

MEMBERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP (MAYBE)

- Why would anyone who is retired and has the luxury to engage in leisure activities agree to take on leadership responsibilities?
- I'm tired of doing it. Let someone else take it on for a change.
- If I agree to do it, I'll be stuck with it forever.
- Let one of the newer folks take on the job.

Before we address these statements about leadership now, let's look at the characteristics of NARFE membership and leadership now and in the future to see what portends for membership, leadership and, possibly, the future of NARFE.

Silent Generation (born 1925 –1945)

- Reverence for authority
- Quest for stability and economic security
- High levels of civic engagement
- Security
- Honor, duty, sacrifice
- Conformity, authors of rules
- Delayed reward

This generation is strongly influenced by family and religion. Education is viewed as a dream, and leisure time is understood as reward for hard work. This generation's discomfort with change and focus on stability and rules is often attributed to the painful upheaval associated with the Great Depression and WWII.

Baby Boomers (born 1946 – 1964)

- Achieving ideals
- Self-fulfillment and personal meaning, fitness conscious
- Strong commitment to *the work* (as opposed to the organization)
- Optimism
- Involvement, often short term
- Independent, individuality
- Self-centered

The 1960s and 1970s were a time of revolution and challenging the status quo. Baby boomers rebelled against authority in their youth (as all generations do), but they challenged leadership in the work place with the intention of replacing the leaders with leaders who were more harmonious, optimistic, and committed to people's development. This required hard work, virtually inventing the sixty-hour work week.

Generation X (born 1965 – 1984)

- Self-reliant, more independent
- Challenging leadership structures (not just leaders)
- Work-life balance
- Global perspective, diversity
- Techno-literacy
- Informality
- Pragmatism

Generation X was the first generation of “latch-key” kids (taking care of themselves after school). Trust in organizations or an expectation of long-term commitment was reduced. Generation X tend to want to take care of themselves, including an emphasis on work/life balance.

Millennials – Generation Y (born 1985 – 2004)

- Optimism, civic duty
- Confidence
- Achievement
- Sociability, network centric
- Street smarts, message savvy
- Technology as a given
- Diversity as a given

Growing up in a time of prosperity and an explosion of information and communications, Millennials seem to match up with the Silent Generation’s focus on optimism and civic duty. Work, leisure, and social activities tend to become intertwined, and having been bombarded with marketing messages and “spin” since birth, they require different levels of communication. They grew up with much more diversity than even Generation X did, so comfort with diversity is high – to the point where they might not even notice it.

The reason for examining these generational differences is that each has developed their particular set of values, attitudes and preferences. As you can see, the stability, security, and “don’t rock the boat” philosophy that has been the foundation of the Silent Generation (us, mostly) has evolved gradually through the subsequent generations into a philosophy (the Millennials) that virtually celebrates individuality, non-conformity and mutability as the norm.

But what about our immediate concerns about membership and leadership? Let’s look at the generation that should provide the new membership and leadership for NARFE for years to come – the Baby Boomers. Will they? Let’s take a closer look at the Boomers’ characteristics.

Barriers to Boomer Membership and Leadership

- Boomers don't want to acknowledge themselves as "aging" and don't want to be classified as "seniors." Seniors are old folks.
- They are not "joiners" preferring independent activities.
- They tend to vote less.
- They read newspapers less.
- They are generally less community minded and are not known for volunteering, except for school activities and coaching sports teams.
- Many Boomers retired from Federal service have chosen full-time second careers or part-time employment.
- They still have college age children or are paying off tuition loans and expenses.
- They are caring for aging parents.
- Boomers prefer physical fitness and education to more passive, sedentary activities.

Enablers to Boomer Membership and Leadership

- Boomers, in general, are well educated, motivated, and want to leave their mark on society.
- Boomers have extensive managerial and leadership experience.
- They are technologically more savvy than the previous generation.
- They like a challenge if it can be proved to be worthwhile and benefit them.

Serious Questions to Ask Ourselves

- As an organization, have we become complacent? Is the necessary organizational energy there?
- Have we "sold" NARFE as a worthwhile organization to join?
- Are we structured organizationally to encourage new members, most especially the Boomers?
- Have we provided what is needed to sustain our membership?
- Have we done what is needed to encourage and develop new leaders in our chapters? Are we strip-mining our current resources?

Let's do It

- Term limits, a necessity.
- Shared responsibility, a success story.
- Getting the Boomers involved, however on their terms.