Multigenerational Learners

What do you know about your Generational Learning Style (GLS)? Ever wonder why you and that senior instructional leader or training developer may not see eye to eye? Enormous challenges can exist in understanding not only your GLS but also those with whom you interact. BLUF: This month, ESC/TLDE focuses on generational learning styles and offers basic information regarding each GLS that you can use in the schoolhouse and at home.

During a recent Instructor Leader Course, someone asked whether the current Qualification Course produces Soldiers who are as effective as those who went through the pipeline 20 years ago. This particular class included people from several different generations, a true example of a multigenerational learning environment. These learners proceeded to state why they believed that *their* respective generation produced the most effective Soldiers. Needless to say, managing multigenerational relationships is an art in and of itself. Of course, your GLS is not based entirely on the year you were born. You may relate to characteristics in another GLS that do not apply to your birth year!

GLS Basic Info:

	Generation	Born	Age Today
1.	GI Generation	1901-1924	91-114
2.	Traditionalists	1925-1945	70-90
3.	Baby Boomers	1946-1964	51-69
4.	Generation X	1965-1980	35-50
5.	Generation Y	1981-2000	15-34
6.	Generation Z	2001–Present	0-14

1. **GI Generation** is referred to as "the greatest generation ever." This generation produced our first astronauts and gave rise to the *Superman* comic strip. Today, they make up no percentage of our workforce; however, they receive frequent public recognition for heroic contributions made in their "glory days." The GI generation places public interest over personal gain.

2. **Traditionalists** are the oldest generation actively engaged in our current work force. Traditionalists comprise 12% of today's workforce. These "Gray beards" are loyal to the workforce, respect authority, and adhere to rules. They can be counted on when push comes to shove; however, there may be a bit of a learning curve when it comes to embracing new technology.

3. **Baby Boomers** bring in fresh perspective, are optimistic, are team players, and are uncomfortable with conflict. They believe the world revolves around them; they live to work, and they expect

others to have the same work ethics and hours. Boomers make up more than 26% of our workforce. Many still have paper calendars; however, some have upgraded to iPads. Baby Boomers are adult learners. Today's classrooms are student –oriented. This is a very successful strategy for teaching adults, especially baby boomers.

4. **Generation X** individuals have positive attitudes; however, are extremely impatient. They are goal-oriented, can multitask, and think globally. They question authority, they use "to do" lists, and they work to live, opposite of Boomers who live to work. This group believes when the internet is not accessible, everyone should go home, because no work will get done. Gen X makes up about 20% of our workforce. They are motivated by asking questions and challenging concepts; however, they maintain short attention spans. Successful instructional strategies for Gen X involve making assignments "real world", incorporating technology whenever possible, and utilizing games and case studies during learning.

5. **Generation Y/ Millennials** are confident, social, diverse, and technologically savvy. Millennials need flexibility, and they expect employers to accommodate non-traditional work schedules. Gen Y comprises the largest workforce cohort at more than 27%. They are accused of possessing a great sense of entitlement. They want to be surrounded by bright, creative people; they want what they want right now, and they seek empowerment. Gen Y likes to communicate through texting and social media. Some instructional strategies for these learners are to develop self-assessment items, and provide opportunities for group work.

6. **Generation Z** is the first generational cohort to know no world other than that of instant access to an infinite amount of information. They are trend setters and truly care about happenings in the world. They use technology to connect and share with each other and the world. They prefer to spend money on traveling, and they share Instagram photos of things as fascinating and/or mundane as their meals and daily activities. This generation will be storming into the workforce gates by 2020. Instructional strategies for Gen Z include mobile learning. Research suggests that mobile learning is growing at a rate of 18.2 % per year; learning organizations must adopt appropriate technologies to keep up with the demand.

Multigenerational learning styles surround us. In order for us to not only get along but also prosper, we must understand ourselves and those around us. We should promote the positive impact that emotionally intelligent instructional leaders, instructors, training developers, and family members have on those of other generations as a result of their encouraging actions.

The importance of understanding generational differences cannot be overstated. It is critical to be familiar with the characteristics of each GLS. This means taking time and building trusting relationships where members of each generation can bring their respective talents to work toward our common goals.

So, the next time you find yourself disagreeing with someone, step back, and think about the GLS of that individual. Recall the characteristics of that person's GLS. Evaluate why you may not see eye to eye, and consider the ways that you can move forward together.