



Speakers Who Speak To the Generations

In the July installment of Speaker Savvy, I explained the differences between the generations and how they learn. Here's how to choose a speaker that bridges the multi-generational gap.

MEETING PLANNERS USUALLY HAVE TWO AREAS OF criteria when evaluating a speaker for an event: competence and commitment. Questions on competency include: Do they know their stuff? Can they deliver it

well? Commitment questions might be: Will they show up on time? Will they customize effectively to the group? Will they carry off their presentation with passion?

A third criterion that is gaining importance is chemistry. Chemistry means not only will the presenter be a good fit for the culture of the organization but that they will be able to connect with all four generational groups in the audience: Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Gen Xers and Gen Ys. How do we analyze generational fit? Picture yourself as member of the conference audience. How would you personally react to the following?

1. The speaker shows up to present wearing a T-shirt and jeans.

2. Their handout is of their PowerPoint slides, three on a page and small in font size.

3. The presenter does not have after-presentation online learning available such as downloadable articles or streaming video.

4. There is no direct connection made between the speaker's comments and the participants' current work tasks or future goals.

Now, how would attendees from the four generational groups feel about these actions?

1. T-shirt and jeans — high negativity for Traditionalists, some negativity for Boomers, neutral for Gen Xers and Gen Ys. For a Traditionalist, even a Baby Boomer, this casualness of dress may be perceived as disrespect for the audience and/or lack of preparedness. Traditionalists may see limited value in the speaker's message.

2. PowerPoint slides in small print — negativity for Traditionalists and Boomers, neutral or slightly positive for Gen Xers and Gen Ys. Any handout that has small print is difficult for the over-40 crowd to read.

3. No after-presentation online learning opportunity — neutral for Traditionalists, slightly negative for Boomers and Gen Xers, highly negative for Gen Ys. Is

a meeting a one-time event or an important element in ongoing learning? Gen Ys expect to learn at their pace and on their timetable. If interested in a subject, they would expect that subject experts would have for-free learning available for event participants online.

4. Lack of connection between content and application — neutral for Traditionalists and Boomers, slightly negative for Gen Xers, highly negative for Gen Ys. Traditionalists and Boomers are satisfied with general knowledge from conferences but Gen Xers and particularly Gen Ys expect to see a direct connection between why they are listening to that speaker and how they will use that information to have better workplace relationships, increase productivity, or achieve results.

So how do you know if the speaker you are considering understands demographic issues? You can start by asking these questions:

- ▶ How does your presentation address the needs of different generational groups?
- ▶ How will your presentation acknowledge both the past efforts and the recent achievements of today's employees or members?
- ▶ What pre-event and post-event learning opportunities will you be making available?
- ▶ How will you connect your message to both the immediate and future needs of the audience? ■

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