

# They're not Elves:

## Creating a Collegial Climate for Volunteers



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## American Generations in the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century

<u>Birth Years</u>	<u>Generation</u>	<u>Lifestyle</u>	<u>Style of Giving/Volunteering</u>
1901-1924	GI	Civic	Cautious, keep things running
1925-1942	Silent	Adaptive	Balanced, caring for persons
1943-1960	Baby Boom	Idealistic	Causes, not institutions
1961-1981	Bust, X, 13 <sup>th</sup>	Reactive	Resigned, pragmatic
1982-2002	Millennial, Y	Civic	“We can do it together.”

**GI Generation** (now 109-86) noted as confident, rational problem solvers who know how to get things done. They were the original Boy and Girl Scouts, victorious soldiers, builders. Trust government and authority. Federal attention has gone to whatever age bracket they’re in--financially comfortable.

**Silent Generation** (now 85-68) became instruments of social change—civil rights and feminist leaders--in midlife after being cautious, unadventurous young people. They produced no Presidents, but three decades of top aides. Tend to be sentimental pluralists, seeing every side of the issue, specializing in the world of human relationships rather than civic leadership. They are taking more risks as elders. Motivated by compassion, fairness.

**Baby Boomers** (now 67-50) are better philosophers than scientists, better preachers than builders. Concentrate on perfecting inner life, but as mid-lifers begin to impose their vision—political correctness, “green seals,” mandated youth volunteering, school uniforms, “anti-ugly” zoning. Want to leave the world—not institution or even nation—better. First generation to be targeted as consumers; 40% of them have cut back, simplified lifestyle. As they retire, they want significant, powerful volunteer positions.

**Generation X** (now 49-29) members were under-protected as children, independent of parents, risk seeking, lacking connection to history and culture. Many sub-cultures exist among Gen Xers. Good at consumer awareness, pragmatic choice, quickness. Have few global hopes but high hopes for individual success despite social problems. Thirteen times more Gen Xers under poverty level than GI generation. Yearn for community—“sick for the home they never had.” They will serve in short-term “just do it” ways that don’t waste time. If they have children, they want to have the kids with them as they serve. Value competence, authenticity, and the job itself.

**Generation Y** (now 28-10) have been born into an era of concern about education and child protection, and into the smallest families in U.S. history. Most were born to parents who desperately wanted them. They are already saving more than they spend on junk food and entertainment. “Cute, cheerful, scout-like, cooperative,” they watch less TV than Boomers or Xers but are technologically adept and “wired.” Focus on community and nation rather than world. Like to work with peers. Value civic engagement, are starting nonprofit organizations.

Based on *Generations: The History of America’s Future 1584-2069*, by William Strauss and Neil Howe. William Morrow and Company, New York, 1991.

# Team Building needs to be Intentional

People work as a team when these factors are present:

1. They understand and commit to group goals. *Why do we exist as a group?*
2. The resources of individuals in the group are utilized. *Who are we and what does each of us bring?*
3. Flexibility, sensitivity and creativity are group norms. *How do we work together when things change?*
4. Leadership is participative. *No one squelches the ideas of others.*
5. Decision-making procedures are healthy. *We don't set goals or make decisions that some in the group cannot live with.*
6. The group can examine and evaluate along the way. *How are we doing? How can we improve?*
7. The climate is healthy. *It feels good to be part of this group. People care about each other and can laugh together.*
8. All group members feel accepted and know they belong. *They sense the group would not be complete without them.*

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# Three Stages of Membership

**Inclusion:** Affirmation of existence and significance

People know my name.

They know something about me.

They appreciate my being here.

**Impact or Influence:**

I am recognized as competent.

I have something to contribute.

My opinion is sought and heard.

**Affection:** I feel an emotional bond to the group.

I am valued for myself, not just my contribution.

If I am absent, someone notices and cares.

People who reach this stage, stay.

## The Spirit-filled Team

What differentiates a Spirit-filled team? It mobilizes the human spirit.

Every organization is perfectly designed to get the results it gets. Form follows function. In a Spirit-filled team:

1. Core goals and values are clear and are shared.
2. Processes let work flow smoothly, with clear communication.
3. Systems are transparent but flexible to allow for change and renewal.
4. People are valued as persons, and have space to be themselves--to tell a story, tell a joke, sing a song.... Fun, love and caring are part of the culture.
5. The structure distributes the power in ways that match our mission, values and goals.
6. Strategies are constantly evolving in response to a changing environment.
7. The culture is consciously examined: How does “the way we do things” enable or cripple the human spirit?

*--Notes by Nancy Gaston from a talk by Mike Vandemark.*