



September 2008

Our Army is doing great. We know exactly how many accident fatalities we experience; we don't, however, know how many we prevent. And the latter is where the good news stories are found. But, we, as an Army, can do better in both areas.

Every day and everywhere I go, I see firsthand engaged Leaders making a positive impact in the lives of Soldiers, Families and Civilians. Where I believe we experience a breakdown is at two critical points: the level of understanding and the magnitude of our engagement strategy.

Allow me to explain: Several research institute surveys define cultural generations by categorizing groups based on various criteria and expectations. Researchers allow different generation groups to select from a defined list those criteria they believe best categorize and define their age groups. This simplification of generations provides Army Leaders with a window of clarity to gain a basic understanding of our Soldiers.

For brevity, let's use the "2008 World of Work" survey results discussed in the Kansas City Star on July 7, 2008. This survey samples a segment of the U.S. population based on character traits and ages. In my opinion, there is no set of criteria that is completely descriptive of any generation, but the likenesses I see in our Army's culture are amazingly similar. The characterization of generations by age, matched against the top five traits chosen from 31 character traits, are:

Gen Y-ers (born 1980 - 1990)

- Make personal friends at the workplace
- Sociable
- Think out of the box
- Open to new ideas
- Friendly

Gen X-ers (born 1965 - 1979)

- Confident
- Competent
- Willing to take responsibility
- Willing to put in the extra time to get the job done
- Ethical

Boomers (born 1946 - 1964)

- Strong work ethic
- Competent
- Ethical
- Ability to handle a crisis
- Willing to take on responsibility
- Good communication skills

Mature (born 1925 - 1945)

- Strong work ethic
- Ethical
- Committed to the company
- Competent
- Confident

Why is any of this important and why do I take you through this exercise? I consider this instructional in crafting solutions to lessen the losses of our Generation Y Teammates. Further, our Generation Y brothers and sisters are, according to the number of recorded deaths our Army has experienced, our most vulnerable Teammates.

How do we target the Generation Y-ers who seem to be in the majority of the Army's accidental fatalities? Generation Y Soldiers' expectations are defined and developed by past influencers (Family, church, media, etc.). To forcibly change and positively adjust their lifestyles without degrading what they bring to the fight is tough work. Another approach I suggest and ask you to explore involves Generation X-ers and Boomers using some "out of the box" thinking themselves.

This non-conventional approach may put you out of your comfort zone, but the chances that it will widen the possibility for success are high. At the very minimum, we will increase our awareness of this target-rich environment for change. Maybe the Generation X-ers and Boomers, not the Generation Y-ers, are the ones who need to adjust their approach and think "out of the box" to create messages and solution sets that transcend the communication barrier between them and the Generation Y-ers.

Each generation is unique and Generation Y-ers are no different. But Generation X-ers' and Boomers' ability to crack the code on the mechanics of what makes the Generation Y-ers unique holds unexplored possibilities of preventing losses. Our efforts surely will create a positive change as we, Leaders, grow based upon our enhanced understanding of Generation Y-ers who seem to be the most vulnerable.

Army Safe is Army Strong !!

WILLIAM H. FORRESTER
Brigadier General, U.S. Army
Commanding