



Generation PPF: Baby Boomers & their role in creating philanthropy

PROFILE OF THE BOOMER GENERATION

In the years following World War II the number of live births in Australia rose to over three per woman. It was the first time the fertility rate had been at this level since the early 1920s and it stayed above that mark until 1965.

This high birth rate, combined with increased levels of immigration, has produced a group of Australians known as the 'baby boomer generation' – people born between 1946 and 1964. At the beginning of this century, aged between 36 and 54, they represent the largest population of any generation in history.

While there's danger in thinking one can ring-fence the characteristics of baby boomers, there are certain distinct qualities which mark the generation as the trail-blazer of radical social change globally. Already pre-disposed to the principles of philanthropy, baby boomers are more highly educated than their parents whose generation is called the 'veterans'. They are also more likely to be separated, divorced, re-married, parents of young as well as adult children, undertaking study or even dating. Living alone in a multi-storey town house or apartment is also on the statistical cards for suburban boomers, as is owning at least one pet.

Employment characteristics of baby boomers vary on a regional basis in Australia. Not surprisingly, the cities support the most qualified of this generation who are likely to be in full-time employment as managers, professionals or associate professionals.

Furthermore, according to the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, more than 37 percent of the nation's wealth is held by the four million Australians born between 1946 and 1960. Researchers thus believe the children produced in Australia's first 15 years of post-war prosperity are the wealthiest generation of the 20th century. By definition they are well positioned to become the creators of a new tradition of giving – especially if they can see something creative and engaging in it for themselves.

MOTIVATIONS OF THE GENERATION

The baby boomers generation is entering a period of transition. Some are taking on the challenges of middle life with typical self-focus, while others are taking a philosophical attitude to what is to come. Most baby boomers are currently still working and a large number have children at home. In the next 20 years the majority is expected to give up work,

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their children will leave home and those not already doing so will start living alone.

Increased life expectancy means baby boomers will live considerably longer than their parents and, perhaps most interesting of all for the not-for-profit sector, they already have – or are looking for – ideas about what they will do with the time.

One of Australia's foremost social commentators, Hugh Mackay described baby boomers as a "peculiar generation' born into the paradoxical influences of the late-1940s and early 1950s". He says their generation has been shaped by the post-World War II economic boom which delivered a sense that a positive economic outcome was the generation's birthright. Along with a notion that life was destined to be prosperous and materially rich, there was also insecurity brought by the Cold War.

These contrasting influences, he goes on, produced "an ethos of instant gratification, materialism and the entitlement to comfort". Hence, predilection for the I-want-it-now attitude has led to low savings and a high level of debt among boomers. In short, MacKay asserts the '60s and '70s were decades of over-expectation – expectations which have not been delivered upon.

Andrew Hockley, from the Clemenger Direct marketing firm says, "In many ways [baby boomers] have never really grown up and, as the last Australians to avail themselves of the free education system, many still believe the world owes them a living."

Mackay suggests that the baby boomer generation was ill-prepared for their middle years because no moral framework has come along to deal with the economic, technological and social commotion of the current period which is unprecedented in Australian history.

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THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

There is now a sense of moral discontent and a state of uncertainty as boomers look for the satisfaction and happiness which has, generally speaking, eluded them. Although their generation pioneered changes in the workplace and in gender relations, there is an undercurrent of discontent and a state of uncertainty. This has generated a return to fundamental values and an inward search for meaning and personal growth, often through religious practice, dabbling in the New Age movement, or undertaking philosophical pursuits. Authentic decency has come to be regarded almost as highly as success on the stock market!

It's therefore little surprise that many of the baby boomer generation are turning to philanthropy (including volunteering) to seek out opportunities for personal satisfaction. In learning to deal with change and the unyielding passage it now takes in their lives, this generation wants to be in control of some of the direction that that change takes, and leave part of themselves in the world in the process.

Increasing awareness of the structured vehicles for philanthropy, should they be financially appropriate, is offering boomers a way to satisfy a craving for self-actualisation which allows them to purposefully transcend the mediocrity of growing old.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PHILANTHROPY

Baby boomers are now in the position to observe the results of unrelenting materialism present in a world they've had a large role in creating. While they do not reject the comforts of their own existence, for many boomers it's a matter of now or never if trends of cupidity are to be tamed or reversed.

And a lot of them have the means to do it. Using the results of hard work and enterprise baby boomers view strategic philanthropy as an attractive option for those who can afford it. They are attracted to goal-focused structures that feature team work with purpose – which is found in trust funds such as Prescribed Private Funds.

While many may seek anonymity in their giving, there will also be those who require acknowledgement publicly. Regardless, baby boomers want their money to have more value than it has before and equally expect that their giving should have impact. In short, they want change that is as significant, obvious and sustained as possible. Moreover, structured philanthropy may also offer an opportunity for 'self-sacrifice' which was highly evident and respected in their parents.

It is also characteristic of baby boomers to find a way of involving their children and grandchildren in the process of philanthropy. Many are all too familiar with conflict in family situations and see it as a way of communicating with and binding family members – especially for blended units which could benefit from working on identity and culture.

Baby boomers see that in establishing a philanthropic vehicle they also have an ideal medium for their personal vision – at least in their family – through which they can transfer their perspectives, values and opinions about the way the world is and how it could be different. In short, the promise of youth has been realised.

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The generational setting ... in brief

Veterans Generation: Born 1929-1949; grew up in wartime; tend to be disciplined and respect law and order; like consistency; are past-orientated and can be perceived to be absorbed by history; prefer formality to informality; prefer communication face-to-face and phone not email; need logic in action; and like traditional recognition e.g. certificates, plaques, etc.

Baby Boomer Generation

Born 1946-1964; open-minded, rebellious in their youth, conservative in their 30's and 40's; optimistic, ambitious, loyal; believed employment was guaranteed; job and status symbols important; espouse values of 'inclusive' leadership, but often do not have the required skills; focused on process need to see steps toward defined goals; like formal recognition through effectiveness though privacy can be an important issue.

Generation X

Born 1965 – 1979; often known as 'latchkey kids' as had both parents working; more resourceful, individualistic, self reliant and irreverent; want options; focus in the workplace on relationships, outcomes, their rights and skills; not interested in long-term careers, corporate loyalty or status symbols; more likely to respect their grandparents' lifestyles than their parents'; easy to recruit, hard to retain ("tell them what needs to be done, but not how"); like to be asked for reactions and opinions; like informal recognition.

Generation Y

Also known as the Millennium Generation – born after 1980; similar values to Veterans – optimistic, confident, sociable, strong morals and sense of civic duty; comfortable with peers of differing ethnicity; women and men will expect greater workplace flexibility; like opportunities for continuous learning & building skills; know their goals and can explain how they fit into the 'big picture'; need more a coach, less of a boss; communication is more informal and brief (email, text, short catch-ups).



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