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Generational Mentoring

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abstract

Healthcare organizations struggle with the best way to integrate new staff members, including novice and experienced nurses returning to practice, into the organization. One way of accomplishing this integration is mentoring. Mentoring is a process of guiding the development of another person. The methods used to mentor staff members can be influenced by the generation to which they belong. Each generation typically experiences different events that shape their expectations and responses. Consideration of the influence of these events can improve the effectiveness of the mentoring process.

In this time of actual and impending nurse shortage, a resounding outcry is heard from countries all over the world for nurse recruitment and retention. This situation is problematic for the entire healthcare system continuum, from educational institutions to facilities that depend on nurses to some extent for their very existence. Numerous articles have been published offering views on how to obtain nurses and, after their acquisition, keep them in nursing practice. Research studies have been undertaken more abundantly than ever before with the overall goal of determining ways to attract individuals to nursing, recruit nurses to work in healthcare organizations, and retain nurses once they are hired. The most common suggestion generated by these efforts is the importance of creating an environment that encourages individuals to want to become a part of the profession, remain or return to the profession, and become or remain a member of a healthcare organization.

Some strategies for improving nurse recruitment and retention include changing the public image of nursing and nurses, and improving pay and benefits for nurses. Strategies for improving nurse retention include improving the job satisfaction level of practicing nurses and mentoring for individuals who are entering or returning to the nursing profession. Of those articles espousing mentoring, much of the literature deals with student nurses. However, the emphasis on nurse retention may

have been the catalyst for the recent shift from mentoring students to mentoring registered nurses.

The concepts of mentoring and mentorship came from the Greek character named Mentor in Homer's epic story, *The Odyssey*. Mentor served as a guide to Odysseus' son as he searched for his father (Allen, 2002; Andrews & Wallis, 1999). Hence, mentor has become the term used to describe a person who takes on the responsibility for guiding the development of another person. The protégé or the person being mentored is usually younger and less experienced than the mentor; however, this is not always the case. With nurses returning to the profession who have previously practiced nursing, the picture of the protégé changes to a person who is older and has previous nursing experience. For that group, the mentoring process is equally important to their reintegration into the profession and entry into that particular healthcare organization.

Regardless of the origin of the concept, mentoring as it is commonly understood today "is the process that awakens our confidence in our abilities" and can serve as the linchpin for retaining employees (Allen, 2002, p. 440). The importance of a mentor, characteristics of a mentor, role of a mentor, effectiveness of mentoring, and relationship of a mentor to the person being mentored have been widely discussed and examined (Allen, 2002; Andrews & Wallis, 1999; Fawcett, 2002). However, one important factor that seems to be ignored in most of the literature is the importance of understanding the influence of the generation to which the mentor and protégé belong.

Typically, the mentor is a member of the generational group consisting of individuals born between 1943 and 1960 and is termed a Baby Boomer (Wong, 2000). The group to which the typical protégé belongs is termed Generation X, and consists of individuals born between 1960 and 1980 (Wong, 2000). More recently, a new gen-

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TABLE 1
GENERATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristic	Baby Boomers (1943–1960)	Generation X (1960–1980)	Generation Next (1980–1999)
Value-shaping events	Born after the Depression Vietnam conflict Kennedy assassination Woodstock Kent State incident	Watergate scandal Three Mile Island disaster Increased exposure to war (Operation Desert Storm) AIDS crisis <i>Challenger</i> explosion Recession Corporate downsizing Rise in crime rate Rise in divorce rate	Period of prosperity Societal focus on family, values, and child safety devices Technological explosion
Child-rearing practices/ family choices	Raised in a two-parent household Father was authority figure Stay-at-home mother Large families Doting parents	Raised in a one-parent household Latchkey children Focus not on "hands-on" child rearing Television acted as babysitter Parents neglected children to pursue own goals	Change in composition of family unit Product of small families Parents busy with children and their activity schedules
Characteristics of generation	Willingness to work relentlessly in pursuit of goals More women moved into the work force Other people/institutions took on more childcare/child-rearing functions Learned to collaborate and work together	Self-reliant, independent, confident in abilities and capabilities Adventurous Prone to change jobs frequently Balance between work, family, and personal time	Technologically savvy Highly educated Very aware of global changes, reality bound Job not expected to give life meaning Accustomed to collaboration, networking, interdependence, and independent endeavors Accustomed to making adjustments Have contingency plans, strong views, free expression, and creativity

erational group is entering the work force. This group is termed Generation Next or the Net Generation, and consists of individuals born between 1980 and 1999 (Kupperschmidt, 1998).

According to Santos and Cox (2002), tension between the generations is a nuisance, affects performance and job satisfaction, and ultimately may significantly contribute to recruitment and retention problems. Generational differences can also contribute to morale issues, leading to a dysfunctional work center that may negatively impact patient care quality and staff retention. Some issues that can develop as a result of low morale are coworker hostility, decreased or ineffectual communication, distrust, sabotage, verbal abuse, and coercive tactics (Cox, 2001). This type of behavior is disruptive to the unit and counterproductive to the organization,

and increases disengagement of the staff from their job. Generation differences can act as a catalyst of this type of behavior, but if these differences are considered during the mentoring process, unit cohesiveness, organizational commitment, and improved patient care quality can result. Understanding another's point of view and values is the first step in changing perceptions and behaviors. If this understanding and tolerance is modeled during the mentoring process, it can encourage like behavior in the protégé.

Generational differences develop as a result of historical events and circumstances occurring during the formative years of development. Understanding these differences is essential to assist in the mentoring process. Table 1 identifies critical differences between the generational groups.

DEFINING THE GENERATIONS

Baby Boomers

Baby Boomers grew up in an era of prosperity and all of the advantages that came with it. They entered the scene after the Great Depression in the United States and were born to parents who doted on them. Historical events that helped to shape their lives included the Vietnam conflict and the controversy it brought, the Kennedy assassination, Woodstock, and the incident at Kent State University (Wong, 2000). They were generally raised in a two-parent household with an at-home mother and a father who was an authority figure. With the grooming of their parents, Boomers grew up believing they could change the world, expected to make a difference, and "embraced the attitude of 'only the best'" (Watson, 2002, p. 8). The sheer numbers of the Boomer generation influenced their development. For example, as a result of routinely overwhelmed school systems, members of this generation learned to work together and collaborate with each other (Dunn-Cane, Gonzalez, & Stewart, 1999; Watson, 2002).

Boomers were encouraged to "spread their wings," seek independence, value creativity, and take risks. As a result, Boomers became a generation willing to work relentlessly in pursuit of goals that often negatively affected their personal relationships. Because of the values this generation embraced that challenged cultural norms, the feminist movement was fueled and resulted in a change in child-rearing practices, moving women out of the house into the work force. With the drive to succeed and the increase in out-of-home working mothers, the face of the nuclear family changed. Nannies and nursery schools flourished, thereby permitting the Boomers to devote more than 40 hours per week to their jobs and the pursuit of their goals and idealism. Work was no longer just a means of providing the necessities of life; it became the focus of their life, leaving the next generation to enter the scene unnoticed (Wong, 2000).

Generation X

The following generation is termed Baby Busters, Slackers, Twenty-somethings, the MTV generation, or Generation X (Watson, 2002; Wong, 2000). Some historical events that shaped the values and lives of this generation included the Watergate scandal that ultimately resulted in the resignation of a president in disgrace, the Three Mile Island disaster, and increased exposure to real-time events, especially during Operation Desert Storm. Xers grew up in an environment shadowed by the AIDS crisis, the *Challenger* explosion, the downturn of the stock market in 1987, the recession of 1990, and "an epidemic of corporate downsizing" (Wellner, 1999,

p. 42). Crime was on the rise, divorce rates soared, and parental focus was generally on attaining personal goals and not on "hands-on" child rearing. These children often became latchkey children, with the television acting as the babysitter. They were frequently neglected and ignored by their parents (Kupperschmidt, 1998). The "quality time" they expected and were promised was frequently absent or overcome by events in their parents' lives.

As a result of growing up in this emotionally austere environment, this generation learned to be self-reliant and more confident in their personal abilities and capabilities. They generally do not view employment with a particular organization in terms of security. This generation is more adventurous than the previous generation and prone to job changes as a means of exploring their career options and moving up the career ladder (and not necessarily the corporate ladder). Although members of Generation X are loyal to their employers, it is not an all-consuming lifelong loyalty as experienced by the Boomer generation based on a promise of employment until retirement. Their brand of loyalty is based on a more personal relationship. As long as there is trust between the individual and the corporation, the Xer will demonstrate loyalty (Wong, 2000).

Another trait associated with Generation X that is different from the previous generation is in terms of their balance between work and personal life. Whereas the Boomers' identity is tied to their position or association with a particular organization, the Xers do not define themselves in these terms. They not only want, but demand, balance in their lives. Family time and personal time are no longer habitually taking a backseat to careers. This generation, in their quest for that balance, will at times turn down career-enhancing positions to maintain that balance between job, family, and personal time. By no means does this mean that career is not important to them; it means that career is not more important than anything else at all times. It means that employers must create plans that "will help them. . . balance family and work life and give them a sense of control over their time" (Puetz, 2000, p. 23). Activities and policies of this nature will foster commitment of the Xers to the organization that employs them.

Generation Next

The emerging generation of employees, comprising 26% of the population, belongs to what is called Generation Next, the Net Generation, Baby Boomlet, Echo-Boom Generation, Millennial Generation, or Generation Y (Alch, 2000; Wellner, 1999). Circumstances that influenced the values and lives of the Net Generation, so far, have included a period of prosperity, a societal focus

on family values and child safety devices, and changes brought about by technology such as the Internet (Kupperschmidt, 1998). In fact, the Nexters are the first generation in which advances in technology are accepted as commonplace. They have never experienced a time without touch-tone telephones, microwave ovens, videocassette recorders, and personal computers. Finally, most Nexters were reared in families that were relatively small, where parents were busy with children who were engaged in scheduled sports and social and school activities (Kupperschmidt, 1998).

As a result of growing up in this environment, the Nexters are technologically savvy, the most educated generation in American history, more aware of global changes that can influence their lives (e.g., Asian financial crash, global warming, ozone erosion, and the global war on terrorism), reality bound, and generally less strict regarding family make-up, and they do not expect a job to be the sole source of achievement and meaning to their lives. As a generation, the Nexters by and large began formal education in preschool, bloomed in an educational environment that encouraged group projects, and are more knowledgeable than their parents concerning technology essential to work and life.

This resulted in individuals accustomed to collaboration, interdependence, networking, and working as a team to accomplish both an objective and independent endeavors. They are a group of individuals that can remain cool in chaos, resulting from the constant turbulent changes occurring during their formative years. They are accustomed to making adjustments and having contingency plans (Alch, 2000).

Nexters witnessed the employment uncertainty of their parents resulting from organizational downsizing mergers, acquisitions, takeovers, and closures. The lesson learned was little job security and little company loyalty. This lesson translated into an "understanding that their training, skills, and abilities are the currency for a getting a job and establishing a career path" (Alch, 2000, p. 32). Nexters flourish in situations that permit them to go from project to project rather than the traditional hierarchal or career ladder situation.

The Nexters were not as overindulged as Generation X. They were accustomed to working part-time jobs while in high school and college to help defray education costs. As a group, the Nexters have developed a culture of free expression, creativity, and strong views. They are strong advocates of lifelong learning and, as a result of their engagement in traditional and non-traditional educational activities, they accept the probability that job change and organizational change is inevitable.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Recognizing that there is no one solution to generational issues, communication can be the catalyst for change, allowing acceptance for generational differences (Smith-Trudeau, 2001). Communication will permit the different generations to have entrance into the beliefs, values, and worldview of one another. One way communication between the generations can be encouraged is to establish multilevel teams to work on projects of benefit to the organization. The use of focus groups, vignettes, and scenarios has also been suggested to promote dialogue between the groups (Desjardins, 2003). This groundwork can foster understanding and tolerance of differences, as well as knowledge of areas of sameness. Administrators should integrate a generational focus and presence into their strategies for leading the organization.

The organization itself must work toward establishing an environment that embraces workers of all generations. The concept of mentoring and the generational aspects must be inherent in the philosophy of the organization, its leaders at all levels, and its value system. The organization should establish a culture of acceptance of new or different ideas, as well as adaptation of methods of operations that encourage new ways of doing things. It is no longer advantageous to the organization to expect workers to make work their top priority over everything else. Leaders must not only keep employees challenged, they must understand that, although different generations on the whole have different needs, all have the need for personal consideration and that should be ingrained in the fabric of the organization.

These changes encourage workers, regardless of generation, to be more tolerant of others and to critically consider ideas and potential contributions from each individual without censorship of any kind. Organizations must improve the work environment and support the employees with up-to-date equipment, adequate staff, and ways to enhance their careers. Without these efforts, Xers and Nexters form the opinion that they are not valued by the organization and perhaps need to move to another organization that will support them.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MENTORS

Baby Boomers

Mentors will frequently be from the Baby Boomer generation. Their work ethic is usually grounded in the idea of long-term commitment to the organization and loyalty to the point of sacrificing time with family for work. "Baby Boomers must be willing to laugh at their workaholicism" and not expect the same behaviors of others (Santos & Cox, 2002, p. 11). Mentors must under-

stand that the following generations do not accept the same values in the employment arena as they do.

Generation X

Members of Generation X enjoy learning by doing. They generally regard work and organizations as a place and means to learn and grow and not as an end within itself. Xers look for opportunities to improve their credentials and specialty skills. With this information, mentors should seek opportunities for protégés to build on their education, skills, and knowledge. Mentors can increase Xers' learning opportunities, marketability, and expertise (Dunn-Cane et al., 1999; Watson, 2002). Mentors should consider encouraging cross-training activities, especially in specialty care units, providing opportunities for protégés to "showcase" their talents and knowledge in presentations, and capitalizing on their knowledge and experience with technology by encouraging them to act as the subject matter experts as appropriate.

Other motivators for Xers include the desire for positive feedback and flexibility. Mentors should schedule formal feedback sessions and "provide small, unexpected rewards for a job well done" (Dunn-Cane et al., 1999, p. 935). In terms of flexibility, mentors should encourage protégés to take an active role in designing their schedules and learning opportunities. When designing teaching methods, mentors should be cognizant of the fact that Xers do not focus on things of the past (lessons learned) as much as Boomers. This perspective dictates that educational requirements and instructional sessions be based on products and final outcomes rather than lessons learned.

Self-reliance registers high with Generation X and tends to bring out their competitive and risk-taking spirit. Mentors should help rechannel these qualities. They can empower Xers to take on new tasks, provide prompt feedback, appropriately reinforce efforts, and encourage a "team" focus (Watson, 2002). Mentors should also encourage recognition of the efforts of others, and understand the reasons for policies and procedures before challenging them. Xers thrive when their innovativeness and independence is permitted to flourish and is appreciated. Mentors should provide opportunities for this to occur, and embrace the uniqueness of this generation instead of dismissing them.

Generation Next

Generation Next's values, beliefs, and expectations are in some ways different from the previous generations', bringing with it the need for a different kind of mentoring. The "Net Generation will be young and relatively inexperienced. . .with limited amounts of practical and clinical experience in their educational programs"

(Kupperschmidt, 2001, p. 573). Mentoring these novices requires improving their clinical skills, demonstrating a personal interest in them, capitalizing on their expertise with communication technology, and keeping them challenged. Mentors for this generation of employees should seek opportunities for the protégés to learn and polish their skills. One way of providing these opportunities includes mentors demonstrating procedures and permitting the protégés to execute these procedures until they can accomplish them without extensive assistance. During the demonstration, it is important to provide rationale for the steps performed and, as appropriate, the reason for the sequential nature of the steps.

Mentors should also encourage cross-training and orientation to other clinical areas of the organization. As with the Xers, these opportunities will enhance the protégé's understanding and knowledge, leading to an appreciation for policies and procedures that will help to shape their professional performance. It will also help with team building because it encourages interaction with other members of the healthcare team (Clausing, Kurtz, Prendeville, & Walt, 2003).

Despite their lack of practical and clinical experience, Nexters are strong advocates of lifelong learning and experienced in communication technology use. They have an investigative nature and understand the need for training and skills for getting a job and having a career. Mentors can capitalize on this by encouraging protégés to share their knowledge and expertise with other employees. This practice also encourages an atmosphere of team building among the staff and positive feedback for the protégé.

"Evidence suggests the Net Generation will thrive in environments where they have a direct say in how work is done and where they can add, innovate, or create in order to turn out the best product or service possible" (Alch, 2000, p. 32). Managers and mentors should take advantage of this characteristic by inspiring the protégé to participate in work groups, on projects, and on committees that have a particular focus that the protégé understands and endorses. Mentors could also be proactive in discovering situations where the protégé can use these skills and characteristics in addressing unit problem areas. These situations should not necessarily dictate that the protégé "take charge." Unlike the Xers, members of Generation Next "seem to be more interested in being a part of the team [rather] than in leading it" (Wellner, 1999, p. 47). Managers and mentors will do well to use this momentum rather than stifle it because the enthusiasm and characteristics are not in keeping with those from previous generations.

Table 2 identifies mentoring techniques that can be used with each generational group.

TABLE 2
MENTORING TECHNIQUES FOR DIFFERENT GENERATIONS

Generation	Mentoring Techniques
Baby Boomers (1943–1960)	Stress the value of lessons learned
	Encourage them to follow existing procedures and policy references
	Provide clear and concise directions
	Motivate them with material rewards
	Offer challenging tasks to be accomplished over several days
Generation X (1960–1980)	Create cross-training activities
	Arrange presentation opportunities
	Schedule formal feedback sessions
	Encourage an active role in scheduling and learning activities
	Focus on products and final outcomes rather than lessons learned
	Empower them to take on new tasks
Generation Next (1980–1999)	Encourage a team focus
	Permit execution of demonstrated procedures until accomplished
	Provide rationale for procedural steps
	Create cross-training activities
	Encourage sharing of knowledge and expertise with others
	Inspire participation in work groups and committees
	Foster team-building activities
Provide an atmosphere for lifelong learning	

CASE SCENARIO

Nurse Boomer (mentor) and Nurse X (protégé) were assigned to provide care for a 60-year-old patient (Mr. W) who was scheduled to undergo surgery (lobotomy) the next morning as a result of his diagnosis of right lung cancer. Nurse Next (protégé), also being mentored by Nurse Boomer, was assigned to provide care for a 59-year-old patient (Mr. S) who was scheduled to undergo surgery (gastric resection) for a bleeding gastric ulcer.

Nurse X was a novice to the profession and was excited about the opportunity to learn and practice new skills and improve his qualifications. He reviewed his class notes and consulted reference books to ensure that he had covered the preoperative and postoperative care of patients undergoing this type of surgery.

Nurse Next was a nurse returning to the work force after a 2-year absence for child rearing. She scanned the Internet for any updated information on the care of a patient undergoing a gastric surgery and was confident that she could provide the requisite care.

Nurse Boomer arrived early on the unit to review Mr. W's chart and assess the patient before he went to surgery. When Nurse X arrived, he reviewed his plans with his mentor and, because Nurse X knows he learns best with a hands-on approach, he informed Nurse Boomer that he preferred to work independently and use her only as a resource. Nurse Boomer, after learning that Nurse X had not previously provided care for this type of patient, informed him of the need to prepare the room for the patient's return according to the unit procedure reference. She told him of an instance where procedure was not followed and how upset the supervisor became. Nurse X was confident that he could perform well, was not concerned with past behavior of the supervisor, and therefore did not review the reference.

Nurse Next arrived on the unit and immediately checked the electronic patient record; she then went to her patient's room and found Nurse Boomer speaking with Mr. S. At the conclusion of the exchange, Nurse Next informed Nurse Boomer that she was nervous about providing the required care and that she would collaborate with Nurse Boomer on procedural issues as needed.

While Nurse X's patient was in surgery, Nurse Boomer began with the room preparation. On Nurse X's entry, Nurse Boomer left the room with instruction that Nurse X should complete the set-up. In Nurse X's estimation, there was significant time to complete the preparation and he left to take a break. While he was on break, the patient returned and the room was not prepared properly. Nurse X immediately began assessing the patient and asked Nurse Boomer to complete the room preparation by bringing in the necessary equipment.

After Mr. W was settled in his room, all procedures were accomplished, and the patient was quietly sleeping. Nurse Boomer told Nurse X that his behavior was unacceptable. Nurse Boomer, a nurse accustomed to following procedures, was not comfortable with Nurse X's method or manner of performance. Nurse X was resentful that his contributions and priorities were not acknowledged or accepted as positively contributing to the team effort. After all, the ultimate outcome for the patient was satisfactory.

In the meantime, Nurse Next's patient underwent the scheduled gastric surgery. During the period of time between the patient's leaving the unit and returning, Nurse Next reviewed the procedure reference to ensure

