currently three generations that are active in organizations today and they have differences in terms of values and attitudes:

- **Baby Boomers** (born between 1943 and 1960) – In the United States, this generation was affected by the civil rights and women's movements, the Vietnam War, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, and Watergate. Most people who belong in this generation respect authority and hierarchy and are willing to wait their turn for promotions and rewards. For them, seniority is more important than merit. Findings also indicated that Boomers like to be in charge, like to be the star of the show and getting credit for everything perceived as positive in an organization. They are happy to abide by the rules and very resistant to change because they tend to be comfortable with the way they have always done things. They grew up in an era of bureaucracy. Hence, they have a tendency to focus on laws, procedures and titles over practicality and



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easy processes. Technology is also a big issue for most of them because they are not technologically savvy.

- **Generation X** (born between 1961 and 1980) - Members of Generation X are the children of older Baby Boomers who grew up in a period of financial, familial and societal insecurity. They witnessed their parents get laid-off, get divorced and are the first individuals predicted to earn less than their parents did. They were influenced by MTV, AIDS and worldwide competition and are accustomed to receiving instant feedback from playing computer and video games.

As a result, most are the kind who wants to solve problems immediately. The best environment for them is the one that is fun, keeps them busy, but not too busy, so that they can do fun things while working. They tend to be informal and direct, often skipping hierarchal protocol and going directly to the manager or leader who can answer their questions. For them, merit is more important than seniority. Just because one is older doesn't always mean one knows better. In addition, they have very low tolerance for bureaucracy and rules. They tend to prefer organizations that offer flexible schedules, independence, professional growth, mentors, interesting work and time off.

- **Generation Y** (born between 1981 and 2000) - This generation was born into technology and often know more about digital world than their teachers and parents. It can be safely said that Generation X was raised with new technologies, it must be noted that Generation Y were totally immersed in the new technologies of their era. They expect to have the latest technology at their fingertips. They may expect that everyone will communicate with them on Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Twitter and so on. Hence, they expect most members of an organization to communicate via these social networking sites.

Most of them are known to be great collaborators and favour teamwork. This might be due to having functioned in groups in school, organized sports and extracurricular activities from a very young age; but they are also very independent, self-confident and self-expressive. Although they believe in collective action, they have a tendency to question every rule because they believe rules are made to be broken. They simply reject the notion that they have to stay within the rigid confines of a bureaucracy or procedure.

It is argued that these differences can result in significant conflict and failure to deal with these generational differences could lead to misunderstandings, miscommunications, and mixed signals. One reason for this is differing experiences with technologies. Older workers such as the Baby Boomers grew up in an era without computers while Generation X grew up when such technology was introduced and generation Y grew up with it. When generations fail to communicate, it can decrease membership retention, affect morale and lead to grievances, complaints and conflicts in the lodge or organization. As a matter of fact, it results to members quitting in an organization or just stop attending meetings. Understanding generational differences, on the other hand, can bring together wisdom with innovation, balance idealism and



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pragmatism, and combine risk-taking with stability. People who come together from different perspectives always have the potential to bring different thoughts and ideas to problem solving.

During the latter part of the 20th century, almost all fraternal organizations — including the Odd Fellows and Rebekahs — have experienced a rapid decline in membership. In the last decade, however, there has been a renewed interest from men and women of all ages, but particularly younger people, in becoming members of the Odd Fellows and Rebekahs. The coming generation is re-discovering new forms of community through the lodges and this is something aging lodges should take advantage. It is an acceptable fact today that a number of our lodges are suffering an aging membership. If lodges, whose average age of membership is 60 years old or more will not make a



radical effort to retain younger people, these lodges will sooner die out. Several lodges are already successful in retaining younger members while several are still unsuccessful. One reason for this, according to findings, is failure to bridge these generational differences.

Characteristic of lodges that are successful in retaining younger members:

- Majority of the officers of their lodge are also younger (at least 50 years old or below).
- Senior members avoid always being in control and give younger members the opportunity to lead and decide on their own.
- They are involved in hands-on community projects and not just handing-out a check.
- They organize social activities that are fun for members and non-members.
- They perform the degrees of initiation in a solemn and dignified manner.
- They are more inclusive to non-members and openly discuss about their Lodge to the public - having set-up websites, online forums and facebook pages that discuss about the Odd Fellows or Rebekahs.

To submit articles for IOOF News, e-mail: oddfellows_publicrelations@yahoo.com