

From the President



by Jerry Gintz

WAA – Free-Falling Without A Parachute:

We pick a theme for our Newsletter, each month. This month it is membership. This will not be a typical plea for membership with a listing of all WAA's self-acclaimed benefits, but rather a chilling appraisal of just what is in store for WAA and its membership over the next decade. Strap on the parachute, or the landing WILL be hard!

As are most associations in this country, WAA is facing the largest shift in human capital in history. That is, from the Baby-Boomers to Gen-Xers and Gen-Yers (Echo-Boomers). Baby-Boomers are joiners, inspired by a strong sense of duty and need to belong. Gen-Xers and Gen-Yers want opportunities to lead, learn and make a difference. These two latter groups are much more attentive to the value an association brings to them, rather than any sense of loyalty-at-all-cost. Many boomers are convinced that the interests and reasons for joining their association is an age-difference and that the Gen-Xers and Gen-Yers will "age" into the same reasons to join their association, as they have had. They couldn't be any more wrong, than as a sky-diver failing to strap on the parachute. It is a "generational" difference, NOT an "age" difference. Each generation has its own unique set of life events and values. Failing to realize this will be the cause of extinction for many professional associations in this country.

There are 120 million Gen-Xers and Gen-Yers, combined. They are like a herd of stampeding elephants compared to the 80 million Baby-Boomers. When we look around our associations we see lots of Baby-Boomers, but far fewer Gen-Xers and even fewer Gen-Yers. Baby-Boomers, in associations, will be halved in the next 5 years and will effectively disappear within 10 years. Ten thousand Baby-Boomers turn 65 EVERY day and that will continue for the next 19 years!

On the chance that some Gen-Xers and Gen-Yers may read this article, I want to emphatically state that the leadership within WAA, along with its association management team, is taking serious action in addressing the "generational hand-off" of this viable and important association. Right-to-practice issues are not generational issues, but rather profession issues. These will continue to be challenged no matter what generation is running things. That's the stake in the ground, so-to-speak, from which WAA measures its effectiveness, as an association that brings value to its members, regardless of which generation they belong to. Current leadership's challenge is with how to engage the Gen-Xers and Gen-Yers in guarding the right-to-practice issues in ways that fulfill their generational uniqueness and values. Of course there needs to be collaboration in numbers, in order to do so (i.e. associations).

WAA, like so many legacy associations in America, is running a bit behind in developing just the right mix of benefits that are of importance to the Gen-Xers and Gen-Yers, based on their unique set of life experiences and values. Throw in changes in technology and how that affects all of us and how we transact relationships and it's not difficult to understand the need for pro-active approaches from each generation, within our profession. Such pro-activity is important if we are going to engage in identifying and then implementing the right mix of benefits that meet the needs of the younger generations, especially if WAA is going to remain viable and relevant, going forward.

So, easy as it is to acknowledge that free-falling without a parachute is not going to end well, it is a bit more nuanced of an understanding that, even with a parachute, it is very important that the packing of the parachute be done reliably and with good skill, lest there be an equally hard landing.

This is definitely a time when WAA is welcoming and encouraging the Gen-Xers and the Gen-Yers to engage with the predominant Baby-Boomer leadership within WAA, to set the stage for your future association. Talk about an opportunity to make a difference, here it is! Talk about an opportunity to lead, here it is! Talk about an opportunity to learn, that just plainly goes without saying!

Over the next 5 years, WAA will be purposeful in learning how to best “pack the parachute”. We will do so by continuing to read and implement recommendations that come from association experts, such as the author of the book “The End Of Membership As We Know It”, Sarah L. Sladek. The reading of her book (and others of equal challenge) inspired me to write this article.

They have convinced me; this concerned Baby-Boomer!
