



# A SNAP SHOT OF A GEN- ERATION

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THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN DESIGNED TO BE INFORMATIVE WITHOUT GETTING TOO COMPLICATED OR DELVING TOO DEEPLY INTO THE GENERALISED PSYCHE OF GENERATION Y. IT IS HOPED IT MAY PROVIDE HELPFUL INSIGHT AND A WAY FORWARD BY OFFERING SOME FAIRLY SURFACE LEVEL PRINCIPLES.

We are a product of our environments—all of us. It is perhaps possible that as an organisation we have not been sensitive to, or aware of, generational change. Maybe, at this juncture it would be possible to recognise the ever-growing diversity within our society and organisation, and to respond in a way that would permit more within those generations to know a place in this great movement.

Before we begin there are some historically experienced obstacles to the discussion that should be considered.

## THESE ARE GENERALISATIONS.

Don't be distracted by exceptions to the rule. Generation Y is a term that relates to the science of demography. Demography is a science of generalisations. There will be exceptions to the rule. There will be those of other generations who behave or believe like that of Gen Y and those within Gen Y who break the mould. It is important to stay objective in this discussion. Gen Y usually includes those born between 1980 and 1995. We are not necessarily talking about your children.

## IT IS A LOOK OUTSIDE THE CHURCH.

This is not about those young people we already have but about those we need to get. With only 1 in 5 Generation Y Christians actually attending a church it is easy to see that we aren't engaged with Gen Y Christianity, let alone Gen Y secular culture. This is more appropriately approached as a cross-cultural mission endeavour rather than one of assumed familiarity.

## DO NOT BE OFFENDED.

It is easy to be offended by the sometimes frank assessment of Generation Y, either by values that contradict your own, or to be offended on Gen Y's behalf. It is important to recognise that this is not a moral assessment of Generation Y, but a sympathetic airing of worldviews and how they shape faith. This leads to the next point.

## THIS IS NOT A MORAL DISCUSSION.

Often there is a temptation to enter into argument about who is wrong or right. Our

society currently consists of five generational demographics. We cannot afford to elevate the values of one group above another. This is an opportunity to understand this one particular demographic. The posture that seeks to correct the errant thinking of youngsters is a posture that has driven young people away from many generations.

## THIS IS A SAMPLE.

A frequent concern is that this is a discussion that has limited value as Generation Y is just one generation amongst five and their young adulthood will end eventually. But the true value of this discussion is within the microcosm that Generation Y young adulthood provides for wider society. Much of what is stated regarding Generation Y is true for Generations X and Z. It is the generation in the middle of those generations of concern. It is a discussion that has very broad implications as we simply consider the cultural demographic diversity of Australia and improve our understanding of our mission field.

As explored later, Generation Y is an ambitious and confronting generation whose vibrancy and confidence provide a significant control sample for the direction of Australian culture.

## WHAT IS A WORLDVIEW?

It is the lens through which we understand the world. Socio-political factors shape our understanding of how the world works. For instance

- Those who have survived World Wars have a unique lens
- Those who felt betrayed by our government's commitment to the war in Vietnam have a unique lens
- Those who lived their lives under the silent nuclear threat of the cold war have a unique lens
- Those who have always lived with the post 9/11 threat of terrorism have a unique lens

We are all a product of our worldview. The theological distinctives of Gen Y are a result of their worldview. What is important to understand is that is true for all of us; Veterans, Boomers, Generation X, Y and Z all have unique worldviews and belief systems to match. There is no righteous or objective moment in history where theology was perfected—it is all a product of our socio-political environments.

Post World War demography suggests that we experience a recognisable worldview shift every fifteen years. We are just now witnessing the oldest of Gen Y approach the average age of parenthood, we are just starting to witness the beginning of a Gen Z adolescence and in 2010 we are expecting the birth of a new generation. This is an undeniably obvious set of generalisations and generational changes that show us something of the soul of the world that God so loves.

Interestingly enough, Generation Y does not fit one of those categories mentioned above. It is a sensational demographic as it has experienced no really confronting political strife and has enjoyed the Howard years of economic expansion. Peace and prosperity have been the norm. This has shaped the way that Generation Y sees the world and has helped to highlight it as a uniquely ambitious and unapologetic generation to be observed—an extreme example of what Australian culture has in store for us.

## THEY ARE CONSUMERS.

**WHAT THIS MEANS:** In nearly every situation they consider themselves the customer.

**WHY IS THIS?** Generation Y has been expertly marketed to since birth. They are first and foremost consumers because society has made them so.

**AS A RESULT:** They believe it is every else's job to impress, inspire, or serve them. Their loyalty is not guaranteed.

**THE QUESTION:** how does a hierarchical institution relate if it is no longer in charge?

## THEY DEFINE THEMSELVES HORIZONTALLY

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?** Generation Y defines themselves on a horizontal plane through their peers.

**AS A RESULT:** Generation Y is not looking for eternal life insurance, image is important to a degree like never before and moral "goodness" is now measured through social activism or humanitarianism.

**WHY IS THIS?** As mortality becomes less relevant so does morality—when you're not worried about death you're not worried about the afterlife.

**THE QUESTION:** what is sin and salvation if you don't ever account to God?

## THEY HAVE A WEEKLY MOSAIC OF TIME

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?** Generation Y does not view a compartmentalised life of work, Sabbath and family. All of life's attributes are mixed together like a mosaic. (A mosaic being a clear picture from a distance and a mess of various images and shapes up close)

**AS A RESULT:** Generation Y is not interested in weekly commitments that are time and place.

**WHY IS THIS?** Generation Y does not know a world with out mobile phones. They can be contacted everywhere at all times.

**THE QUESTION:** How do you measure loyalty if not by time and place?

## THEY LIVE IN A POST-SECULAR SOCIETY

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?** Society was once Christian, then post Christian/secular and now post secular. No one is asking the question about faith and church attendance.

**AS A RESULT:** Generation Y considers themselves members of society first and Christians within it. They do not consider themselves saved out of the world and into the church, just saved. They are not aware that the church once had a unique voice and authority within society; it now competes with all other sectors.

**WHY IS THIS?** Generation Y has grown up in a society that no longer asks the question of faith and church attendance. They belong to a society that doesn't know that it is secular. (Only 1 in 5 Gen Y Christians attend church.)

**THE QUESTION:** what does the church look like when it's no longer considered a necessary element to faith?

## THEY HAVE A REFLEXIVE LEARNING STYLE

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?** Generation Y is not informed by their superiors but formed by their surroundings. Not through information but through life experiences, friends and family.

**AS A RESULT:** imposing your beliefs on another is the height of political incorrectness. Insight comes from experience, friends and art.

**WHY IS THIS?** Institutions and people in power are not to be trusted—the media and their parents taught them so.

**THE QUESTION:** how do we disciple generation Y if not through information from above?

## THEY CUSTOMISE TRADITIONS TO MAKE THEM THEIR OWN

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?** They like heritage but celebrate it by customising it.

**WHY IS THIS?** They are consumers.

**AS A RESULT:** a knowledge and connection to heritage is desired but it is not honoured by a pure or consistent handing down but by morphing it into something of their own design.

**THE QUESTION?** What is TSA going to look like when/if handed down to Gen Y?

## WHAT IS A LIFE STAGE?

Every stage of life has a unique purpose. Childhood, adolescence, parenthood and grandparenthood are all states of being with specific purpose. Pre-school, school, tertiary study, working life and retirement again are phases of life that contribute to how we think, feel, behave and see the world.

The church has responded to the demands of children, youth, families and seniors but it would appear that for the most part young adults have fallen through the cracks. With the average age of first time parents being 32, young adulthood now represents a 14-year life stage. I think you could agree that this is too large a group to be overlooked or misunderstood.

## WHAT IS A YOUNG ADULT?

While young adulthood is considered by many to be ages 18–25, it is more accurately identified as the life stage between leaving school and having children.

It is a state of no longer being under parental control but not yet being parents.

**AS A RESULT: They resist authority from above and obligation from below, and are ready for the adventure they have been prepared for all of their life...** That is the young adult life stage in a nutshell.

**It is very important to note that the impact of the Gen Y phenomenon is a young adult phenomenon. We are not talking about youth ministry but about Gen Y in young adulthood. For far too long it has been assumed that adulthood is preceded by adolescence. With the emergence of the young adult demographic this is no longer the case.**

THEREFORE YOUNG ADULTHOOD IS:

**A TIME FOR SELF-DISCOVERY.** This is a key motivation for young adults as they are assessing themselves for the first time as someone apart from their families and traditions. It is a philosophical leaving of the nest. It is a time to test out rules, values, practices and beliefs that have been invested in them and test them on their own merits.

If the values and identity handed down to them is going to be for life then it must be properly tested. (Remember customised traditions?)

**THE SEARCH FOR LEARNING EXPERIENCES** is an incredibly important aspect of this life stage, as young adults feel ill equipped to make life long decisions until they have lived some life. This is why backpacking, overseas travel and gap years are so popular and important.

If learning comes through experience how does someone with no experience make an educated decision? (Remember the Reflexive learning style?)

**A TIME TO PARTY.** Just about every movie hero and idolised celebrity seems permanently in this stage of life; no longer under parents' control and not yet a parent. Many young adults feel that this time is their right and that if they don't make the most of it they will miss out or regret it for years to come. Many young adults see this as a pre-emptive mid-life crisis.

It is viewed as a limited window of opportunity to have endless amounts of fun—no rules or responsibility.

CONCLUSION;

**THIS IS THE RIGHT OF PASSAGE.** THIS IS HOW ADULTS ARE MADE  
While much of this life stage may be viewed as self centred or irresponsible, it is now our society's right of passage for a young adult. This is how we make adults. This is a course that has been chosen for them. There maybe a tendency to lament the nature of young adulthood today but it is a time that affords great opportunities to the church if we are intentional and open-minded.

**JESUS:** The vision of Jesus has shifted from the conquering king to be worshipped in the temple to the nomadic friend of the poor to be followed in the world.

**MISSION:** The mission of the church is about going out rather than bringing in. More precisely it is about going out and staying out!

**THE CHURCH:** As a result of the above, the role of the church is struggling for meaning with Generation Y. More often than not it is viewed as a safe social outlet for those living their lives in the world.

**SALVATION:** Ask a Gen Y what salvation means and rarely will you get an answer that is satisfactory to other generations. Mortality is not perceived as a pending reality therefore the concept of the afterlife is increasingly being considered irrelevant.

**END TIMES:** Despite the enormous sales that the “left behind” series has enjoyed, the end times are not considered something to be concerned about. If Gen Y were to gravitate towards a theology of end times, it would be that the world is to be redeemed now with Social Justice and environmentalism being the foremost concerns of the demographic.

The real question behind this reflection is, what are the defining values that would provide a satisfying theological reflection for Generation Y? Some suggested hot spots are: humanitarianism, reform, social inclusion and grace (especially as it relates to morality). What are the missing pieces of this puzzle?

A RESPONSE:

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

Here are some strategic values that may help define the road ahead.

### CULTURAL COMPATIBILITY NOT COMPROMISE

This is less about changing our message or lowering existing standards and more about tailoring our modes and methods. We simply do not operate in terms that matter or make sense to wider society.

■ Think about this as a missionary learning the language of a target group...

### LEADERSHIP NOT PANDERING

There are many points of tension between generations. Some of them are over negotiable elements of taste and some are over non-negotiable elements of the faith—the latter is where we show leadership.

■ For instance, when it comes to the topic of salvation we need to, and have an opportunity to, show leadership...

### CROSS CULTURAL SENSITIVITY NOT IMPERIAL CONQUEST

We need to move away from a “make the world British” attitude to one of cultural sensitivity recognising that in Australian society there are five distinct generations all with their own worldviews, various life stages and theologies.

■ We need to cease the quest to make the world Veteran... (or Boomer)

### PIONEERING A NEW CULTURAL INITIATIVE NOT ATTACKING EXISTING MINISTRY

The same attitude that justifies the preservation of existing ministry for the sake of its relevance to some is the same attitude that justifies the pioneering of the new for the sake of relevance to others.

■ We need a “live and let live” attitude between styles and schools of ministry and mission...

### THIS IS NOT ABOUT THE STYLE BUT ABOUT RE-IMAGINING THE SUBSTANCE

Redecorating existing programs is not enough. What is required is the rebirth of Salvationist DNA anew. What is required is not a tune up or a paint job but a completely new vehicle—while the destination is the same, the terrain is totally different.

■ This is not about a new program or a new logo but a completely new facet of being for The Salvation Army...

ARTS, ACTIVISM AND THE ALTERNATIVE CORPS PROGRAMMING  
—A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

**ARTS:** The learning mode of the young adult is reflexive. It is in response to experience, peer influence and socio-political environment. They are not so much informed by their superiors as formed by their surroundings. It is the capital crime of the young adult to impose your belief upon another. This has contributed to the unpopularity of evangelism and the swing to activism as the primary task of the church. So for our discipleship strategies to be structured and information based is to communicate in foreign or incompatible terms. What is required is artistic testimony. You need only to look at the writings of Donald Miller or Rob Bell to see examples of literature that are re-imagining faith, artistically testifying and inviting you into a personal (and reflexive) truth, without imposition or institutional condescension. The second largest influence in the life of a Gen Y, after their peers, is music. This reaffirms the importance of artistic truth expressed without agenda.

To suggest we require young adult resources is to barely scratch the surface of understanding what is needed. We require a smorgasbord of artistic re-imaginings that create a scatter shot of Christian and Salvationist vision. Literature, music, film, spoken word, animation, online mediums (vodcast, podcast, blogs (narratives), social networking etc... while these mediums exist, they exist in a pre 1965 DNA.

**ACTIVISM:** The primary spiritual value of the Gen Y young adult is activism. Whereas previously moral conduct determined the “goodness” of a person, now activism does. Verses such as Isaiah 58, Micah 6, Amos 5 and Matt 23:23 have been popular of late along with other passages of scripture that demand not only piety from God’s people but also activism and social justice. These verses are striking a chord with young adults. Mother Teresa they know, Billy Graham they haven’t heard of...

Not only is activism now the measurement of Godly character but also of ecclesiological credibility. The church of the Gen Y young adult would not only be a place of relational community but also a hub of activism and mobilisation. As a community it would have long-term goals and short-term opportunities for making the world a better place.

To suggest that all we need to do is create or identify pathways into mission is to miss the point. Gen Y young adults should be seen as a mission field in themselves and not simply a means to another end. Activism would be the currency of their gathering in the same way that worship has been for others.



## ALTERNATIVE CORPS PROGRAMMING:

### THE COCA-COLA STORY

The classic Coca-Cola mission statement states that their mission is, "to put a can of coke within arm's reach of everyone on the planet." It was a bold statement that demanded loyalty to Coca-Cola, a carbonated and caffeinated soft drink, from everyone on the planet!

Move to today; the current Coca-Cola mission statement states the intention to, "... Bring to the world a portfolio of quality beverage brands that anticipate and satisfy people's desires and needs..."

Coca-Cola has moved from a narrow measure of success and the perpetuation of one particular product to a broad range of products that are tailored to suit the wide diversity found within society. They have moved from demanding that everyone in the world drink Coke to producing what everyone in the world wants to drink.

### THE MOUNT FRANKLIN STORY

Coca-Cola recognised that women aged 14-35 do not drink coke and constituted the majority of bottle water consumers. As this section of the market was more inclined to drink spring water, Coke developed the Mount Franklin range. The size and the nature of the bottle are designed to provide a "lady-like" drinking experience but most importantly the Mount Franklin brand has been positioned along side the values of young women through the Pink Ribbon Foundation that raises funds for the fight against breast cancer. Pump water, on the other hand, has been designed for a more masculine rehydration experience.

In short, Coca-Cola has moved from being in the carbonated soft drink business to being in the beverage business. The following is just some of the current range:

- Carbonated soft drinks (CSD),
- Spring waters,
- Sports drinks,
- Energy drinks,
- Juices,
- Flavoured milks and
- Children's drinks...

As stated in the latter mission statement, Coca-Cola continues to anticipate the "needs and desires" of society. Whereas 2 years ago non-CSD income represented 5% of income, this year it represents 23% and it is only expected to increase. This is not a loss in the CSD customer base but an engagement with those who would've never have been Coke's customers otherwise.

## ORGANISATIONAL APPLICATIONS FOR THE TSA

FIRST, this anecdote provides an example of a global and iconic organisation that has moved away from an imperial mandate of wanting everybody to commit to the singular product, to responding to the recognised diversity found within society.

Our singular product is our faith packaged and operated for those born before 1965.

### SECONDLY,

- Coke does not sell water in the hope that it will result in people buying CSD.
- The water department does not need to rationalise itself to the CSD department.
- The water department is not tied to the same measures of success as CSD.

These departments exist as peers with separate demographic targets, strategies and measures of success. They are not a means to another end but an end in themselves.

From a structural point of view, we have never pursued alternative means to new ends with sympathetic executive oversight, strategy, support, resource and, most importantly, political authority and unique measures of success.

## REGARDING BRANDING:

This anecdote provides a great source of encouragement in that it does not faithfully serve The Salvation Army's situation when it comes to branding. Our brand is very good. If anything, our brand is well positioned with Generation Y young adults—it is perhaps the product that doesn't make sense.

## CONCLUSION:

The values of these young people are very closely related to the historical activity and rhetoric of The Salvation Army. We are well positioned to relate to younger demographics.

We have a fantastic opportunity regarding Generation Y's worldview, and their perception of our brand, if we can connect it to targeted initiatives, faithfully re-imagine our message and organisationally invest and shepherd these initiatives through the mediums of Arts, Activism and Alternative corps programming.