

Generational Diversity

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Abstract

This paper is about how diverse the nursing profession has become over the last few years. The nursing profession has the most diverse set of employees now than ever before, I will show the readers that this is true not only generationally but also culturally as well. I will also give examples of typical stereotypes of these generations and cultures. I will also show how nursing is dealing with these diverse changes in the workforce. I will also show how multiple generations in the workplace can create diversity as well as problems due to communication and cultural barriers.

What is diversity? According to the American Heritage Dictionary Diversity or to be Diverse is “distinct in kind; unlike or having variety in form; diversified or the fact or quality of being diverse; difference or variety or multiformity”. (Author, 1994). To be different whether it is culturally, generationally, or physically is the basis of being diverse. In the nursing profession today our nurses are the most diverse now than at any other time in history. Nurses are diverse in culture, ethnic, age and gender with this being said I will start this paper with the types of generations and the stereotypes of these generations in the current workforce of nursing.

There are four types of generations currently working in the nursing profession today. There are the Veterans, Baby Boomers, Gen Xers and the Gen Y or Nexters. The reasons for having such a diverse age bracket are for many reasons. The veterans have reentered the workforce in some cases due to extenuating circumstances in the home or lack of qualified nurses in the hospitals due to nursing shortages. The baby boomers are staying longer in the workforce because of increased retirement and social security age requirements. The gen xers and gen yers are just now entering the workforce and slowly filling the nursing shortages making it possible for some veterans and baby boomers to retire but not at a fast enough rate to make the nursing workforce less diverse.

One of the most trying things for current employers is having a “productive organized approach to managing diversity” (Janasz, 2009). This is not an easy thing to do when working with so many different variables but it is suggested that it is beneficial to learn the strengths of the different generations and to communicate and learn from each other what would be the best way to accomplish the task at hand. This is an ideal scenario but doesn't always work due to

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natural order of how each person from each generation feels that there way is the best way and have trouble coming to compromises. “Ignoring this and not being able to properly manage diversity can have a negative impact on productivity and performance and can create conflict and undermine business performance.” (Janasz, 2009).

The Veterans, born between 1922 and 1942, are the oldest of the four generations in the current workforce their dedication, self discipline, duty before pleasure, sense of history, oriented toward the past, respect for authority and adherence to the rules make the veterans a great asset to the workforce. Their liabilities are that they have a tendency of not being able to cope with change are reluctant to buck the system are uncomfortable with conflict and don't like to disagree. Veterans have been around to see many life changing world events wars, depressions, and financial crisis. Veterans are a wealth of knowledge because of this and a great asset to learn from on various topics. Most veterans are stereotyped as hard headed and set in their ways this may be so in some instances but most are eager to learn new things it just takes them longer to understand new concepts and ideas, but with patience and time most come around to new ways of doing and thinking.

The Baby Boomers, born between 1943 and 1960 are seen as people that are optimistic, hard working, youthful and involved. Their liabilities to the workforce are that they tend to be overly sensitive to feedback, judgmental of those who don't see things their way and self centered. Boomers have also been around to see many life changing events, some of which are the assassinations of prominent leaders the fight for minority equality, war and the introduction of

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nuclear power. Many see this generation as more forward thinking but more authoritarian in their approach to how they treat and react to others when in a leadership position.

The Generation Xers, born between 1960 and 1980 are seen as people “appreciate diversity, are able to think globally ...that work should be fun, and have a casual approach to authority and are self reliant.” (Holtzman Diane M.). Their liabilities are that they are impatient, don’t communicate well with others, have a negative stance on job security and don’t like to make sacrifices at work. As well as the other groups the Xers have also witnessed life changing events such as the fall of communism, the birth of AIDS, and environmental catastrophes. Many see the xers as lackadaisical and unmotivated, but with their technological savvy they tend to do less manual labor jobs and more technologically advanced positions.

The Generation Yers or Nexters, born between 1980 and 2000 are the youngest of the four generations currently in the nursing workforce. They are seen as people with a sense of civic duty, heroic in spirit, appreciate diversity and have great multitasking capabilities. Their liabilities are that they need “supervision and structure” (Holtzman Diane M.). Most people see them as inept to deal with interpersonal issues due to lack of experience in these situations. “In their leadership style, Nexters combine the teamwork ethic of the Boomers with the can do attitude of the Veterans and the technological savvy of the Xers. Resiliency is one of their strongest traits.” (Holtzman Diane M.).

These are some examples of the strengths and weaknesses of each generation. Not everyone who is part of that generation act like this but as far as an overall picture the majority of people from these generations act in this manner. The Nexters seem to have put the best of all

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generations to good and productive use while the other three generations have contributed greatly to the current way that we do or do not do things due to process of elimination and experience in practical applications of new ideas. “The historical, political and social events experienced by generational cohorts help to define and shape their values, work ethics, attitudes toward authority, and professional aspirations.” (Sherman, 2006).

Education of current employers on the subject of diversity whether it be age, gender, or cultural should be a priority of everyone entering the nursing field. When we see that “each generation should be appreciated for the strengths they bring to a team, generational diversity will lead to a synergy that brings the team to a much higher level of performance.” (Sherman, 2006) the more cohesive of an environment with the new generation of nursing graduates we will have.

Currently, the average age of nursing school graduates is 29.6 years [Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) (2004a)]. Whether these are people who went straight from school to University and are entering the workforce for the first time or they are more mature, second-career graduates, these employees are approaching the workforce with a different perspective on organizational commitment. It is important for nurse managers to understand each generation’s unique perspective of organizational commitment. This first step is necessary in order to develop specific, creative strategies to make these workers feel like they are making a meaningful contribution to the workplace while receiving adequate compensation in return. For example, compensation

does not necessarily mean more money in the paycheck, but for younger workers it could mean more flexible work scheduling, job-sharing, child care benefits, or recognition for a job well done. This new breed of workers is not concerned as much about the retirement benefits, overtime, or clinical ladder plans that appealed to the generation before them (Lancaster & Stillman 2002). These new nurses want to be treated fairly and to be intellectually stimulated and challenged. They will give you 100% at work, but they also desire balance in their lives and will value their time off and independence on the job. Nurse managers will want to get to know this new breed of nurse to better understand their motivation. A nurse manager might not agree with these new employee priorities or understand their value system, but the wise manager will try to bridge the generational gap to create a more cohesive workforce that embraces the diversity of these workers (Twenge 2006). (Carver & Candela, 2008).

Besides a lack of communication and understanding between the generations there are also barriers that nurses need to overcome in order to properly maintain a good relationship with coworkers and clients some of these are prejudice, ethnocentrism, stereotypes, discrimination and harassment. Prejudice is defined as “unjustified negative attitude toward a person based on his or her membership in a particular group...” (Janasz, 2009). Ethnocentrism is defined as “ a tendency to regard one’s own group, culture, or nation as superior to others...” (Janasz, 2009). Stereotypes are defined as “ a set of beliefs about a group that is applied universally to all members of that group...” (Janasz, 2009). Discrimination is defined as “ barring an individual from membership in an organization or from a job because of her membership in a particular group.”

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(Janasz, 2009). Harassment is defined as “consciously shunning or verbally or physically abusing an individual because of membership in a particular group.” (Janasz, 2009). The best way to gain insight into how these barriers can harm not only ourselves but others is to consciously being aware and educating ourselves in how to recognize or avoid these types of behaviors.

To conclude the different generations, stereotypes of those generations and the barriers that those generations must overcome if in harmony can make for a very productive and peaceful work environment. The wealth of knowledge that you can gain from this type of environment will serve to help not only you but generations that come after you. Without this cohesion though it can be damaging and nonproductive to not only yourself but to others around you and future generations not look to their elders for guidance and education. The significance of this is to show that it can be beneficial to learn from your and past generations mistakes and make things better for the future.

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