

Four-Part Harmony: From Hand Crank to Hash Tags



Clive S Grant, MD, FACS

Before proceeding with the main topic, I would like to make a few preliminary comments. I would like to thank Norm Estes not only for his kind introduction, but also for his sincere interest by inviting my wife and me to dinner in Rochester, expressly to get to know us better. It was a fun evening.

I am extremely fortunate and deeply honored to have served as president of the Western Surgical Association (WSA). From the first time I presented a paper at the Western in 1983, to being inducted as a member 5 years later, I have always been impressed with the scientific sessions, but even more remarkable is the warmth and genuine friendship of our entire membership.

I am very proud to be the tenth WSA president from the Mayo Clinic (Table 1), dating back to Charlie Mayo in 1904. As I suspect every newly elected president has, I re-read numerous of our previous presidential addresses (Table 2), and was again amazed and inspired by their words. They will be hard to match.

Of the many people who helped me over the years, I have time to name only a few. I want to thank Don McIlrath (Fig. 1) and Keith Kelly (Fig. 2), both former chairs of our surgical department at Mayo, for their guidance and mentorship early in my career. Without question, Jon van Heerden (Fig. 3) and Tony Edis (Fig. 4) had the most influence during my training and paved the way for my career in endocrine surgery. I owe them a great debt of gratitude.

As valuable as my mentors were 2 colleagues, Michael Farnell and David Nagorney. They started their surgical training the same day I did, and we have remained great friends for nearly 39 years. Together we weathered the stress and intensity of surgical training in the 1970s, and the subsequent growth and maturation of our careers together has been very special to me. One additional colleague, Geoff Thompson, has been an outstanding partner with me for many years in endocrine surgery.

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From the Department of Surgery, Mayo Medical School, Rochester, MN. Correspondence address: Clive S Grant, MD, FACS, Department of Surgery, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN 55905. email: cgrant@mayo.edu

And finally, I owe so much to my family. Of course it starts with my parents, two of the finest from the Greatest Generation. Also sharing those 39 years, and as she fondly points out, each and every one of the 39 Rochester winters, is my wife, Karen. Simply stated, without her, none of this could have happened nor would it have been as fun or meaningful. I am also fortunate that joining her here today are my 3 daughters, Kelly, Elise, and Stephanie, and my son, Justin. I am a very lucky man. To borrow a little piece of wisdom from Basil Pruitt, I feel like a turtle on top of a fence post in the middle of Texas—he had to have a lot of help getting there, and so did I.

Our civilization is doomed if the unheard-of actions of our younger generations are allowed to continue.

—Inscription on a 4,000 year old Sumerian tablet

Friction between generations is not new. Over the past 10 to 15 years, for the first time in history, 4 distinct generations have coexisted in the workforce. Although certain basic values of integrity, honesty, and desire to be respected and recognized are shared by all generations, the priorities and attitudes regarding education, work style, work-life balance, authority, and especially communication have evolved and sometimes caused misunderstandings if not outright contempt. Discussion between members of different generations often generates more heat than light. Social science research that forms the conceptual basis for defining generations, their conflicts and potential resolutions, although far different from the methodology of medical science, has generated a _prolific number of papers, editorials, presentations, and books dealing with this subject. Physicians in general and surgeons in particular are only now encountering the most recent generation (Generation Y, Millennials) as they have worked through residency, fellowships, and have just begun to enter the surgical workforce. The education and business sectors have dealt with these generational differences for more than a decade, and their assessments, experiences, and recommendations can be valuable to us. Mentoring these young adults requires us to understand the traits and characteristics of each generation, and especially to recognize striking differences that need to be bridged. Specifically for the Western Surgical Association, I believe there are imminent risks in ignoring these generational differences, but they can be converted to great opportunities by instituting some enhancements.

Table 1. Past Presidents from Mayo Clinic

President	Year
Charles H Mayo	1904
E Starr Judd	1929
James Priestley	1959
Charles W Mayo	1963
O T Clagett	1967
William ReMine	1980
Martin Adson	1985
Jon van Heerden	1996
Michael Farnell	2010
Clive Grant	2013

A generation is defined as an identifiable group that shares birth years and significant life events at critical development stages.¹ This leads to mutual values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. At teenage, a person's focus turns from inward to outward. This is a critical time in individual development, influenced by world events, family especially parents, peers, media, popular culture, with formation of values, priorities, and measures of success.² These opinions will influence individuals for a lifetime.³ Even though people generally become more conservative as they age, research shows that core generational values change very little.³ These differences are real, striking, and mainstream; they are not confined to just a select number within each generation. However, without question, not all members of a defined age range "behave" according to the corresponding generational label. These labels are just reasonable generalizations, not meant to imply derogatory stereotypes.

Heralding the arrival to college of a new generation—in this case Generation X—was a powerful and concerning article published in 1994, authored by the president of the Hobart and William Smith Colleges, RH Hersh, entitled, "The Culture of Neglect: Our Colleges Have To Lead, Not Follow."⁴ He stated,

Table 2. Past Decade of Western Surgical Association Presidents

President	Year
Richard A Prinz	2003
Fabrizio Michelassi	2004
Arthur S McFee	2005
Richard C Thirlby	2006
Merril T Dayton	2007
Bruce L Gewertz	2008
Wayne Schwesinger	2009
Michael B Farnell	2010
Gregory J Jurkovich	2011
Raymond J Joehl	2012

A generation has come to college quite fragile, not very secure about whom it is, fearful of its lack of identity and without confidence in its future...It is happening because the generation now entering college has experienced few authentic connections with adults in its lifetime. I call this the "Culture of Neglect,"...More children and adolescents are being reared in a vacuum with television as their only supervisor, and there is little expectation that they learn personal responsibility...We have created a culture characterized by dysfunctional families, mass schooling that demands only minimal effort...Intellectual demands placed on college students are less than they need or are capable of handling. Yet, despite low expectations and standards and plenty of free time, fewer than half of all students who enter college ever graduate, and those who do increasingly are seen by employers as having learned too little. A nation of individuals who cannot read or write well, with no sense of major human questions, who cannot think critically or show interest in learning and who are unable to act responsibly in a diverse democratic society, will be ill equipped to compete in any new world order. A culture of neglect demands little. A culture of responsibility demands more from all of us but holds the promise of far greater rewards.

Just 3 years later, the cover of *Time* magazine from June 9, 1997 focused on Generation X, stating, "You called us slackers. You dismissed us as Generation X. Well move over. We're not what you thought."

Add another 3 years, at the turn of the millennium, when the newest Generation Y was knocking on the collective corporate doors, the CEO of Deloitte LLP observed, "My kids have very different attitudes than I do concerning life, careers...you name it. Something is happening that goes beyond my being old and their being young. And many of our partners are sensing the same thing."³ In the ensuing 13 years, the relevance of generational differences and methods to facilitate collaboration drew immediate attention—more than 80% of Deloitte's external client-facing employees were under the age of 35.

Let us first examine the 4 generations. To illustrate just how different generations can be, let's take something seemingly very simple—ordering coffee:

Traditionalist: Coffee with cream, please. Simple, straightforward, polite, respectful; in those times it could not be very exotic because they only had 2 choices: Folgers or Maxwell House!

Boomer: Large latte to go. They need to get to work for the next 12 plus hours.

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