

# Generational Differences and Professional Membership

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**T**he American Organization of Nurse Executives (AONE) is celebrating 50 years of providing leadership, professional development, advocacy, and research to advance nursing practice and patient care, promoting nursing leadership excellence and shaping public policy for health care nationwide. Fifty years of success comes from dedication, commitment, and hard work, as well as

open-mindedness and adaptability. Organizations, especially professional associations, that fail to evolve inevitably lose momentum and at some point could face failure. In fact, only 12.2% of the Fortune 500 companies in 1955 were still on that list in 2014, and almost 88% of the companies have either gone bankrupt, merged, or have fallen from the top Fortune 500 companies.<sup>1</sup>

Given this historical perspective, there are certainly lessons learned as to why and how AONE has thrived for 50 years and grown to be the largest organization—with nearly 10,000 members—specifically for nurse leaders. From our experience (as individual members and as part of board governance), it is because of the thoughtful and deliberate intention to engage members and continuously evolve the organization to deliver high value member benefits. Just as the nursing workforce has changed over the last 50 years, so has the membership of AONE. Members today are very different from the members of yesterday and are different still from the anticipated membership of tomorrow.

AONE's member demographics mirror the multigenerational workforce of the profession who are in organizations today. Across the field, there continue to be preconceived notions of certain generations, with many information inputs influencing labels and assumptions. There are many studies about both the differences and commonalities among the generations. A data review reveals that there are many more similarities than there are unique qualities for each generation.

Jurkiewicz<sup>2</sup> conducted a study to assess for generational differences. The study participants provided responses that measured the importance of a variety of values including achievement, comfort, status, altruism, safety, and autonomy. A statistical analysis of the results demonstrated that 12 of the 15 categories were ranked similarly. The domains that had a statistically significant difference were related to learning new things, work-life balance, and being independent.

Similar findings were duplicated by Jobe.<sup>3</sup> In this study, a quantitative study of inpatient nurses from 2 teaching hospitals was conducted. Many commonalities were identified among study participants, and the only differences noted were in the dimensions of leisure, hard work, and delayed gratification.

## AONE WORK ON GENERATIONS

In 2014, AONE convened a multigenerational task force with member stakeholders from across the nation and varied practice settings. The goals of the task force were to examine generational differences in the workforce, explore best practices from industries both within and outside health care, and to develop recommendations to the AONE board. Through this work, a set of guiding principles were developed. These principles include over 40 different interventions leaders can implement to help recruit and retain talent into formal leadership roles.<sup>4</sup> The interventions were themed into 5 areas based on Zemke et al.<sup>5</sup> ACORN Imperatives. ACORN is an acronym which stands for:

- A = Acknowledge generational differences and integrate them into organizational goals and outcomes
- C = Create choices that promote harmony between career and personal life
- O = Operate from a sophisticated management style
- R = Respect competence and initiative
- N = Nourish retention

Following development of these AONE Guiding Principles, a broad national survey was conducted to determine nurse interest in leadership. This survey included over

700 nurses and participants were asked to rate how impactful the AONE Guiding Principle's interventions would be at either recruiting them into formal leader role or retaining them in their current leadership role. Similar to prior research, there were more commonalities between generations than there were differences, with participants rating 4 of the 5 sections similarly. One category that rated statistically different for baby boomers was the "C" bucket which related to work-life harmony.<sup>6</sup>

Information gleaned from this survey provides insight into how AONE's 50 years of successes in the specialty of nursing leadership, both nationally and internationally has occurred. It has been our personal experience that AONE has helped members focus on commonalities rather than differences. Primarily through thoughtful leadership of elected leaders and staff, AONE has kept focus on the profession's purpose—the line of sight by leaders to patients and those who receive care—and relating that to effective leadership.

AONE's priorities, programs, and initiatives have focused on avenues that build a collaborative environment and develop current and future generations of nurse leaders. Whether it's advocacy on Capitol Hill, investment in nursing research, or educational tools and programs, AONE remains relevant to leaders from the point-of-care to the C-suite and across all generations.

## PERSPECTIVES FROM AN EARLY CAREERIST (CUSPER): ERIK MARTIN

In generational terms, I'm known as a "cusper." With a foot in both worlds, I represent the end of Gen Xers and the beginning of the Millennials. My needs as an AONE member are different from many members from other generations. In 2008, when I was introduced to AONE, I was a new nurse manager and on the brink of burnout. Following the recommendation of a mentor, I applied and was accepted into the 2009 AONE Nurse Manager Fellowship. Over the course of 1 year, during a very tumultuous time in my career, the fellowship became my beacon. I harnessed valuable leadership skills, built lasting relationships, and most of all, gained the confidence I needed to lead my team.

Today, the benefits I capitalize on from AONE are different because my needs as a leader have evolved over time. Further in my tenure as a formal leader, I leverage different tools and resources than in my novice years. I find that as my leadership develops, AONE's benefits are diverse and relevant enough to keep me engaged. As my primary professional organization, AONE supports my ongoing development, giving me confidence that as I remain engaged, my skills will remain sharp and my knowledge current.

## PERSPECTIVES FROM AN EXPERIENCED NURSE LEADER (BABY BOOMER): KT WAXMAN

AONE is *the* nursing leadership organization, is established, and is reputable. According to recent AONE surveys, 16% of members have been members for over 25 years, 32% from 4 to 10 years, and 51% have been members for 3 years or less.

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