



AAUW Teleseminar

November 14, 2005

“AAUW: Membership Matters”

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Guest-speaker, Jean Marie Navetta (a GenXer): - “Some thoughts on GenX and what we want.” * (Goes with accompanying Teleseminar PowerPoint , Slide # 14: “Generation X”)

Perceptions and Realities:

- Largest misconception about this group is that we are the ultimate slackers. The reality is quite the opposite. To date, we have been the most driven to achieve in terms of education, becoming the first generation to not only be expected to get an undergraduate degree, but to get graduate degrees also.
- This is the generation for whom long-term company loyalty is a cautionary tale. Many of us saw our parents work for one company for 30 years only to be downsized. We saw the mass exposure of corporate greed and scandal. Political scandal marked the beginning of our lives. We are far more suspect and cynical of authority in all forms than the generations before and after us.
- Because of this, few of us respect authority per se. We do not adhere, for example, to our parents’ belief that we should respect our supervisors because they are our supervisors. We respect supervisors because they earn respect with us. It isn’t arrogance – it’s self-preservation.
- We are also not willing to make work into life. From what we have seen, the payoff is never what many promise, and many of us have chosen to lead more traditional family lives than even our parents (quite a few of whom traded family for work and ended up divorced) did.
- The first completely tech-savvy generation, most of us have had computers and Internet access since primary school.
- We are also the diversity training generation for whom diversity is a given, so when it appears inauthentic or misled, we tend to hone in on this problem.
- We are the great beneficiaries of many years of women’s rights movements as well as movements for racial equality. While we have seen great unrest (i.e., the Los Angeles riots) we have also seen great progress (i.e., more women attending college than men). Because of this, the urgency that the previous generation felt to get involved in social change is different and falls in different areas. (Many of us would be faster found at an environmental protection or GLBT rights event than a NOW meeting.)

Qualities and Characteristics:

- Comfortable with teamwork
- Less hierarchical
- Independent and self-reliant on projects when necessary
- Willing to bend or ignore rules to make things work (risk-takers)
- **Pragmatic** – little in the world has been consistent for us, so we find little permanence in anything. (Providing us with a sense of something permanent really appeals to many of us.)

How to make AAUW appealing to GenX

- **Provide an education/action link** – We thrive on learning something and being able to do something about it. Issue forums that then can give way to program initiatives are great.
- **Give us a sense of purpose** – Programs that reach into communities (literacy, education, mentoring, etc.) help us use the skills that are trademarks of our generation to make noticeable changes in our world. Most of us have no interest in saving the world, but would love to make a difference in our town.
- **Give us flexibility** – Since our commitment level can be tenuous, provide multiple ways to participate. A few meeting options, online discussions, social components as well as educational components make us feel that we can continue to contribute on our own terms.
- **Give us something that can be permanent** – Communicating the importance of doing work that helps fund F&G programs, for example, and giving us ways to do it helps us feel that we’ve made a mark that will last long after we’re gone.

To be perfectly blunt...

- Things that would interest us, especially if updated and made more current: Sister-to-Sister, issue forums, lobby events, speaking events on hot issues, some fundraisers (even book sales appeal to us)
- Things that would turn us away immediately: Feeling as though we are wanted just because we’re a key demographic, membership teas, fashion shows, hours of discussion on bylaws and abstract internal concepts.