

### "TAKE IT TO THE HOUSE"

What does this expression mean to you? Different generations can interpret this phrase in very different lights. To some, it may mean something as simple as asking your child to take the basket of vegetables from the garden to the house. To others, the expression may mean a great play in a football game.



Jason Chaput

For the first time in history, we have four generations of employees working together. Our workplace is different than most because we also have guests to communicate and "work" with. Generational differences are based on the years in which we were born and raised by our parents or guardians.



The oldest generation in the workforce, the Traditionalists (born prior to 1942), tend to want a fair and consistent work environment and their communication style is more formal and professional. Traditionalists grew up at a time when there was very little, if any, use of computers at home or in the workplace. Many of the newer technologies that we have today can make them feel uncomfortable and they may avoid using some of these resources for communication.

The next generation, which represents the greatest percentage of the national workforce, is the Baby Boomer generation (1943-60). They are likely to be workaholics, prefer to have personal interactions and often associate their professional successes to their personal self-value. Baby Boomers may also struggle with the tech savvy, non-traditional communication styles of younger generations, but they are more likely than Traditionalists to be aware of the newly available technologies.

Generation X, or Gen Xers (1961-81), are often defined by their direct communication style and their preference to work independently. They are committed to their careers and are usually looking for ways to make their organizations more efficient. While Gen Xers are more apt to using today's technologies, many in this generation probably did not grow up learning about them during their younger developmental years of education.

Although Millennials (1982-2005) are the youngest workforce generation, they have much to offer to their colleagues. Their knowledge of diversity and technology can prove to be invaluable. Unlike their Gen X counterparts, they typically look for immediate feedback on their job performance, need structure and supervision and enjoy working in teams.

Millennials tend to be very in tune with the most up-to-date technologies and have used them since a very young age.

As facility and event managers, being able to effectively and efficiently communicate with our staffs, vendors and guests is paramount in producing the optimal atmosphere at any event. Part of that ability to communicate effectively is recognizing how these groups are accustomed to receiving information. At the University of Texas Arlington, for example, we have a representative from each generation working on our score table during basketball games. I would probably never send a text message to the Traditionalist or the Baby Boomer on this staff because I would not have much confidence in their ability to reply to the message. They prefer a printed schedule at the beginning of the season and a phone call if and when there are any changes to the schedule. On the other hand, when given the same printed schedule at the beginning of the season, the Gen Xer and the Millennial usually ask if I can e-mail them a schedule that they can put in their Outlook e-mail calendars and cell phones. The printed schedules that were provided to them are usually left on the table when they leave.

Being able to communicate with guests is an important factor in hosting a successful event. Even before guests arrive at our facilities, we must be prepared to communicate with those guests through channels that reach all generations. If there is a game time change, an increased security alert or a late closure of an entrance to a facility, our ability to communicate with our guests will help to greatly enhance their experience at the events we host. In this day and age, we have outstanding, up-to-date technologies such as Facebook, Twitter and text messaging alerts, which help us to communicate with our guests and potential guests. If you are a Millennial reading this you might say, "Those aren't new!" while the Traditionalist or even possibly the Baby Boomer may have no idea what those technologies are or how they can be used. While those technologies are extremely useful and at times essential when communicating with the younger generations, continuing to use some of the older modes of communication, especially in less technological markets, can still be a vital asset to our organizations.

Taking a proactive approach in evaluating and determining how we can best communicate with all generational backgrounds can help us to understand and adapt to the needs of our co-workers, staffs and guests.

Thanks for this article to Jason Chaput, assistant athletics director for facilities and events management at the University of Texas Arlington.