

## **Understanding the Value of Multi-Generation Customers**

by Lori A. Hoffner

---

Remember the hours that you, your staff and possibly members of your board spent identifying your organizational values and guiding principles? Those values help define your organization and establish your boundaries of operation. Organizational values help you define and recognize a successful organization.

How then, do your guiding principles and organizational values impact interactions with your clients and customers? One thing that is extremely important to keep in mind is that your customers also come to you with their own set of core values. Their values help them determine how they will approach any situation and help identify the boundaries that they are willing to operate in. Generational values shaped and defined by life situations and experiences influence the way staff approaches work. Those generational values also have a large impact on customers as consumers. In fact, every customer of different generations will approach your business and interact with your staff based on those generational values.

Too often we forget these very important and identifiable generational factors when dealing with our customers. Our programming may not reflect a flexibility that would engage a variety of users because we fail to think outside the box of our own experiences. The way we offer services may show a progression of technology but leaves some users behind or intimidated because we fail to recognize the need for “face time,” an important piece of customer service. On the other hand we could end up stereotyping individuals based on age and perceived experiences.

So how do you meet the needs of multi-generation users and not feel like you’re spreading your abilities and budget too thin?

### **Understand generational core values:**

Provide training for your staff to help them understand the core values of your users so that the programming you offer meets their needs and utilizes your staff to the best of their ability. This also helps your staff to not get caught stereotyping users based on age. For example, did you know that the ‘boomer’ generation rarely will enroll in a class that implies old? The names you choose to identify any type of service will determine certain generations that use it. Babyboomers see themselves as vibrant and active, therefore a fitness or pottery or cooking or whatever activity is appealing to that generation when it reflects that.

### **Identify multi-layer services:**

Find ways to offer a variety of customer service opportunities. For example, some of your customers will not feel as though you really care about their concerns or needs if you do not take the time to have a personal conversation with them. Have your staff find out the best method of communication; “Would you like me to call you, send you an email or would you prefer a text message to learn about the change in the class you have registered for?”

**Practice Value Segmentation:**

Segmentation has been used for years when identifying the habits of customers. Value-based segmentation looks at groups of customers in terms of the revenue they generate and the costs of establishing and maintaining relationships with them. Segmenting programming and/or services based on a perceived generational need reduces the opportunity to “know” your customers. It’s up to you and your staff to build the relationships with your customers in a way that lets them know how valuable they are to your organization. Knowing your regulars by name, learning the names of newer customers, sending follow up information or thank you notes, even if they are electronically generated, helps your clients feel connected to your organization.

**Create a multi-generation mentor program:**

When you offer the opportunity for your staff to learn from each other, you create an environment of support and cooperation within your organization. That understanding then gets reflected through a positive atmosphere to your customers. Once staff has a greater understanding of the values that different generations bring to the workplace, they can easily transfer that knowledge to the value of customers from different generations, and that will ultimately increase and improve your bottom line. You already understand the value of a customer base that has different interests and behaviors; however, understanding the needs of your customers through their core values of generational experiences takes you and your organization to a more advanced level of service. By being this type of organization, you rise above the rest and develop relationships with your customers that will be the highlight of your community. You become the ‘go-to’ business or agency that is supported by your customers into the future and also by that important increase in your overall budget.

*Lori A. Hoffner, Professional Speaker ~ Trainer ~ Consultant, draws on years of experience of leadership in both the for-profit and non-profit business world. She can offer staff-development programs helps promotes a cohesive internal team and positive culture of support within your organization that helps benefit your bottom line.*