

## Being an X'er in a "Boomer's World"

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At 34, I'm part of what got labeled "Generation-X." A lot of ink has been spilled trying to figure out this generation of people, a good portion of which has been negative - and I think perhaps wrongly so. Many people used to consider "Gen-Xers" as slackers because large numbers of my contemporaries tended to spend a good portion of their time on the edges of events rather than jumping in with both feet (which is what our Boomer parents tended to do). My generation has never been very good at "signing-up."

My question to our critics is, however, "Signing up for what?" It's true that a lot of X'ers (and our younger cousins in the Mosaic/Y/Millennial generation as well) tend not to run right out and sign up to keep institutions running at peak efficiency. When people ask us to join a bureaucracy we spend a lot of time asking, "Why?" Our failure to jump into actions isn't so much laziness as it is a testing, we want to see how authentic something is before we attach ourselves to it. This approach has a lot going for it, as we tend not to accept the first thing that people say to us in order to get us "on board." It's also got some pit-falls, in that we can lapse into a constrictive cynicism that prevents us from doing anything (that's not laziness, but sometimes it's hard to tell the difference).

What's interesting is that groups that were previously populated by, and run by, Boomers and their Depression-Generation progenitors are now seeing an influx of X'ers that don't accept a lot of the presuppositions that people had before us. This, in my opinion, is what makes pastoring a congregation largely populated by Boomers and a shrinking number of Depression-Generation folk so interesting. While Boomers tended to want to break into their own thing out from the shadow of their parents - they also tended to value individualism, autonomy, and individualism with all but a few close friends. It's not a surprise, then, that mega Churches are made up largely of Boomers who have the flash, anonymity, and small intimate circle of friends provided for them in that world (Boomers in small churches gave up the flash to be in a small church but not the other two). Depression-Generation folks want stability (is it any wonder given the world they grew up in?), and stability means locking everything down and double-bolting the doors.

Into this mix come the X'ers and our cousins. We're OK with confusion (which drives the Depression-Generation folks nuts), but we also tend to think that anonymity in relationships is a lot like being inauthentic (which drives Boomers a little batty). We throw our most intimate details out onto the vastness of the web, and while we have no trouble making plans we also have no trouble shifting gears at a moments notice if we don't get a good enough response to "Why are we doing this again?"

Yet, we also value community without anonymity. When we work-out this value of community, we tend to have no problem submitting to a community that we feel is "authentic" (even if they are making, in our eyes, "Stupid decisions"). Submission, however, doesn't mean we're simply being servile - while we'll submit to a community, we're too aware of our own frailty to hold leaders in awe (we're pretty sure they're screwed up too). What it does mean is that even if we're not going nuts for the latest program handed to us by our Boomer parents, we're happy to experience it and see what comes from it.

I'm not sure that you can make these three groups "happy" when you get them together (and when you add in the Millennials and their gizmos the tension gets worse), but I think that X'ers are in a unique place to show people how to make space for each other without having to have everything like the same things. After all, X'ers value authentic community above most other things. Our communities tend to be dynamic and non-uniform (though as we get older I'm seeing us talk about being non-uniform with other people look like us, and that's worrisome), as opposed to static (Depression-Generation) and uniform (Boomer) - and while that may make our parents and grand-parents scratch their heads it also makes us ideally suited to say, "You know, that's not my favorite, but hey I think we should all be willing to give it a shot and see where God takes it - and if we have to open the doors a bit wider, that's cool."

Eh, just some ramblings from the world of allergy induced mental haze...

Read more at: <http://wezlo.blogspot.com/2007/05/being-xer-in-boomers-world.html>.