



By Stephanie Ramsey; The Foresight Companies, LLC

There is much talk through all US industries about the difficulties encountered in employing Millennials and Generation Z's. It is perceived that they have a much different approach to the work environment than Generation X's and Baby Boomers. Some businesses tend to attract and hire within just a couple generations. For example, Facebook and Google are well known for their trendsetting work environments and are highly attractive to the Millennial crowd. Funeral service is challenged on how to integrate the new generations into a historically based business model.

The reality is that funeral businesses always had and likely always will have multiple generations within the business working toward the common goal of serving the families in their communities. For funeral businesses today, the question is how to create an effective work environment that is hospitable to multiple generations so they can continue to provide quality services to their families.

It is important for funeral business owners/managers to understand what is attractive in the work environment for each generation and determine if there is a way to craft a work place atmosphere that will meet these varying needs. Funeral businesses need certain employee tools such as policies and procedures to operate efficiently. Each of these generations perceive these tools differently. Each of these generations approach their work place with a different attitude. These generations include:

- Silent Generation (Traditionalist) – born 1925 – 1945
- Baby Boomers – born 1946 – 1965
- Generation X (Gen X'ers) – born 1966 – 1979
- Generation Y (Millennials) – born 1979 – 1994
- Generation Z (Gen Z's) – born after 1995

Generations in the workplace

TRADITIONALISTS



are stereotyped as old fashioned but are known for their hard work and loyalty to the company. Their core values of compliance, respect for authority, and duty translate to their work environment. They are rule

followers who assume if they are not receiving feedback they are performing their responsibilities properly. They tend to be more formal in their communication style and may not be as comfortable with technology as other generations. Traditionalists work well in an environment where there are clearly established policies and procedures. They enjoy a work place where everyone knows their roles and responsibilities.

Traditionalist's experience and knowledge can be very useful in the funeral business. They can be exceptional mentors to younger generations when placed in the appropriate framework. This framework needs to establish clearly how the mentorship works for the benefit of both the mentor

and the mentee. It is important to make sure that both parties know the objective and time line of the mentorship relationship. Both participants can learn from each other if they keep an open mind and respectful attitude.

BOOMERS



are responsible for coining the term workaholic. They are hardworking, ambitious, and money motivated. In fact, they frequently measure their success by the number of hours they have worked in a week. They are

team players who give their loyalty to the members of their team rather than to the company. They also expect loyalty in return and can be devastated when that does not occur. While they can and do use technology, they prefer

face-to-face interaction or telephone calls. Relationship building is critical for them which makes them extremely successful in dealing with families who are planning funeral services.

Baby boomers tend to be independent and are not concerned about formal policies to follow. They are quite happy to “wing it” when dealing with a situation. While it is beneficial to have employees who can “think on their feet”, this trait does not allow for a consistent response from all employees to similar situations. Baby boomers are also not very interested in feedback as they are optimistic about their performance and don’t necessarily like to have that optimism brought back to reality. They may not agree that policies and procedures are necessary for daily business operations. However, when presented in a manner that focuses on how such items create a work environment that will allow for efficient operations and increased profitability within the business, they are willing to buy in. Offering them the opportunity to provide feedback in the designing these procedures and creating effective teams will speak directly to their core values of crusading for a cause and team building.

GENERATION X'ERS



tend to be very self-reliant and skeptical. They work autonomously and are task-oriented. However, work-life balance is important to them.

Gen X'ers are the cross over generation in using more technology such as email and texting. They tend to become loyal to one person rather than to a company or team. This generation truly believes in working smarter not harder which can be a boon for the funeral business.

As employees, Gen X'ers desire schedules that allow them to have time for their families (e.g. school plays, football games, band concerts, etc.) These are the employees who are always looking for ways to improve processes to save time or improve the quality of services to the families. They enjoy a more casual and friendly work environment that is comfortable and inviting.

Gen X'ers also welcome the opportunity to continue learning. Offering them online continuing education or seminars they can attend would be welcomed and make them feel valued. They are willing to follow policies and procedures as well as receive feedback. However, they need an outlet and pathway to voice their concerns or ideas for improvements.

MILLENNIALS



are goal-focused and self-directed. They are eager and excel at multitasking with a “what’s next?” attitude.

Millennials can have a short attention span. They work to live rather than the Baby Boomer’s live to work attitude.

Millennials are open to mentorships from those they believe can help them achieve their long-term goals. They are comfortable with technology (in fact, slightly tech dependent), especially social media. Millennials want to work in an environment where there is an opportunity to learn and achieve personal fulfillment. They crave feedback. The more frequent the feedback the more content they are in their role.

They do tend to be job hoppers if the work environment does not meet their need for personal satisfaction so leadership from funeral owners/managers and relationships with their peer employees is important.

Established policies and procedures give them direction that helps them perform their task. They also provide guidelines on which feedback can be based. Millennials want to have a purpose for their work environment. Job descriptions can assist them with understanding their role within the funeral business. A work environment where they are given the opportunity to work on teams to complete projects or accomplish task is fulfilling for them.

GENERATION Z'S



are the newest generation and we are still learning about their desired work environment. What we know so far is they are creative and unique. They are flexible, enjoy personal freedom, and can be self-reliant.

They do not feel they need to be part of team, but are willing to collaborate to accomplish a common goal.

This generation was born into techno-proficiency. They process information at a much faster rate than other generations. They need the mentorship of the Traditionalists, but might find the framework constraining as many traditionalists move at a slower pace than what they are comfortable with, especially in learning the funeral business.

It is best to establish a formal mentoring process that runs two to four weeks at a time focusing on specific objectives. They need feedback in small doses in real-time throughout the mentoring process. Welcoming this generation into the funeral business takes careful preparation as Gen Z's thrive on acceleration, but serving families is not about speed. It is about quality. Communication is key in creating a work environment that will attract Gen Z's. They enjoy creative but comfortable work environment that will embrace what they can bring to the business. They will follow policies and procedures if expectations are clearly presented and implementation is consistent.

Regardless of generation, policies and procedures are vital to the efficient and effective operation of the funeral business.

Stephanie Ramsey is the HR Specialist for OGR Supply Partner, The Foresight Companies, LLC. She has a unique perspective on the challenges funeral and cemetery business owners and managers face when dealing with employee issues. She has written many employee handbooks and other job-specific documents for clients nationwide. Stephanie writes a quarterly newsletter on HR matters that can be viewed at www.f4sight.com. She can be reached at Stephanie@f4sight.com.

While some of the generations may find policies and procedures restrictive, they are valuable tools for the business and provide the employees guidelines for their responsibilities and tasks. Creating a work environment to meet the needs of all generations on the surface may appear overwhelming, but when digging down to the root of each generation there is a commonality. A comfortable work environment that encourages employees to treat each other with respect as well as creating a methodology for employees voices to be heard on different issues.

Employee handbooks and procedures manuals can clearly define the atmosphere within your funeral business as well as create the ability for funeral owners/managers to implement and enforce that defined atmosphere. Whether an employee is a Baby Boomer or a Gen Z, they both want to work in a safe and comfortable work place where they know what is expected of them. Start by defining for your employees what their work place environment will be.

An advertisement for ASD Funeral Communications for 2019. The top of the ad features a blue banner with the text "Funeral Communications for 2019" in white. Below this, the text "THIS IS YOUR YEAR" is displayed in large, blue, sans-serif font. A woman with dark hair, wearing a dark blue blazer over a white collared shirt and a pearl necklace, stands with her arms crossed, smiling. At the bottom of the ad, there is a white box with the text "Enhance Family Experience", "Instant Access Messaging", and "Gain Peace of Mind" in blue. The ASD logo is in the bottom right corner, and the website "myASD.com" and phone number "1-800-868-9950" are in the bottom left corner.

Funeral Communications for 2019

THIS IS
YOUR
YEAR

Enhance Family Experience
Instant Access Messaging
Gain Peace of Mind

myASD.com 1-800-868-9950