

## Why Should I Have to Keep Them Entertained?

By Misti Burmeister

In a recent meeting with a potential client, I had the opportunity to learn about some challenges they are having with their emerging leader program, which is in its inaugural year. The vast majority of their participants are generations X and Y.

Six months into the year-long program they are dealing with disengaged participants – in fact, many participants are more than simply disengaged – they are outright rude to some of the instructors. It is clear that they perceive this program as if it were merely a box that needs to be checked off in order to keep their careers moving forward.

I listened to a description of the program and its intended goals, and then began asking questions. I asked what was going well and not-so-well in the program, when do participants seem to be engaged, what do the program managers think needs to be adjusted? They had a great list of what was going really well and only a short list of what was not going so well. What stuck out for me was that the participants seem to like the program only when the instructor goes out of his or her way to be engaging.

This naturally lead me to share with my potential client the reality of this generation – they were raised by television, chat rooms, instant messaging and video games – they are used to being stimulated and expect it now, whether "it" is feedback, gratification or anything else! As soon as I mentioned this, one of the wonderful ladies I was talking with (a Boomer) came back with, "It is not my job to keep them entertained!" Her exclamation reminded of me something I heard quoted recently – "Generation Y will be the most high maintenance workforce in the history of the world, and they will be the most high performing."

Whether it's right or wrong that this generation is demanding is immaterial. Fortunately for them, they can be! Baby Boomers are beginning their move into retirement, and organizations are required to find ways to attract, retain and motivate their next generation of leaders.

Toward the end of our conversation, I was asked how to create a multi-generational curriculum. To which I responded – "While the more seasoned generation is far more tolerant and adaptive, and its members will therefore participate regardless of presentation type, every generation wants to be stimulated and engaged. The biggest difference between generations is their respective skill sets – if you can offer a variety of courses and keep them engaged, you'll be effective across generations."

Finding a way to keep participants engaged, *even entertained*, will likely increase participation and add to the overall success of your program.

