

Warning Signs – Generational Apartheid

By Scott Degraffenreid, March 5, 2008, www.NecessaryMeasures.com

We are in the first stages of a social phenomenon that can fairly and accurately be referred to as “*generational apartheid*”. I hesitate to use this term because I know it is polarizing and may be viewed by many as overly dramatizing the situation but I will call it how I see it, as an experienced Social Network Analyst. Throughout America and much of the industrialized world, a quiet offense is being waged against a burgeoning demographic. The remarkable thing is that it is not being done deliberately, systematically or even maliciously. Unfortunately the net effect is and will be just the same as if we had set out to marginalize, ostracize and manipulate this population.

Millennials, the demographic sector born circa 1982-2001, are being held virtual hostages by prior generations. Baby Boomers and Gen Xers were at first myopically indifferent to the profound changes exhibited by the group of young people sometimes inappropriately referred to as Gen Y. In general, no one considered the far-reaching implications for children raised in an environment that was technologically, culturally and even chronologically different than anything that has ever occurred before. That lack of foresight and preparation is part of the reason Millennials appear to have landed in our midst like some incomprehensible alien invasion. In truth they did not arrive without warning and they are clearly finding little welcome.

Because older generations find many of their characteristics somewhere between annoyingly unfamiliar and totally unacceptable, they have taken the position that Millennials must conform to the standards established by those who grew up in a very different environment from theirs. Millennials are being treated as if they are somehow defective or diseased. Nothing could be further from the truth. They aren't broken and they don't need fixing.

Millennials were raised in the cradle of an unprecedented perfect storm of cultural, technological and historical trends in. The result is a generation of people nearly perfectly adapted to the chaotic, volatile and globally hyperlinked world they must live in and try to shape for the better. Demanding that they be other than themselves is as naïve as trying to turn back evolution. We must not only accept, but respect and embrace their dynamic outlook and neurological differences. Forcing them to emulate us, or simply excluding them if they refuse, is leading to a mutual resentment and alienation that can have no positive outcome and which is rapidly creating a hostile subculture.

Reaching out to Millennials is the duty of older generations. They did not ask to be shaped in the ways they have been by the technology and culture we created and immersed them in. They have been summarily launched into thought and behavior patterns that no previous generation has ever experienced. We are the instruments of their differentiation; they are adapted to the world we gave them to live in. We cannot shut them out or stop them. They are the future.

It is the purpose of N2Millennials to bridge the gap between Millennials and their forebears. We are committed to forging a partnership of trust and acknowledgment that recognizes the value of all generations not only in the workplace but in the world at large. Email us at Scott@NecessaryMeasures.com.