



# THE COACHING JOURNAL

May 2015

## GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES AND COACHING

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Much has been written about generational challenges in the workplace, from 'Working with Five Generations in the Workplace' [\[1\]](#) by Forbes in 2011 to "Winning the Generation Game" [\[2\]](#) by The Economist in 2013. How does this impact our coaching leaders in the workplace? With this article I will present a conceptual model put forth by Neil Howe and William Strauss in their book "The Fourth Turning", followed by one approach to effectively coach people of different generations.

Let's begin by understanding generations. In 2012 Brett and Kate McKay shared this:

Talking about generations is simply a way to acknowledge that because different age groups are raised in less or more nurturing families, and experience historical events at different times in their development, their "generational persona"-their "attitudes on family life, gender roles, institutions, politics, religion, lifestyle, and the future" are shaped in a distinct way. It's also important to keep in mind that no generation is "better" or "worse" than another; each generation has unique strengths and weaknesses, each is important, and each provides balance and self-correction to the cycle of history.[\[3\]](#)

According to Strauss and Howe, a generation is the "aggregate of all people born over a span of roughly twenty years, or about the length of one phase of life: childhood (0-20 years old), young adulthood (21-41), midlife (41-62), elderhood (63-83), late elderhood (84+). People "belong to a generation that happens to be passing through an age bracket - a generation with it's own memories, language, habits, beliefs, and life lessons." [\[4\]](#) The people who comprise a generation change as they age.

Strauss and Howe discovered a pattern of generational events they call turnings, each of which lasts about 20-22 years. They identify a four-stage cycle of social or mood eras (i.e. turnings) that lasts about 80-90 years. Each turning can be likened to a season: First (High) is Spring;

Second (Awakening) is Summer; Third (Unraveling) is Autumn; Fourth (Crisis) is Winter.

A generation is born approximately every twenty years and people are living well into the 90s. Thus the current generations are G.I., Silent, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials (or Gen Y), and Homeland. Each generation experiences "four turnings" every approximately 80 years. Historical turnings and generational archetypes work together to fuel the generational cycles. Because each of the four generation types experience the four historical turnings at different times in their lives, each generation is shaped differently by the formative moments in history.

According to Wikipedia [5], the timing and turnings of the generations alive today are:

Generation	Type	Birth years	Formative era	Ages
G.I.	Hero (Civic)	1901-1924 (23)	Unraveling: World War I/Prohibition	91-114
Silent	Artist (Adaptive)	1925-1942 (17)	Crisis: Great Depression/ World War II	73-90
Baby Boom	Prophet (Idealist)	1943-1960 (17)	High: Superpower America	55-72
Gen. X	Nomad (Reactive)	1961-1981 (20)	Awakening: Consciousness Revolution	34-54
Millennial	Hero (Civic)	1982-2004 (22)	Unraveling: Culture Wars, Reagan Revolution, Postmodernism	11-33
Homeland	Artist (Adaptive)	2005-present	Crisis: Great Recession, Climate Change, War on Terror	0-10

McKay and McKay look at the four generational archetypes and turnings to show at which point in life each generation experiences the turnings[6]:

	Prophet	Nomad	Hero	Artist
<b>High</b>	Childhood	Elderhood	Midlife	Young Adult
<b>Awakening</b>	Young Adult	Childhood	Elderhood	Midlife
<b>Unraveling</b>	Midlife	Young Adult	Childhood	Elderhood
<b>Crisis</b>	Elderhood	Midlife	Young Adult	Childhood

We entered the Crisis, the fourth turning, in approximately 2008 with the election of Gen X Barack Obama over Silent Gen John McCain. According to history the Crisis will last until approximately 2025. During the Crisis: Prophets (Boomers) enter elderhood, Nomads (Gen X's) enter midlife, Heroes (Millennials) enter young adulthood, and a new generation of Artists (Homeland Gen) is born. The other two living generations (G.I. and Silent) are unlikely to be candidates for coaching.

Let's view the Boomer, Gen-X, and Millennial generations from the lens of the Crisis turning we are in.

- Boomers are idealist prophets who place value on inner convictions and spiritual awakening - self-discovery and authenticity are valued. During the Crisis, Prophets are entering elderhood while providing moral vision and values-oriented leadership to younger generations. Boomers are also redefining 'retirement', with many transitioning to occupations that bring purpose and meaning to their lives.
- Gen X's are reactive nomads entering mid-life during the Crisis. They are assuming roles as parents and influential leaders within society. Nomads will make personal sacrifices for society's good - and are blessed with cunning and survival instincts well-suited to lead during the Crisis. Effective at pushing efficiency and innovation, they will continue to be free workplace agents.
- Millennials are civic heroes entering young adulthood during the Crisis. They are confident, ambitious, and optimistic about life, even in tough times. Oriented toward action they work well in teams. They are about community, technology, and affluence. Redefining what young adulthood is, they place importance on getting married, having children, and being community leaders.

How can we coach to accommodate each generation during the Crisis turning?

1. Recognize each individual is unique, and characteristics of each generation are generalities rather than absolutes.
2. Know that as coach you bring your own uniqueness and perspective from your generation.
3. We will coach three generations over the next five years, each at a different stage of life.
  - a) Boomer generation is wise, respected, principled and creative. Boomers entering elderhood will provide wise guidance and inspiring words through this Crisis.
  - b) Gen X's are transitioning from alienated to mellow as they enter midlife. They are pragmatic leaders who are hands-on and get it done.
  - c) Millennials are focused on building and working in teams as they enter young adulthood.

While it is beneficial to understand trends and commonalities across generations, bottom line, what is critical is to be aware of our own bias and coach the individual, rather than the generational characteristics.

Additional Resources:

- <http://www.fourthturning.com>
- Harvard Business Review, July-August 2007 "The Next 20 Years: How Customer and Workforce Attitudes Will Evolve" by Neil Howe and William Strauss.

[1] <http://www.forbes.com/sites/rawnshah/2011/04/20/working-with-five-generations-in-the-workplace/>

[2] <http://www.economist.com/news/business/21586831-businesses-are-worrying-about-how-manage-different-age-groups-widely-different>

[3] <http://www.artofmanliness.com/2012/07/12/the-generations-of-men-how-the-cycles-of-history-have-shaped-your-values-your-place-in-the-world-and-your-idea-of-manhood/>

[4] <http://www.lifecourse.com/about/method/phases.html>

[5] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strauss-Howe\\_generational\\_theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strauss-Howe_generational_theory)

[6] <http://www.artofmanliness.com/2012/07/12/the-generations-of-men-how-the-cycles-of-history-have-shaped-your-values-your-place-in-the-world-and-your-idea-of-manhood/>

*In 1995 Vikki G. Brock left The Boeing Company to start VB Coaching & Consulting with the intent to provide premier coaching services to leadership. Vikki is a published author of articles and books, speaks internationally and is the foremost subject matter expert on the roots and emergence of the coaching field. She wrote "Sourcebook of Coaching History." Celebrating her 20 year anniversary as a business owner and coach, Dr. Brock coaches face-to-face at client sites and from her 50' sailboat named Cuidado, moored in Ventura Harbor an hour north of Los Angeles. She and her dog Djanga enjoy the outdoor life of beach walking, kayaking, stand-up paddle boarding, and occasional surfing.*



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