Coming to Terms with Generation X:

A Call for Relevancy, Reflection, and Resiliency

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Elder members of "the Unforgiving Age[1]" (a moniker creeping in as a descriptor for the decade of the 90's) have found their ideal prey, those between the ages of 98 and 35. Relentlessly, their abilities, attitudes, and prospects have been deprecated, particularly by the media. This generation gap has served as a vehicle to deliver a message – you are not worthy! But is this message correct? What do we really know about the age group known as Xers or Thirteeners[2]?

For career professionals the origin of the message can be traced to David Cannon's appraisal of student norms conducted in repeated focus groups on several college campuses and reported in this journal (1991). Coupland's Xer novel (1991) arrived on the scene at the same time. Both contributed to the media and lecture circuit rich images on this generation's attitudes, expectations, and foibles. Unfortunately, quantitative research which should have built upon Cannon's focus group results failed to materialize; thus, the extent of these attitudes, as well as differences across demographic cohorts (men - women; multicultural groups; socio-economic status; career aspirations) were never substantiated. Instead anecdotal evidence, often based on niche marketing surveys[3], casual comments and selective experiences, has served to authenticate Cannon's findings. Even Strauss and Howe who developed and demonstrated a model of generational differences which was presented in their book Generations (1991) relied heavily on anecdotal evidence and targeted group surveys in their defense of Xers in 13th Gen (Howe and Strauss,1993).

Recently several research efforts have refuted some of the images conjured by these earlier reports and media portrayals. A Readers Digest poll (January 1995) found that Thirteeners were as willing as Boomers to work hard to get ahead; perceived people as basically equal and thus believed to the same degree as Boomers that unlimited opportunities were more important than ensuring greater equality of income; and were satisfied with their personal lives to the same level as Boomers. Similarly, Ross Goldstein of Generation Insights reported that Thirteeners placed a high value on education and technical competencies in pursuit of challenging jobs (USA Today, 1995). Goldstein revealed that Thirteeners were far from the slackers that they are often characterized.

Debunking the myths surrounding Thirteeners, Lankard (1995) examined their career ambitions, career realities, and workplace influence. While making a case for approaching Thirteeners through new lens, she also relied on studies or observations based on anecdotal perceptions rather than supported by theoretical development or quantifiable verification. For example, she contends that Thirteeners have a "new concept of career." Yet, career theorist have failed to propose new or modified career models, though the boundaryless career seems to be a start (Arthur, 1996), in response to the dramatic changes in labor markets since 1985. The rapid turnover of recent college graduates in their first employment situations has been a result of company decisions to downsize, to reduce new product development time (i.e. automobile design time has been in halved in less than a decade), and to reorganize their workplace (Gardner and

Motschenbacher 1994); rather than the Thirteeners inability to adjust to the world of work.

Even these efforts in behalf of Thirteeners have left conflicting impressions. We have not gained a complete nor satisfactory image of the Thirteenth generation -- maybe we never will. Still, we can sketch an outline of this generation through the use of several existing historical studies. Building on these trends, we can discuss similarities and differences between generations and the images these differences convey. From these images several suggestions are made for career and human resource professionals in their dealings with Thirteeners.

Freshman Norms: Defining Events -- Broken Promises

To fully grasp the nature of a generation it is important to tap into historical data that allows for comparisons between generations and which establishes linkages and identifies discontinuities between generations. Several useful studies can help describe college student attitudes and values (Astin's freshman surveys), events that shaped their generations (Levine, 1993), and economic trends. For the past twenty-five years freshman have matriculated to college for the same reasons: to learn interesting things; to gain a general education; and to position themselves to obtain a better job in order to earn more money (Astin, et al. 1987, Day et al., 1991). Several reasons have shifted in importance over this time period. The financial rewards expected from obtaining a degree have increased significantly (up 23 per cent). Preparation for a graduate program is now important to 55 per cent of entering freshman compared to 34 per cent in the early 1970's (a far higher number than actually act upon this intention). More disturbing may be the upward raise in the percentage of students who indicate they attend college to meet the expectations of their parents; to escape from home; or because they lack economically viable alternatives (jobs).

More dramatic have been the changes Astin's group has observed in freshman values. Students at the front of the Boomer wave were concerned about developing a philosophy of life, establishing themselves as an authority in their field, and becoming involved in political affairs. Today's freshman center their values around raising a family, being well-off financially, and being recognized as an authority in one's field. Developing a philosophy of life and being well-off financially have swapped places in terms of percentages: in the 1960's philosophy of life was important to 83 per cent, today 43 per cent, while being well-off financially started at 44 per cent and today is 74 per cent. Astin and other observers (Light, 1988) attribute this shift to economic conditions (high inflation, limited employment opportunities, and stagnant salaries) that have persisted since the 1970's which has propelled financial considerations higher among the factors that frame students' philosophical bearing.

Interesting observation emerge upon review of the trends in Table 1. Many changes, such as lower SAT scores, actually started during the latter half of the Boomer generation rather than by the Thirteeners who are often blamed. Some values have not

changed over the years, especially those associated with arts and creativity which have remained important to about 15% of freshman. Professional values have also remained relatively constant. One professional value that has grown in importance concerns administrative responsibility (supervision of others) which reflects students' tendency to view managerial positions as preferred career reference points. The central focus of freshman values continues to revolve around personal well-being: financial security and family. The decline in importance in developing a philosophy of life appears to have bottomed out and has experienced a modest increase throughout the 1990's. Accepting that their financial position may never be secure in the new economy, students may be willing to consider other meaningful aspects of life in their emerging philosophical outlooks. Political involvement fell off sharply late in the Boomer years and has failed to rebound; at the same time, students' social commitment has remained strong as does their concern for racial understanding, social values, and environmental action. Today's Thirteener freshmen actually attach more importance to these three issues than all earlier classes, except for the front of the Boomer wave.

What has caused shifts like this to occur? Like earlier generations, students' outlooks and beliefs reflect a woven tapestry of poignant events that occurred during their youth and college years. Compelling events shape a generation: the Civil War, the Great Depression, World War II, for example. The events and themes that shaped early Boomers (college students of the 1960's), late Boomers (college students of the 1970's), and Thirteeners (college students of the 1980's and 1990's) left indelible marks. Arthur Levine's comparison of generational events along with commentary by Light (1988) and Kleinfelder (1993) provide interesting insights into the behaviors of students as shown in Table 2.

The initial wave of Boomers, those who arrived on campuses between 1961 and 1968, had enjoyed a structured, indulged and often care-free childhood; experienced the entry of television into their homes, were comforted by a robust economy, and felt secure under confident leaders who emerged from World War II . They graduated from high school under a standardized curriculum that successfully countered the Russians in space race. This group of high achievers, reflected in their SAT scores and ambitious goals, experimented in personal areas (sex) and social interactions (civil rights), buffeted from intense criticism from their parents by the conformist "Silent" generation (their immediate elders). Their lives, however, were strongly affected by a series of high profile assassinations, an increasing deathly presence in Vietnam, and the arrival of the Beatles.

Boomers who comprised the second half of this generation (those arriving on campus after 1969) found or created a much more dangerous environment. By this time the sex revolution had spilled over into their personal lives with the rapid increase in divorce among their parents; the drug scene, always an experiment to older Boomers, became ugly and violent; the war took an increasing toll in Vietnam which resulted in violent protests on campuses. In addition the institutions that had supported their older brothers and sisters so well began to fail them: Watergate; more violent civil rights

demonstrations; corrupt business practices; and a lack of jobs. SAT scores started a steep decline during this period and individuals started to focus more on themselves (the "me decade"). The Yuppie image emerged near the end of the 70's to characterize Boomers similar to the flower child label attached to them ten years earlier. Ironically, only 10 per cent of the Boomer generation were ever flower children or yuppies. The yuppie symbols of individualism and self-promotion, however, captured the attention of the media which permitted unrealistic and faulty expectations to filter down to youngsters of the Thirteenth generation..

Observing all this was a group of youngsters who began arriving on college campuses in the 1980's, having little knowledge of the Vietnam war, social protest, or the meaning of 1960's rock songs (though they liked the music). Their baggage was different. Their one hero, teacher Christa Mcauliffe, was killed in the Challenger explosion; an event many of them watched on TV. To them this symbolized the ineptitude of business and government. The wars they shared were short, patriotic events with no long lasting tragedy; yet most of these wars brought inconclusive results that created confusing messes. A major factor contributing to global instability was the end of the Cold War; something they had feared all their lives. This fear was replaced by a more daunting challenge: the continued fragmentation of the global community as epitomized by Yugoslavia and sectarian warfare in Africa. This fragmentation also paralleled the fragmentation in their personal lives with the break-up of families and the increasing diversity of society. They also responded to the increasing risks associated with sexual encounters (AIDS) with the "ignorance is bliss" approach. But no factor dealt them a harder blow than the economy which literally transformed itself: shedding jobs -- usually their parents -- and scaling back the opportunities available to them. Even those jobs that could be obtained required new skills, more education, and resilience to secure. Thus, the Thirteeners were shaped by a different set of forces and, unlike the Boomers, lacked a buffer group between themselves and their powerful elders (the Boomers) that would protect them from intense scrutiny.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, economists and demographers foretold of wonderful opportunities for those born in the 1960's. This cohort, the first wave of Thirteeners, was smaller in number which meant this group would benefit from the institutional size created by the Boomers. With demand shrinking, those selling homes, offering educational services and other products would have to be very competitive to attract customers; and employers would have to recruit labor at higher wages. Based on these pronouncements, Thirteeners and, especially, their parents, established expectations that would be shattered by the end of the 1980's. The 1970's and 1980's marked an era of broken promises according to Howe and Strauss. The assumptions used by prognosticators failed to consider (1) the devastating impact of inflation; (2) non-traditional demands for education; (3) dual family wage earners; and (4) wage stagnation. All these factors have had a profound impact on the attitude and expectations of Thirteeners and their Silent and Boomer parents when they finally enrolled in college and subsequently entered the workforce.

For Thirteeners the scenario played out this way. Housing costs soared 294 per cent between 1972 and 1987 (Light, 1988). As a result, first-time home ownership cost rose from 12 per cent to 29 per cent of family income (Howe and Strauss, 1993). Home ownership was accomplished through dual income wage earners rather than the corresponding rise in the wages of a single family wage earner. According to figures published in The Chronicle of Higher Education (1994), the cost of tuition rose at almost three times the housing rate. Between the 1964-65 academic year and 1992-93, tuition and student fees (not including room and board) increased 689 per cent at public universities and 906 per cent at private universities which meant 24 per cent and 32 per cent average increases, respectively. Two-year colleges were not immune to increases moving from relatively inexpensive institutions with tuition and fees of $100 per year in 1964-65 to $1229 annually in 1993-94.

Family incomes, except for those at the highest income levels (top 5 per cent), were going in the opposite direction during the 1980's and even into the 1990's. Friedman (1995) reported the average weekly earnings in 1974 was $474 and in 1995 $385. Family incomes have remained relatively unchanged, even with two family incomes. In many cases adult workers are working longer hours and one wage earner from a dual career family possibly a second job. To enjoy the lifestyles created by two family incomes many teenagers entered the workforce (usually into the expanding, low-paying service industry), using their earnings to subsidize their activities above and beyond their parents' contributions.

More revealing has been the stagnation in college graduate starting salaries after adjusting for inflation. Using data from Michigan State University, the average starting salary for a 1978-79 graduate was $13, 444 compared to $28,951 for a 1994-95 graduate. However, real income for the 1994-95 graduate (using 1978-79 as the index year) was $13,466 for a gain of $22. Interestingly, engineering graduates have experienced the largest decline in real starting salaries while liberal arts and business graduates have held even or gained slightly. While starting salaries may have peaked for technical graduates, technological advances across an array of occupations have allowed technically savvy liberal arts graduates to capture higher earnings. Never-the-less, the pleasure of these salaries pales upon receipt of their first student loan repayment notices.

Point-Counterpoint: Work Attitudes and Lifestyles

These cultural and social influences have shaped the context in which individual development has taken place. The young adult developmental stage has always included confrontation with adults, experimentation, testing boundaries, and following a different drummer. Boomers tried the patience of their parents during the summer of love, their flower-child ethic, and campus demonstrations. For the Thirteener youth it may well be slacking, binge drinking, and trying different living arrangements prior to marriage. It is important to relate to young adults as they pass through this stage; remembering as they move into their 30's they shift their trajectory (Bachman, 1997; Strauss and Howe, 1991).

Understanding Thirteeners in their present developmental stage requires consideration of key differences and similarities between them and their elders.

   Jobs. "Why Xers Hate Boomers" (Ratan, 1993) sounded the battle cry between Boomers and Xers over jobs and conditions in the workplace. Simply, the huge bulge of Boomers has clogged the career paths for Thirteeners. Middle and upper management is now the home of first wave Boomers, conceivably for the next two decades. Boomers moved into these positions, even after experiencing a stagnant 1970's economy; mainly because there were too few Silent generation members available to fill vacant slots and the timing of periodic economic growth cycles favored Boomers. Thirteeners have not been as fortunate with regards to expanding labor markets during economic growth spurts. In fact, external events, primarily the transformation to a global economy, has conspired to eliminate jobs for Boomers and Thirteeners alike. Restructuring which downsized many organizations took care of the problem -- now any job will do! In reality, job creation since 1990 has out paced job loss by two to one. However, the lost jobs have been at highly visible Fortune 500 companies while the jobs being created have been at smaller, predominately service companies. The result has been an increase in anxiety over job security, salaries, and long-term careers for both generations. They share in their collective concern over what the new economy has in store for them.

   However, the attitudes these generations bring to work are very different. Boomers, who challenged authority while in college, proved to be loyal, dedicated workers; just like the Silent generation ahead of them. They worked long hours, deeply committed to their work. An extreme element, the Yuppies, pushed work, money and career to new heights. In the process many Silents and Boomers shifted time from family and community involvement to work. The consequences, a breakdown in families and community institutions, especially churches and schools, impacted their children who experienced a vacuum as to where they belonged (often home alone). Caught in this oppressive atmosphere of work, Thirteeners when grown would care little to emulate their elders.

   Thirteeners know they will have to work hard, but are unwilling to work more than 40 hours per week. To complete special assignments, they are willing to work late and even weekends; but not in the continual, institutionalized way Boomers have done. Balance in their lives is very important to them, especially family (close friends until they settle into familial arrangements) and health-related activities. In studies that we have conducted on time allocation among college students, time is taken away from work and allocated, not to academics, but fitness and relationships (not necessarily social parties). Having learned from their parents that loyalty no longer pays and hearing from their career advisors that a career is based on multiple jobs, Thirteeners believe they do not have to demonstrate any sense of loyalty nor stay committed to an employer for a long period of time.

   Thirteeners are also turned off by the lengthy, introspective way Boomers solve problems. Meetings, lead by Boomers, are anticipated as boring and wasteful. Wanting

more tangible evidence of progress, the younger generation simply wishes to be given a problem or assignment to do; the opportunity to do a variety of tasks (utilize a variety of skills); and have fun in a casual work environment. The job will get done; Boomers just need to learn to shut their eyes and hold their tongue! Not something the control-oriented Boomers are willing to do.

While young adults, repeatedly in polls, respond in the positive to a strong work ethic and ambitious career prospects, their actions, especially during college, speak otherwise. They (many Boomers can claim the same college behaviors) are notorious for skipping class, turning assignments in late, and holding a party for any whimsical reason. In fact a popular T-shirt sold near many campuses refers to college tuition as the world's highest bar tab and more prophetically that the weekends begin on Thursday. Unfortunately, these behaviors frequently carry over into the workplace. According to several small employers who have commented to us, new college hires are often unprepared to work on Monday morning after a weekend of parties and social activities. Dissonance exists between where Thirteeners want to be and their observed behaviors – a developmental conundrum -- behaviors that Boomers and others naturally draw their stereotypes.

Consumer Ethic. The Japanese invasion into America's automobile industry brought with it a new consumer orientation that has evolved into today's customer credo for just in time, convenient, and customized service and products. While this message has been adopted by nearly all consumers, Thirteeners who were introduced to it at a very young age have embraced the creed as a central element of their lifestyle, pervading everything they do. Thirteeners have been described as conspicuous spenders, particularly as teenagers: not only did they have large amounts of disposable income to spend, many as Ritchie (1995a and b) points out have managed household purchases from microwave food to stereo equipment for their harried parent(s). In many respects this generation can be very astute purchasers. They are now extending this credo into other aspects of their lives: just in time - customized education and employment. Thirteeners are beginning to ask for educational programs that are customized to their learning styles, are easily accessible, and provided at a convenient time. Some have even taken this message into the job search arena: just in time recruiting means making a job offer during or shortly after the on-campus visit, not four to twelve weeks later; and tailoring a position to the individual's skills, competencies, and interests. As this mentality expands, it presents a challenge for employers in the arrangements they utilize to attract college students to their organizations.

Technology. Even though the technology revolutionizing the workplace was created and built by outcasts from the Boomer generation (long live the nerds), it is sustained and pushed to new heights by Thirteeners. Technology means different things to these generations. Technology symbolizes the increasing complexity throughout society; a challenge to both generations but Boomers may have been less successful in adjusting than Thirteeners (Ritchie, 1995a). For Boomers technology, in its variety of forms, is nothing more than a tool to get something done. Technology to the Thirteener

is a way of life. Take the television which defined Boomer childhood , as an example. TV for the Boomer is friendly (known for a long time) and entertaining that provides scenes that mirror who they are. For Thirteeners TV is a window, not necessarily the best one, to access their community and carry out a way of life (MTV). VCRs, computers and the Internet stimulate Thirteeners. They continually accept new and better technology and quickly find ways to integrate it into their lives (Ritchie, 1995a); thus, technology becomes more than a tool, it defines one's life.

Ritchie offers a prophetic statement: "Because Boomers largely failed to perceive the true nature and potential of computers, they literally pushed the technology off on the next generation and, in doing so, sometimes sowed the seeds of their own obsolescence." Once Thirteeners have integrated technology into their lives, they identify the next generation of technology which they also adapt. Being more comfortable with technology, provides Thirteeners with an advantage in the workplace -- emotional adaptability to accept continual technological change. Boomers on the other hand reach a saturation point which may make them less competitive than their juniors in areas where technology strongly influences the workplace.

It should not be assumed, however, that all Thirteeners are technically proficient nor live vicariously through technology. A recent study by Lunney and Gardner (1995) found that between 30 and 40 percent of college graduates from liberal arts institutions found that they were technology unprepared for the workplace. Even within this generation, there is a separation along technological capabilities that will possibly dampen career aspirations for some.

Communication. Boomers are put off by the whining tones commonly spread throughout Thirteener conversation. These tones represent uncertainty, questioning, and hesitancy (Ritchie, 1995b). By responding through questions, Boomers have interpreted Thirteeners as needing lots of help and assistance (a natural response from Boomers). Yet Ritchie (1995b) in her examination of marketing strategies to Thirteeners revealed interesting insights into this speech pattern. The whining tone or rising reflection which conveys a sense of uncertainty actually is a means for Thirteeners to allow differing opinions to be heard. Young people seek information and confirmation of actions to be taken in this manner: by questioning they seek multiple answers and then select the most appropriate for their individual situation. So when Boomers rush forth in response to the whines with a ten-step program for success (study skills, college major selection, resume critique, career planning workshops, job skills seminars, etc.) they find few receptive listeners.

Another dimension of Thirteener communication is the type of advertising they respond to. Having been raised on commercials that hawk a variety of products which subsequently failed to deliver what was hyped (remember the prize at the bottom of the cereal box), Thirteeners are leery of services that may not provide what is promised and also fail to meet their perceived needs. As a result this generation has little brand loyalty and willingly selects from a wide variety of items. While Thirteeners seek validation from

adults, they are more comfortable listening to messages pitched by their peers. While sounding counter intuitive, for adults to successfully deliver a message to Thirteeners they may need to employ Thirteeners as the messengers; preferably one who has been successful or overcome great obstacles to attain what they have. This approach challenges Boomer faculty and student support staff, as well as recruiters, who often assume student needs which have generally been based on Boomer experiences and expectations.

Teamwork. Teams are promoted as the vital engine for organizational competitiveness in the global economy. Boomers, according to Light (1988), were never created to work in teams. Boomers are highly independent, introspective and competitive individuals who like to have control. These characteristics bode ill for teams which rely on a high level of interaction, openness, and peer evaluation. Boomer managers, in particular, have a difficult time staying out of a team's way. Teaming, however, comes naturally to Thirteeners. Teaming is particularly attractive to Thirteeners if they can put together their own teams and do the assignments their way.

Diversity. Boomers grew up in an age of social intolerance; an age they continually attacked and thought they destroyed. Yet, diversity for many Boomers was an acceptance that everyone was the same. Among Boomers conformity wove its way through policy and procedure and has remained their concern in public debates over such issues as affirmative action. Thirteeners are the most diverse generation in history along all dimensions: ethically, culturally, and economically. "Everyone is a minority," to a Thirteener. They are tolerant of others in a collective sense; but since they do not believe in conformity, they tend to coalesce in small groups around common interests and values. These groups actually raise tensions which are often managed by avoidance. Boomers interpret these behaviors differently, figuring Thirteeners need a good dose of diversity education. Thirteeners rebel at this because they recognize, ironically, that their peers need to be a part of a chosen group (Ritchie, 1995).

Public Service. Boomers like to do good things in a big way. Community service has been a central element of their make-up from their enthusiastic Peace Corps involvement to promoting the American Corps. They think globally and want to make a big impact. Thirteeners also like to be involved in community with many high schools now having made service a graduation requirement. Their approach, however, is very different. They look to small, local successes; doing what they can, they believe they can make a difference. Make a Difference Day and Into the Streets are two very popular programs supported by Thirteeners. As Boomers ease off their work pace, opportunities abound in this changing political environment for linking Boomers and Thirteeners through public service. Boomers will provide the vision and Thirteeners the practical focus.

Family. It cannot be disputed that a major distinction of the Thirteeners relative to the Boomers is the proportion who have gone through divorce and live in single parent families or stepfamilies. For example, the proportion of college students whose parents

have separated or divorced has nearly tripled over the past two decades from about 9 per cent of first year students in 1972 to about 25 per cent in 1992 (Cage, 1993). The economic implications of this trend are very real and very pervasive. Recently, single parenthood has been blamed for poverty. This oversimplification has been refuted in that children are more profoundly affected by socioeconomic resources and the degree of involvement, support and discipline provided by their parents than by divorce and single family structure per se. Even though Thirteeners are unique in their single parent status, the issue of poverty is a persistent problem across generations.

Maternal employment which also characterizes the family for the majority of Thirteeners has been blamed for a variety of societal ills. The reality is that maternal employment has shown very little adverse effects on children. Positive consequences present themselves, especially for female children. Coming from a dual-earner or single parent worker family should be considered a strength of the Thirteeners because maternal employment promotes positive attitudes towards women and women's employment, expands role models for boys and girls, and may enhance both maturity and responsibility. As with single parent status, maternal employment interpreted narrowly and traditionally has led to assume a uniformly negative influence on Thirteeners.

Parental commitment directs the family concepts of Thirteeners, as well as many Boomers. Because many Boomers established families later or initiated second families after divorce, both Boomers and Thirteeners find themselves nurturing children of the next generation. The size of the overlap of two generations having off-spring in the youngest generation may be unprecedented. Thus "family" has become a central if not the greatest value to both groups. However, do not expect Thirteeners to accept as narrow a definition of family structure as the Boomers. Boomers' views are often guided by the idealized forms prevalent in the 1950's and early 1960's where a single-wage earner, married couple were pictured on television and at home as the All-American family. These images belied the true situation among 1950's American families where less than half (43 per cent) of families conformed to the traditional ideal and already one-fourth (23 per cent) were dual-earners (Masnick and Bane, 1980). In addition, 25 per cent of Americans were poor during the 1950's; a time when there were no food stamps or housing programs. Never-the-less, the family experience of Thirteeners has been dramatically different; so while Boomers will tend to revive the traditional family, Thirteeners will experiment with a variety of forms. The common ingredient will be commitment -- love their children, investing years in guidance, protection and nurturance, establishing important norms and values.

Family life will be an essential element of Thirteeners lives and will have a profound impact on their approach to work. Boomer norms which have become prescribed in the work place (long hours at the expense of family) will be challenged as a better balance will be sought. A balanced employee should be viewed as a strength and managed accordingly. What Thirteeners seek in terms of salary and benefits packages will change once they have established themselves in the workplace. Having watched

what happened to their parents and their friends' parents during the recent downsizing period, Thirteeners are more likely to make different career choices and commitments.

Life Scripts. In her book Teenagers, Palladrino (1996) attributes many conflicts between parents and young adults to misinterpretation of the life's scripts before them: each interpreting the same words, actions, and scenes differently. The tension between Thirteeners and older generations is more likely the result of different interpretations of the scripts available in society today. The result is often a failure to connect: young adults fail to connect to potential future situations and choices while elders fail to connect their experiences and wisdom with the immediate needs and challenges of young adults. Nothing brings this to the forefront than a visit to the movies.
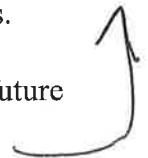
The Field of Dreams is the quintessential Boomer movie. Have a grand vision; work hard to achieve it, even as some ridicule you and those closest to you suffer; and you will be rewarded. "Build it and they will come," is a Boomer mantra that Thirteeners do not buy into. Thirteeners are not visionary, and are not deluded by things (images) they can not touch or feel the texture of. They would never build something without having a commitment that someone actually needed the object or service. This scene plays out daily in our offices : Boomers planning and offering workshops, fairs, and recruiting visits by Fortune 500 companies. Yet, few come. Thirteeners want you to bring it to them -- because it is only worthy if it has value to their immediate, real situation.

In "The Firm", Tom Cruise, the epitome of today's Thirteeners, extricates himself from a threatening situation through his own wit and cunning, even freeing his brother in the deal. Thirteeners easily wrap themselves in accepted behaviors that will get them ahead, as the young firm lawyer did. However, as Ritchie observes, they do not internalize these behaviors so they believe they can stop whenever necessary and break from the group. This type of action relies on street smarts; something Thirteeners believe they have. Thirteeners have complete confidence that if faced with a predicament or problem they possess the ability to find a solution. Boomers, at least according to a Thirteeners, will spend lots of time talking about getting out of a problem than actually doing anything about it (Howe and Strauss, 1993). So rather than a lecture, they follow Nike and "Just Do It."

Reality Bites plays on the perceived angst and bleak fortunes of Thirteeners. To many graduate students, those among the first wave of Thirteeners in their late 20's and early 30's at the time the movie was released, a close identification resonated with the movie's message; believing that their hard work would not be appreciated and no jobs were available except at McDonald's. Our undergraduates reaction to the movie was completely different: buy the soundtrack and avoid paying $6.00 for a bad film. Many angrily commented that the media and "old folks" have nothing kind to say about us. They did not appreciate the movies' message-- enough is enough. Reversing the situation, many felt they were in better position to deal with the new economy and future change than their parents -- certainly the parents portrayed in this movie.

Defining the Generation X: The Lion King Effect

Shortly after Reality Bites left the theaters, The Lion King's roar awoke undergraduates, packing them into the theater's empty seats. The cute animals and youth oriented music were not the primary reason this film captured the attention of college students. As one young women commented in class: " Dr. Gardner, you have drawn your analogies to our situation from the wrong sources. The Lion King really speaks to us." This movie is simply the retelling of the ancient story of Telemachus whose external conflict, the search for this father, parallels his internal conflict of growing up and accepting who he is. Along the way, he hears repeatedly that he palls in strength and character next to his father; that he will never measure up to his father nor the expectations of those around him (in Telemachus' case his mother). Many students who have repeatedly heard the message of Reality Bites push away from crossing that imaginary line that requires them to enter the adult world because of anxiety over whether they are ready to accept the challenges "out there," or the feeling of inadequacy in meeting the expectations parents and society have for them -- especially after being told they lack the competencies to be successful on the scale of the Boomers. Graduation is such an exhilarating moment, reflecting great accomplishment as well as sacrifice. Yet the physical act of walking across the stage and accepting the diploma is much easier than the psychological transition because the move to the next level of responsibility is fraught with anxiety and fear. Every one has to go, as The Lion King learned, but some take longer than others and the transition experience varies widely. Pulling back into the safety of their own environment projects the image of a slacker (Hakuna Matata) which is merely a protective device until they feel ready to move ahead. Boomers, many having forgotten their own transition experiences, have little patience for those who malinger at the crossing; unwilling to hold their hands. Unfortunately, holding hands may be just what Thirteeners need.

Reaching Xers: Relevancy, Reflection and Resiliency

Generational gaps have existed throughout history and the differences between Boomers and Thirteeners are no exception. The chasm between these successive generations is wide and often deep. In spite of basic differences, common ground exists (public service, family, workplace needs) that allow positive relationships to develop between them. The challenge for Boomers is to develop partnerships between student development staff, faculty, and potential employers for the purpose of creating programs that complement classroom activities and bring real world expectations into collegiate life. Essentially the traditional three R's of education (reading, 'riting, and 'rithmatic) need to be balanced by three additional R's: relevancy, reflection, and resiliency. The new R's address important developmental issues faced by Thirteeners.

Undergraduates' concept of relevancy bears on the connection between a class and its content and their career expectations. An engineering student, for example, wants to study only engineering courses and reluctantly engages in "liberal arts oriented classes" which are part of the university's core curriculum. Students also have little use for information presented in the classroom that is not relevant to the test they will take.

Relevancy based on merely collecting things fails in that students do not develop skills to recall and apply what they have collected. Baxter-Magolda ( ) shifts relevancy into an active learning context whereby a student moves from dependent learning (collection of things) strategies to interdependent/contextual learning where knowledge gathering and application become more ambiguous depending on the context of events being studied. Efforts through co-op and internships begin to make this transition; but the movement has to be re-enforced on a more regular basis through classroom activities. A one time internship experience is not sufficient.

Experiences that expand relevency need to be followed with periods of reflection where students engage in evaluating their intellectual, professional and personal development in light of their experiences. In other words, reflection allows a student to take a service learning assignment, for example, and determine how it has affected them, re-enforcing or altering their expectations and aspirations as well as building new competencies. Co-op students often are required to write reflective pieces on their experiences and, after reading several hundred, we now realize that many students have failed to comprehend the extent to which their lives where impacted by their off-campus experiences. What is missing is a dialogue with their faculty and advisors that allow these experiences to be probed at a deeper level, challenging students to articulate how they have been changed as well as prepared to make their transition from college. Too often neither the commitment in time nor an environment conducive to establishing dialogues is in place for students to engage in reflective practices. However, reflection and relevancy can happen in unlikely places. A colleague in a management class lectures on the theoretical foundations of customer service; then has students keep a weekly journal of service they have received which contributes to a brief essay on what customer service means to them; and finally leads group discussion that reconciles personal beliefs with management practices.

In order for reflection and relevancy to make a difference, students have to be resilient. No one who has continually heard how poorly trained they are wants to hear additional bad news, particularly when it comes down to the personal level. Reflection opens the door, allowing criticism to enter. Maybe a student has not yet developed the interpersonal skills necessary for the occupation they wish to enter. Yet telling a student they have to work on this competency is problematic. First, students are defensive and second, they can not easily accept failure. Yelon (1996) suggests that we need to set higher expectations for our students. He argues that assignments be given students where only an A can be earned. To meet this expectation students have repeated opportunities to complete tasks, encouraged to utilize different learning styles and different strategies, until they reach the accepted level. This practice removes failure as a threat and places resiliency up front -- keep trying until you find a path to the accepted level of performance.

Many opportunities avail themselves to incorporate relevancy, reflection and resiliency into our interactions with students. Before we enter the Thirteener's world with prescriptions and programs, we suggest three actions for career advisors and

recruiters as they lay a foundation on which to build the new 3 R's. First, the emotional collectivism of Thirteeners remains at an all-time low; a result of negative coverage in the press and film. Covey offers the emotional bank account as a depository for the elements that contribute to positive relationship building -- the cornerstone of the 3 R's. Covey (199) suggests that six types of deposits need to be made: understanding the individual, attention to little things, keeping commitments, clarifying expectations, showing personal integrity, and apologizing sincerely when withdrawing from the account. (p. 190 - 199). Specifics are not important here as the concept of making deposits; as we are going to have to build a strong reserve before many Thirteeners are willing to trust us. Over the last few months, employers have made more positive statements about Thirteeners which presents an opportunity to open the bank account.

Once the bank account is in place, the next step involves validating the student as an individual not as a member of a poorly defined group. Every student has a story to tell and we need to take the time to listen. Validating replaces hand holding which older generations view negatively.

Students strongly wrap their identity around a vocational image such as being a manager or more specific job title. This type of imaging has a fallacy in the new economy as traditional career paths based on titles are being eliminated or redefined around competencies and skills. This makes it necessary for students to reshape their identity as it relates to vocation. In career planning the objective becomes one of articulating a personal mission statement (Covey,) that captures what one desires over one's life span rather than the construction of an agenda based on job titles and continual upward movement in an organizational setting. As workers become more entrepreneurial in their career activities, they need to be guided by a personal mission. Activities that support development of mission statements, articulate the tradeoffs between different values, and establish a framework for navigating the boundaryless paths through the workplace are integral parts of the portfolio process (see Kimeldorf,).

Footsteps: The Arrival of the Millennial Generation

Long before Boomers retire they will encounter a new generation of students; the students of the first wave of this generation currently reside in 9th and 10th grades. Already Astin's surveys capture subtle shifts in student attitudes that will grow as this new generation enters college. Already cultural influences are already in play that will mold this generation. Society has squarely placed a high priority on protecting children; overall this generation is expected to be better protected from violence and abuse while being indulged by their parents. Education will also be a priority with education being increasingly equated with a job. The connection will be so strong that many students and their parents will consider college an entitlement to employment. Remember, their parents, Boomers and first wave Thirteeners, did not always have a positive experience in the college classroom; thus, the demands for relevancy and quality will be high. The amount of pressure they bring to bear on educational institutions will depend on how they utilize their consumer ethic for educational services.

If one can keep events in historical perspective, one quickly realizes that every generation who enters the workplace has created dissonance for both themselves and the established workforce. The key is not to respond to the stereotypes and easily massaged anecdotal evidence; but, rather be knowledgeable about and sensitive to this cohort, the Thirteeners. Not only does this minimize dissonance but can build on the many strengths the Thirteeners bring to the workplace.

Footnotes

1. Names have in recent history been given to decades based on some widely shared characteristic. The 90's decade has yet to be titled. "Unforgiving" is a label frequently heard that captures this decades return to stricter values and penalizing those who veer from expected norms, especially in the areas of crime, drug use, smoking for example. We can expect further efforts to clamp down on inappropriate behavior.

2. Various names and dates have been associated with Boomer and Xer generations. Demographers tend to base their dates on birth rates while Strauss and Howe take an historical approach, using generational characteristics as guides. Their approach provides a scholarly structure for studying generations; thus their terminology and dates have been followed throughout.

3. Niche marketing targets small subsets of a population (generation) in hopes of identifying future trends and consumer tastes. Survey findings spark interest in the media and labels are created even though the trend is short lived or never came to fruition. ~~These~~ Many labels for the Thirteeners are based on very small samples which may not reflect the general population.

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Table 1

Table 1
Values Important to College Freshmen
(% Indicating Essential or Very Important)[1]

	Boomer Years			13th Generation		
	1966	1972	1978	1980	1985	1992
Creativity						
Accomplished performing arts	11	12	13	12	11	11
Contribution to science	13	11	14	15	13	18
Write original works	15	17	14	14	11	12
Creating artistic work	15	17	14	14	11	12
Professional Life						
Authority in field	66	61	73	73	71	69
Recognition for contribution	43	37	50	54	55	55
Expert-finance/commerce	13	16	--	--	26	--
Administrative responsibility	29	24	36	39	43	41
Successful own business	53	45	48	49	52	42
Personal Well-Being						
Well-off financially	44	41	60	63	71	73
Develop philosophy of life	83[2]	71	56	59	43	46
Raise a family	71[3]	65	62	63	70	71
Political Involvement						
Political affairs	58	49	37	40	38[4]	39
Influence political structure	--	46	15	16	16	20
Participate in community action	--	29	27	27	16	26
Becoming a community leader	26	15	--	--	--	31
Social Involvement						
Help others	69	67	65	65	63	63
Racial understanding	--	--	34	33	32	42
Influence social values	--	30	31	32	33	43
Environmental action	--	45	27	27	20	34

[1]Source: Astin, A.W., Green, K.C., and Korn, W.S. 1987. The American Freshman: Twenty Year Trends, 1966-1986. The Higher Education Research Institute and American Council on Education. Los Angeles: University of California. "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1992." The Higher Education Research Institute and American Council on Education. Los Angeles: University of California as reported in the Chronicle of Higher Education. 1994. The Almanac of Higher Education. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[2]1967 data.

[3]1969 data.

[4]1984 data.

Table 2
Events and Attitudes that Influence a Decade

	Events	Attitudes
1960's	Assassinations Vietnam War The Beatles Summer of love - the pill Space race Cold War (Cuba) Peace Corp established Civil rights movement Great Society	Life increasing affected by war Need for individual distinction/ individualism Rejection of social/political traditions (no party identification) Deep sense of social commitment Sexual experimentation Distrust of leaders Great economic expectations Fears of nuclear age Standardized curriculum in education Introspective, search for meaning
1970's	Vietnam War Watergate/Pentagon papers Cold War (China open) Terrorism/civil wars Oil embargo Unemployment Divorce rate increases	Life continually touched by war Government, business corrupt No heroes existed Trust in social institutions low Focus turned inward "me" Optimistic about personal future Negative about collective future Being well-off financially motivator Vocationally oriented
1990's	Cold War ends Persian Gulf War AIDS Racial tension	Better place to live Fear of fragmentation Patriotic Solved no problems/created mess Ignorance is bliss Lost faith in society Be called on to fix things Heroes: Mom and Dad, teachers Fear of economy Cheated of opportunities Financially well-off vs. helping others

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