

BY STEPHANIE RAMSEY

How can the information we know about the various generations help funeral service owners and managers? Let's consider various scenarios for attracting employees for certain positions in which a specific generation might be a good fit.

TRADITIONALIST

- ▶ Born between 1900 and 1945
- ▶ May have experienced World War II or the Korean War
- ▶ Either lived through the Great Depression or were raised by parents who did
- ▶ Experienced the wonder of the Space Age
- ▶ Understand how to survive desperate times through hard work
- ▶ Many experienced both poverty and prosperity
- ▶ Raised with the philosophy that everyone has to "pay their dues" and "earn their way"
- ▶ Disciplined, focused and prefer a clear line of authority at work
- ▶ Training is done on the job
- ▶ Missing a day of work is unheard of
- ▶ Loyalty to employer is expected; frequently worked for same company their entire life

1900-1945

BABY BOOMER

- ▶ Born between 1946 and 1965
- ▶ May have fought in Vietnam or for civil rights
- ▶ Listened to the music at Woodstock
- ▶ Space travel was a reality, as was the possibility of war with Russia.
- ▶ Believed the American Dream could be achieved through diligent work
- ▶ Invented the word "workaholic"
- ▶ Personal success only achieved through good work ethic
- ▶ Well educated and dedicated to employers
- ▶ Process-oriented with a strong "do whatever it takes to get the job done" attitude
- ▶ Many re-entering the job market; cannot afford to live on the funds set aside for retirement

1946-1965

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

How funeral homes can leverage the diverse experiences of five generations.

GENERATION X

- ▶ Born between 1966 and 1979
- ▶ Typically dual-income or single-parent families
- ▶ Considered the first true daycare generation
- ▶ Experienced Watergate, the energy crisis and Y2K
- ▶ Developed a disdain for politicians as nothing but deceivers
- ▶ Grew up having to take care of themselves
- ▶ Skeptical of authority figures
- ▶ Independent and self-reliant
- ▶ Like to have a say in work environment
- ▶ Do not mind moving from one employer to the next
- ▶ Task-focused and results-oriented
- ▶ Prefer to balance work and family life
- ▶ Smart and willing to be educated
- ▶ A job is just a job.

1966-1979

MILLENNIAL

- ▶ Born between 1980 and 1994
- ▶ More likely to have been children of divorce
- ▶ Heard or saw school terror attacks and the 9/11 attacks
- ▶ More sheltered as parents sought to protect them
- ▶ First to be barraged by digital media
- ▶ Very sociable and like to be connected to everyone
- ▶ Overindulged but ambitious
- ▶ Effective multitaskers; enjoy working on teams
- ▶ Anticipate the ability to influence the terms and conditions of work environment and their role
- ▶ A job seems to be a way to spend time between weekend activities
- ▶ Motto is “work smarter, not harder”

1980-1994

GENERATION Z

- ▶ Born between 1995 and 2016
- ▶ Have seen crisis period with terrorism throughout the world
- ▶ Global recession likely made them aware they may be inheriting significant financial problems.
- ▶ Do not remember a time when technology not completely integrated into daily lives
- ▶ Most will have cellphones by the time they are in junior high or sooner.
- ▶ Tech savvy
- ▶ Used to having information at their fingertips
- ▶ Communication style dictated by technology rather than personal relationships

1995-2016

Baby boomers. Latchkey kids. Millennials. The Silent Generation. These terms referring to the different generations have been bandied about for years. Let's look at their impact on the funeral service industry.

It's not news that funeral business owners have complained about not being able to find the kind of quality employee they did years ago, which points to the fact that generational issues are indeed impacting the industry. Perhaps gaining insight on these different generations will provide funeral service employers a clearer path to identifying and retaining the employees they seek.

Currently, there are five generational descriptions: traditionalist, baby boomer, Generation X, millennial and Generation Z. Basically, these terms are used to reference demographic groups born in specific years. Researchers have named these segments and profiled them as well. Each demographic has key characteristics that are driven by the attitudes and influences experienced during the environment in which they grew up. These characteristics impact what attracts them to a job and whether they stay at one business or move on to another company. Let's take a closer look at these categories and their work philosophies.

GENERATION	BORN BETWEEN	KEY TRAITS	WHAT ATTRACTS THEM	WHAT KEEPS THEM	WORK PERCEPTION
TRADITIONALIST	1900-1945	Dedicated, hard work, company first	Job security, respect, stability	Recognition, obligation, security	Doer
BABY BOOMER	1946-1965	Strong work ethic, goal-centric, resourceful	Position title, authority, responsibility	Comfortable environment, recognition of contribution	Live to Work
GENERATION X / LATCHKEY KID	1966-1979	Independent, self-sufficient, adaptable	Like positions that are results driven, like specific task, get paid to get job done	Flexible schedules, good work/family life balance, not all about money	Work to Live
MILLENNIAL / GENERATION Y	1980-1994	Diverse, highly educated, cynical	Ability to set terms of employment, an interesting position, want to be well paid	Fun, flexible environment that uses technology effectively, do not want to be bored	"Me First"
GENERATION Z / GEN NEXT	1995-2016	Global, connected, technological	Use technology to reach, work environment that fosters team environment, data necessary for job easily available.	Supportive work environment, ongoing training, balanced family/work life	Techies

SCENARIO 1

A multi-location funeral business is looking for several part-time funeral attendants. Because they are part-time/as-needed positions, it's a challenge to find interested candidates. Af-

ter a few brainstorming sessions with senior staff, it's decided they'll target two groups – retired seniors/traditionalists and high school or college students/Gen Z – but the firm is not sure how to attract them.

How so you reach them?

Retired seniors/traditionalists need the personal touch. Let them know they are needed. This is achieved by word of mouth or approaching them at the senior center one on one after speaking to their group. Explain the role, what is needed, to whom they will report and the hours required. They like facts and enjoy responsibility.

For *students*, contact the schools to find out if they have online job posting boards. Stress the flexibility of the job and that they can work only when they are available. Meet them on campus initially, as many have never been to a funeral home.

How do you retain them?

Treat the *seniors* with respect and acknowledge their contributions. Saying "thank you" goes a long way with this group. Pay them fairly.

Pay the *students* fairly, allow for a flexible schedule, provide training and discuss career opportunities. Use technology to communicate with them.

SCENARIO 2

An expanding regional funeral service business that has been growing quickly is looking to add several licensed funeral directors. The funeral homes being acquired are owned by individuals who are ready to retire and do not have anyone interested in taking over the business. The regional business is looking for a wide range of full-time, experienced, licensed staff in several states. Because of the scope of their needs, they are likely to find qualified staff from among baby boomers, Gen Xers and millennials. However, approaching them and retraining them are completely different things.

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How do you find them?

For the *baby boomers*, use word of mouth and post in industry publications, at local churches and with community organizations or clubs.

Gen Xers can be attracted by word of mouth; they also follow the money, so post in publications outside your immediate market area and offer a moving allowance and attractive pay. Use the online job board within your state.

Millennials are tech savvy, so online job websites and other job resources are your friends. This generation tends to be willing to change employers for an attractive promotion with further career opportunities. Create a career package to illustrate to them.

How do you keep these employees?

Baby boomers: Give them responsibility and show them appreciation. These employees are dedicated to their employers. Their self-worth is tied to the level of responsibility and authority they have. Pay them fairly and they will stay.

Gen Xers: They want to have quality family life and their job helps them achieve a standard of family life they want. Help them achieve that balance. Offer a work environment that encourages teamwork.

Millennials: They are ambitious and driven. Give them projects to accomplish. Flexibility in their work schedules will also go a long way. Have a work environment that incorporates technology as much as possible.

Clearly, a funeral business owner cannot create a custom work environment for a single employee of a specific generation. However, a blending of key situational elements in which the different generational segments enjoy working is possible and can be beneficial in retaining staff that in today's market seem to find it so much easier to look down the street for the next job opportunity.

The table on the facing page provides a short key to the various generational segments.

Understanding how the different generations not only perceive the world but how each specifically works will provide owners and managers ideas on how to structure business environments and positions to make them more attractive. With the increasing challenges in finding quality employees in the funeral industry, it's at least worth considering. ☰

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