

**Who Taught Michelangelo:
How Intergenerational Influence Shapes Millennials and Screeners**

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Absolutely awestruck, I fixated my gaze on the statue of David in Florence's Galleria dell'Accademia. Other admiring tourists stood, observed, chatted and walked on. I gawked for over an hour, shaking my head in disbelief at the humanness of this chiseled stone. Slowly, I traversed the 360-degree circle enthralled with this astounding, lifelike sculpture of an adolescent David with sling over his left shoulder and stone in his right hand. In sheer gratitude, I began to ponder on the divinely talented sculptor, Michelangelo, and eventually asked myself the gnawing question, "Who taught Michelangelo to sculpt?"

Isn't there always a "someone" behind the someone more famous? Looking at the scriptures for example, do you know who taught Moses about leadership or mentored Ruth in cultural engagement or poured wisdom into a young John Mark who later wrote one of the gospel accounts? The dynamic successes of these "someones" behind these faith heroes (they are Jethro, Naomi and Barnabas) were established on the principles of intergenerational influence, mentoring and leadership. In light of these examples of intergenerational influence and knowing that the next 20 years of youth ministry will be about the Screener* generation with Millennials as their primary leaders, it seems equally crucial for churches and youth ministry organizations to implement an intergenerational strategy for mentoring and leadership development. This chapter investigates what each generation needs, wants and offers, and why the Millennials as young leaders require intergenerational influence as they spearhead ministry to the youngest generation of Screeners.

* I have termed this generation Screeners because they are embedded in a technological world where they will always mediate life through screens. I strongly dislike the nondescript moniker

of Gen Z!

Millennials constitute the largest generation ever recorded at 83 million, which includes 78 million US births and roughly five million cohort members who are immigrants (Rainer, 2011, p.2). Together they represent roughly 1/3 of the American population. Their sheer size and youthfulness draws an inequitable amount of attention by everybody from marketers to educators to municipalities to politicians and church leaders. Everyone is clamoring to connect with the Millennials, and these groups seem hungry for strategies and methods to make it possible. Even though the focus remains squarely fixated on Millennials, the diminutive generation in their wake is methodically populating our middle schools and soon-to-be high schools. Attentiveness to this dynamic declares that, for the next 20 years, youth ministry will be primarily about the Screeners (named Homelanders by Straus and Howe). While educators, youth workers and churches have barely glanced at this new generation, an understanding of Generational Theory may provide a beneficial lens through which we identify and strategize our engagement of intergenerational influence with Screeners as the next youth generation and Millennials as their leaders.

Generational Theory Defined

William Straus and Neil Howe are the gurus of generational theory who introduced their concept through their seminal work *Generations* in 1991. According to Strauss and Howe (1991), a generational cohort “[...] is defined as everyone who is ‘brought into being’ at the same historical moment” (p. 436), and therefore share similar generational characteristics with the other members of their cohort. They all come from the same “special history” and share a unique

“peer personality” that shapes the way their generation characteristically behaves throughout their lifetime (p.437). While great effort is given to the historical naming and sequencing of generations in basic 20-year cycles, attention is also devoted to the persona of each generation influenced by the cyclical nature of the repeating archetypes every 80-year phase (four 20-year cycles) called a saeculum. Strauss and Howe (1991) define peer personality as a “generational persona recognized and determined by (1) common age location (2) common beliefs and behavior; and (3) perceived membership in a common generation” (p.429). A generation is composed of people whose common location in history lends them a collective persona. The span of one generation is roughly the length of a phase of life, and generations come in four archetypes, always in the same order - Artist, Prophet, Nomad, and Hero (Strauss and Howe, 1997, p. 74). At the end of the 80-year saeculum, the four basic archetypes repeat themselves. This basic understanding of the repeating archetypes allows us to project characteristics of the Screeners even though there are yet unborn members of this generation.

Generational Typologies and Characteristics

Describing the generational personas of the three older generations will provide a context by which we can begin to grasp how both appreciation and frustration develop between the cohorts. Consider the implications of the following similarities/differences and likes/dislikes in this abbreviated glimpse of these generations.

1. Traditionalists (Artist archetype) were born between 1922-1945 and are 72-92 years old.

They are also known as the Silent generation and like such things as being polite, more formal, respectful, and friendly as well as hierarchical structures (Zemke, 2013). This

generation dislikes being overly casual, cold, rude, and indifferent (“whatever” is not their go-to phrase).

2. Baby Boomers (Prophet archetype) were born between 1946-1964 and are 53-71 years old. There were 76 million born into this behemoth cohort, which is how they got their name. Boomers like recognition, caring, being knowledgeable and personal, and they like things focused on them. The Boomer cohort dislikes distracted, defensive and briskly efficient (Zemke, 2013). Because of their current life stage of having moved through the success phase having gained knowledge and experience and into desiring significance in life, Boomers make excellent mentors. This cohort is a natural match for Millennials who strongly desire mentoring and who value the experience Boomers exude. Gen Xers and Boomers are more at odds when it comes to mentoring because their values and worldview are constructed from some radically different historical context and social environments.
3. Gen Xers (Nomad archetype) were born between 1965-1982 and are 35-52 years old. They only total about 48 million and have been characterized as ‘latch-key’ kids who are entrepreneurial and enjoy working on their own. This generation likes things straightforward, brief, efficient and focused on outcome or product. Gen Xers dislike things that are overly perky, chatty, dumb and anything involving overselling (Zemke, 2013). As we compare the generational personas, it becomes clear that areas for potential clashes with other generational cohorts exist. Because Gen Xers are located in the center of the lifespan development of most churches, it is therefore important that they buy in to any discussion of intergenerational expressions within the church, particularly youth ministry.

Who are Millennials?

Millennials (Hero archetype) were born between 1983-2002 and are 15-34 years old. This generational cohort is the largest generation at 83 million strong with 5 million of the ranks being immigrants, which represents a significant increase over any previous generation. They also represent the most studied and most educated generation to date (Dupont, 2014, p.75). A record number of people from this generation either attended or currently attend college. (Hartman & McCambridge, 2011). This cohort likes things positive, cheerful, engaging, helpful and meaningful while disliking things/people who are snide and snippy, too formal, condescending and slow. Diversity for this group has become a norm with over 42% indicating something other than “white” in surveys. Millennials are different in racial and ethnic backgrounds as well as religious and lifestyle backgrounds. As much as there are differences, Millennials "accept and tolerate" those differences (Rainer & Rainer, 2011, p. 34). The sheer enormity of the Millennial generational cohort accounts for 1/3 of the US population. It is no wonder that significant attention, resources and efforts have been expended to understand and reach this group from every sector of the business, political, educational and church worlds.

Some of the most common characteristics of Millennials that inform their generational persona include:

1. *Technologically fluent (or tech fluent)*. Many of them use Google to find an answer to a question (Roberts et al, 2012). They stay connected 24/7 to friends, parents, information, and entertainment (Zemke, 2013).
2. *Cause-driven*. The Millennial Generation is America's newest civic generation" (Greenberg & Weber, 2008).

3. *Outcome-focused*. The view that Millennials are usually inclined toward helping others is so widely held that companies have instituted recruiting programs for young workers involving volunteer services and helping the environment (Twenge & Freeman, 2012).
4. *Need feedback*. This generation desires frequent feedback and does not follow rules (Bell & Griffin, 2010). They also desire transparency from their co-workers and managers (Ferri-Reed, 2014). They want to "feel valued, respected and rewarded for their contributions." (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak, 2013, p.139).
5. *Desire mentors*. "Mentor me" is a cry for most Millennials because they are keen to access the experience of the older, more veteran generations. When Millennials feel empowered they believe they can achieve anything (Ng & Gossett, 2013).

Who are Screeners?

Screeners (Artist archetype, like the Traditionalists) are being born between 2003 and 2022 and are now (6)-13 years old. Projected to be fewer in numbers than the Millennials, they will reflect a generational cohort persona much like the Traditionalists who are 71-91 years old according to the cyclical nature and the turnings recorded in Straus and Howe's generational theory (1997, p. 74). Steinmetz (2015) anticipates that Screeners will be well behaved and develop a culture of 'blanding' – playing it safe - in many ways like the Silent generation (Traditionalists). This ability to project Artist attributes coupled with some early studies of these children and emerging adolescents allows us to begin developing a generational persona in this vastly different, technological age. 'Screeners' (called 'Homelanders' by Straus and Howe and the White House) will always observe, know and experience life through the framework of screens – usually 4-5 screens at a time. A Screener "has access to more viewing screens than any

preceding demographic category.” Nickelodeon calls this new arena “multiscreen sandboxes” (Umstead, 2013). This cohort likes diversity, individualism and technology while disliking personal reflection, old-style teaching and lacking technology. The generation makes up about 25% of the current population of the United States. Ethnically, biracial and multiracial groups are the fastest growing groups of young people in America (Turner, 2015, p. 104). They are also the most sexually diverse generation due to the blurring of gender roles in American culture (Sparks and Honey, 2014).

Tim Elmore (2014), the founder and president of the Growing Leaders organization, states that they are: “Cautious and safety preoccupied; Green-biased; focus on conservation; Insecure; seeking identity; Calculated; Frugal stewards of resources; Self-reliant; Realistic and pragmatic; Issue-oriented; Globally savvy and aware” (p.1). Therefore, some of the most common characteristics of Screeners that inform their generational persona include:

1. *Tech immersed*. The Screeners live in a world where technology is constantly at their fingertips, and Steinmetz (2015) refers to them as technological umbilical cords always connecting the parent and child.
2. *Globally savvy*. Screeners are not only more globally connected, they actually are engaged with international news and macro events and concerned about the implications for people around the world.
3. *Individualistic*. Screens allow Screeners to interact with each other and the world as individuals, and they like it that way. Being a smaller generational cohort, there is less of a communal identity and more of a personal interface with the world. James Steyer (2012) says, “In a world of limitless connections and hundreds or even thousands of ‘friends,’ many relationships are bound to be shallow and unreal” (p. 25).

4. *Traditional teaching averse.* According to Steyer (2012), the ability for adolescents to gain information extremely quickly has shifted many of the ways in which an early adolescent belonging to the Screener generation focuses, reads, writes, and reflects. In his book *Rewired*, Larry D. Rosen notes that “While Baby Boomer and older Gen-Xers prefer either visual or auditory modes [of receiving information], Net-Geners and iGners learn best by touching, moving and enjoying” (2010, p. 45-46). “Literally, their minds have changed – they have been ‘rewired’” (p. 226).
5. *Extrinsically focused.* What people ‘out there’ think of Screeners becomes a driving obsession. This attitude increases the pressure placed on adolescents in a culture to succeed and achieve, but it also leads to isolation (Greenfield, 2009, p. 403).
6. *Anxious.* Being isolated and always on in a globally perilous world brings an angst that permeates daily life for a Screener. It’s what Steinmetz (2015) refers to as a ‘highly documented life.’

Beginning in 2014, middle schools and youth ministries began welcoming this newest generation whether they knew it or not. In only 3-4 years, all of high school ministry will be Screeners, and in 5 years they will be entering college! This generational cohort has been born mobile, always on, building worlds (think gaming), under surveillance, homebodies, and loyal soldiers (like the Traditionalists before them).

Millennials vs Screeners

The lens of Generational Theory can become a beneficial method for identifying and strategizing our engagement with Screeners. While in its infancy, research on Screeners indicates marked differences from Millennials in almost every way. In a basic comparison of Millennials

and Screeners, with a cyclical reach back into the Traditionalist's persona, it becomes obvious that the two generations bear some striking dissimilarities. With Millennial characteristics listed first, the differences include:

1. Adventurous vs Cautious and safety preoccupied. The Screener world is more threatening, and they are more electronically observed and documented than Millennials.
2. Optimistic and progressive vs Realistic and pragmatic. This is a move away from “I can change the world” to “How can I affect specific change in the world.”
3. Naïve vs Globally savvy and aware. Screeners are interested in the news of the world and the impact of events on humankind.
4. I want (entitled to) it all vs I seek balance and tradeoffs. This attitude is tied to being pragmatic and a bent toward conservation rather than extravagance.
5. Dependent on parents/adults vs Self-reliant. As a smaller generation and one prone to individualism, the self-reliance is claimed as a virtue and skill.
6. Secure; high self-esteem vs Insecure; seeking identity. While Millennials have always believed in themselves, Screeners are developing an insecurity in their smaller numbers, and their individualism and external focus is creating an identity anxiety.
7. Cause-oriented vs Issue-oriented. Dissatisfied with broad, encompassing causes, Screeners will be fixated on issues that will bring about change; it's a pragmatic approach.

Implications for Churches, Youth Ministry and the University

Mentoring as a means of intergenerational discipleship and passing on of the faith has been a hallmark of the people of Israel in the Old Testament as well as the church from its very beginning in the book of Acts. Significant mentoring relationships exist in stories like Abraham

and Lot (Genesis 12:1-9; 13; 18:22-33), Jethro and Moses (Exodus 18:13-27), Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 1:1-22; 3:1-5; 4:13-17), Moses and Joshua (Exodus. 33:11, Numbers 27:15-23, Deuteronomy 34:9), Deborah and Barak (Judges 4:4-16), Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21; 2 Kings 2:1-15), Barnabas and John Mark (Acts 12:25; 15:37-39; 2 Timothy 4:11), Paul and Timothy (Acts 16:1-3; 1 Timothy 1:1-3, 18-19; 2 Timothy 1:1-6; 4:1-5), Eli and Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1-10), and others.

Over and over the scriptures demonstrate influence through an intergenerational approach to building leadership and faith into the lives of young people. This relationally-based transference of values and lifestyle is emphatically centered in an older/younger paradigm, which frankly seems deemphasized in many local churches of today. Whether it's the onset of 30 years of separating teens from congregational life and worship into their own enclaves, or the older generations losing their sense of purpose in this vital role, or a perceived inability to connect to the "youth of today," the intergenerational model offered to us in the scriptures must be recaptured for the benefit of all.

As we emphasize an intergenerational influence approach to mentoring and leadership, we can utilize our knowledge and understanding of the current generational differences and similarities, and then look for creative options with an intergenerational approach to reaching the upcoming Screener generation over the next 20 years while building biblical leadership characteristics into the staff and volunteers in our ministries to youth, primarily Millennials.

As educators and church practitioners, generational theory informs us. Millennials and Screeners are not the same any more than the Boomers and Gen Xers are the same! They value different approaches to life and express different needs. All cohorts' strengths and weaknesses are different. Their cohort position in the cycle of generations (Prophet, Nomad, Hero and Artist)

identifies very different historical, societal influences and functions. With teaching pedagogy and youth worker methodology as a means of frontline engagement with each generational cohort, perhaps there are lessons to be learned and arguments to be proposed from generational theory that will increase our mentoring and leadership effectiveness.

So, let me ask you, “Who poured their influence into you so that you are the person you are today?” Does a name (or several) come to mind? Most likely you can identify your inspirations fairly easily, therefore, the more intergenerational influencers we can muster and train, the better our Millennial leaders will lead our Screeners in development of lasting Christian faith. In a mentoring conversation, a 25-year old Millennial put it this way, ““We're young, impulsive, idealistic, passionate, and in need of direction, mentorship, patience, and grace (lots of grace). We need help; we have no idea what we're doing!” It will take every generation in the church, so let's all be in this together! And, oh yes, as well as many other influencers, it was Bertoldo di Giovanni (who studied under Donatello) who had the adolescent Michelangelo as a sculpture student in Florence!

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