



The Missing Generation

Much has been written about the current generation of young people. Most people agree that they are optimistic and hopeful and really believe they can change the world for the common good. As I shared in our Ten Trends white paper "The Face of Change", the young people I meet on college and school campuses across the nation are greener, more politically and socially active, and more global in their views than just a generation before. Call them the active generation. They are on the move, seeking positive change, and leveraging technology and social networks to do it.

Interestingly enough, though, as they progress into their next stage in life, young professionals might also be dubbed the missing generation. Church leaders will tell you that young leaders are missing in their pews and in key leadership roles. Non-profit leaders will suggest that they are missing in key leadership roles. Fundraisers report that it is increasingly harder to gain their trust and financial support. And, college presidents and heads of school are often faced with aging boards with fewer rising stars. Is there something larger at work here?

When I step back and look at the current orientation and skill set of young professionals today, it becomes painfully clear where they are spending their time and energy - and where they are not. Young professionals today are looking for places where they can make a clear, distinct difference with their limited time and energy. This path often looks much more obvious in arenas such as social entrepreneurship, where there exists few limitations or structural barriers to their difference making. Just look at the rise of innovative fundraising and social activist programs through technology. Who is often leading the charge? Young professionals.

If my thesis is accurate, why are young professionals missing from the board room? I can think of three really good potential reasons why there is a lagging interest in serving in traditional non-profit leadership roles from this generation.

- 1) Structural - Young professionals see the built-in, slow to change psyche of education and other non-profits and don't have the patience for it.
- 2) Social - Young professionals are less interested in social ladder climbing and status attainment than they once were just a decade ago.
- 3) Systemic - Perhaps most concerning, young people have lost their confidence in long-standing social institutions, whether it be government, finance, education, or religion, and don't have the trust anymore or passion anymore to build them up.

Whether this is merely an educated observation, or a larger trend, I see an increasing challenge on the horizon. How will educational institutions grow and harvest the very talent and passion of those in their classrooms to continue to serve in their own



industry? How can they capture the innovation and collective social network savvy of these people in order to advance the industry? Seems like a daunting task. I will be curious how we solve it. Or, if we can solve it.

What are your thoughts? Feel free to share your comments and share the article with your colleagues.