

FAMILY REUNION INSTITUTE'S

STICKY REUNION SITUATION

PASS THE BATON

November 2018

The Situation:

Our family elders have been planning our reunion ever since I can remember. They don't listen to us and do not include us in the planning, even though we want to and have tried to get involved, (which is why most of the younger family members do not attend).

As years have gone by we've noticed that our elders are getting to the place where the planning should be handed over, especially if this great family tradition is to be continued. We're older now with children of our own and want our kids to experience the comradery and unity that comes from having a family reunion. Do you have any suggestions for how we can tactfully and respectfully take over the planning so that our elders feel grateful and pleased—and not unappreciated and forced out?

The Fix:



Doug Harris

My first response to this situation is the old saying: "The longest journey begins with a few small steps." My own family was involved in a situation where younger family members were basically told, "Here you do it." As soon as they started with their plans, the feedback was immediate and disapproving: "That's not the way it's done. Why did you do it this way? This isn't going to work." Although the result was one of our nicer reunions, the two young people who planned the reunion both vowed they would never do it again, because of the negativism they encountered.

The step-by-step approach works better in my opinion. Several good suggestions were mentioned in the article about the Wilson-Lake-Herbert Family reunion in another section of this website this month. Turning over the family newsletter to a Millennial, involving them in a variety of ways, including a representative of the younger generation on the Planning Committee, having intentional conversations with youth about what's going on in their lives and their plans for the future are all good ways to spur commitment to family reunions. Other ideas include asking Generation X (ages 38-53; Millennials (ages 22-37); and Post-Millennials (under 21) to plan one or several events during the Reunion that are planned by them with their interests and goals in mind. I recommend that all family members be invited, but with the understanding that's it's all about the generation planning the event. Although we Baby Boomers (ages 54-72) and the Silent Generation (73-90) may neither understand nor approve what other generations choose to do, we must accept their choices. If they plan a gaming event using their phones, judgmental comments like "they're always on their phones" and "they don't know how to talk to each other" must be quashed. Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation must learn from and embrace younger generations and their culture—and vice versa.

The Fix:



**Sylvia
Ford-George**

Gently fold members of your generation into the planning. Match-up interested younger members with family elders by skill/responsibility/task. Meet one-on-one with your matched-elder during and outside of meetings. Help them accomplish tasks, encourage conversation, build a rapport, lead them into a comfortable give-take relationship, and learn as much as you can about the elder and the job at hand. Hopefully you can win the elders over by working with them individually. Their seeing how helpful and insightful the younger generation is will change their attitude about allowing the next generations to help with the planning, and help them understand that this is the only way to ensure the reunion continues.
