

# The neXt Generation of facility managers

Writing from the perspective of the 'X-Generation,' this FM discusses the profound changes he sees coming to the profession



*Brandon Meisner*

**T**he facility manager in today's workplace is someone who could be on the board of directors or at a senior VP level.

FMs have to facilitate the work environment. But what happens when they are younger than some of the furniture in their buildings, or even some of the people, they are managing? If that is the case, the X-Generations (Xers) could face serious problems with fellow employees. They may have different work styles and ideals than their peers. They could possess differences in time management skills, efficiency, and job performance. This diversity must be embraced and not feared by today's companies.

The classifications of generations within the workplace has been an issue since the acknowledgement of aging Baby Boomers some 20 years ago. The most common classifications are:

**Millennium** (0 to late teens) — sometimes referred to as Generation Y.

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**Generation X** (Late teens to mid 30s)  
**Baby Boomers** (mid 30s to mid/late 50s)  
**Traditionalists** (mid/late 50s to late 60s)  
**Seniors** (late 60s plus) — sometimes called the "Silent Generation".

The "X" in X-Generation was coined by Douglas Coupland in his 1991 novel, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, (New York: St. Martin Press, 1991) in which he referred to a generation that had nothing to stand for. Since then, the Xers have filled in that blank "X" with multiple, positive meanings. The past meaning of this generation was lazy, confused and unfocused. Being raised by MTV with the teachings of Beavis and Butthead, the X-Generation was never taken seriously. The oldest Xers will be mid-30s this year and have proven that being raised by the overworked single parent has been strongly effective. They have been raised in an environment where the key interests were not baby-boomer idealism, but the ozone layer, homelessness, AIDS and social security.

## **Strong work ethic**

Many Xers and their parents were affected by the corporate downsizing between 1979 and 1995, which resulted in millions of job losses. Many have had to pay at least a portion of their own schooling. This instilled a strong work ethic, which many Xers acknowledge is needed in today's marketplace to succeed. They thrive on competition, which keeps their skills polished, because they know that job security is virtually non-existent. Recently, a study by the University of Michigan found that 25 to 34 year-olds are trying to start an entrepreneurial business three times the rate of 35 to 55 year-olds. In addition, Marquette University found that

Xers are starting 70 per cent of all new businesses.

Futurist Watts Wacker forecasted that the Xers would do worse than their parents, a view repeated in the media numerous times. However, no one ever asked the Xers what *their* views were on their own future. In a CBS News Poll, an astonishing 96 per cent of Xers surveyed said that they will get to where they want to be in life. These statistics, and more, have challenged the whole slacker stereotype. Because of their propensity to save and invest financially, and their strong bent toward entrepreneurialism, the accomplishments of Xers have no limits. They have been growing in a constantly changing environment and are the ones who can relate to and assimilate change.

## **Well-planned careers**

Currently, the X-Generation makes-up over half of the adult labour force. FM was, for many years, associated with an older generation of engineers, but since the development of this profession, a new generation has been attracted to its many disciplines, encompassing skills such as design, engineering, management, finance, operations, real estate and environmental factors.

Many of the Xers working in FM have planned their careers carefully. Currently there are six IFMA recognized programs offering degrees in FM, 26 other colleges and universities offering concentrations in the field and an additional 20 schools offering specialized classes. These programs make it attractive for many younger individuals to begin a career in FM. Many Xers currently in the field have accomplished degrees, not only in FM but also in interior design or engineering, and many have MBAs in project management or finance, as well as masters, such as in design or architecture. The mixture of education and talent these Xers bring to the workplace will have a significant impact on how business is done, how clients are handled and even the future development of the corporation.

*Please see X-Gen, page 40*

Doug Leventhal, a project manager in his early 30s, at Evergreen Devco, holding an MBA and an MA says, "Real estate and development, including facilities management, is such an exciting field to be in during these banner economic times. It is a wonderful feeling to have the ability to not only create but also influence the built environment, especially at a young age."

An additional asset of Xers is an understanding of technology in today's work. In an article "It's just a job: Generation X at Work" in Training Magazine, (April 1994) B. Filipczak wrote "Xers are either adept users or at least unafraid to try new technology. Combine this absence of fear with the ability to parallel think and process information quickly, and you've got workers who can pick up almost any software program and learn it quickly"

Many Fortune 500 companies have issued programs that "value diversity." Age differences have been recognized as a serious diversity issue. By supporting these programs, companies have realized their teams gain rewards by collaborating with individuals from different generations with different views, fresh ideas, and unbiased opinions. Companies have departments dedicated to college hiring, and pursuing college-fresh recruits. Some incentives they offer are hiring bonuses and immediate vacation packages.

Now, because of these young, well-educated individuals entering the workplace, older generations are feeling threatened. Many companies have instituted education programs for workers to go back to school and achieve a degree. Most of these participants are not Xers, but Baby Boomers. They feel

they need to keep "neck-and-neck" with the new employees and to further expand their skills and knowledge base.

"Going back to complete my bachelors degree gave me an edge," says Rusty Thompson, a facilities engineer at Boeing. "It propelled me to the level of the younger generation's education, but at the same time, I am using my 15 plus years of experience . . . and with that combination I am now more marketable."

Within FM, experience is truly valued. Companies often are enticed by the idea that they can pay younger workers less than they do seasoned employees. However, many of these companies are learning that experience versus dollars can be a game with many variables.

This X Generation has the highest level of education of any generation before them. And women of the X Generation, raised by working mothers, are better educated than women in any

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other generation in U.S. history. In FM, women have emerged strongly to secure roles as engineers, designers and managers, in contrast to jobs in finance or human resources more typical women Baby Boomers.

"As anyone in a facilities organization knows, you have the unique ability to rub elbows with all levels of personnel," says Teresa Sowell, a facility space planner for Raytheon. "This allows me the opportunity to 'spread the word' to everyone from vice presidents to custodians regarding the fact that females can successfully contribute to the organization . . . have embraced the challenge with humour, endurance/tolerance, and determination. I have always enjoyed a good challenge, and after five years [of] working in a male dominated corporation, I have learned that my skills and perspective as a female add greatly to the goals and objectives of our group."

"Facilities management, is such an exciting field to be in during these banner economic times. It is a wonderful feeling to have the ability to . . . influence the built environment, especially at a young age."

The corporate culture has shifted. This may be due to the younger generation being behind the wheel, or at least being in the car. Xers in the corporate world have changed the overall feel of facilities departments. One area is the style of dress in these departments. Many companies have turned from suit and tie, with a Friday casual day, to casual day every day. Currently, 66 per cent of office workers dress casually everyday, and 24 per cent of companies observe casual dress on Fridays. Engineers in Hawaiian print shirts are not rare sites. They have

traded the pocket protector, the white short-sleeved dress shirt and the black tie for a backpack, a pair of Sketchers, and an earring.

Another change that might be due to the rise of Xers in the workforce, is the number of hours worked a day. Many Xers prefer not to work the standard five, eight-hour days, when the option is there to work four, 10-hour days or telecommute from home. With technology and a fresh view, options are greatly expanding and new ideas and products are constantly being generated to change and enhance the workplace.

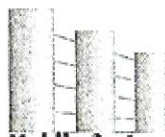
Since we, the facility managers, assist in controlling the work environment, it will be interesting to see how exactly this generation will influence it. As many people accept this as true, change is the only thing of which that we can be sure. . . . It makes us wonder where will the next generation escort us within the work environment?

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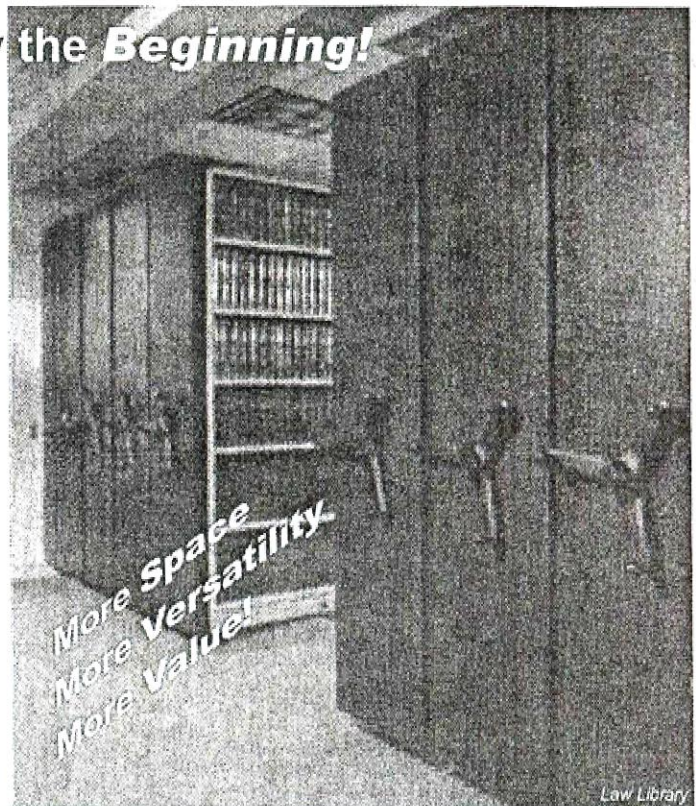


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