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.

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.
A generation is defined as an identifiable group that shares birth years and significant life events at critical development stages. 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. These opinions will influence individuals for a lifetime. Even though people generally become more conservative as they age, research shows that core generational values change very little. 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.” He stated, 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.”

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalist</td>
<td>1904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boomer</td>
<td>1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Boomer</td>
<td>1959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation Y</td>
<td>1967</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Past Presidents from Mayo Clinic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charles H Mayo</td>
<td>1904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Starr Judd</td>
<td>1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Priestley</td>
<td>1959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles W Mayo</td>
<td>1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O T Clagett</td>
<td>1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William ReMine</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Adson</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon van Heerden</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Farnell</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clive Grant</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Past Decade of Western Surgical Association Presidents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard A Prinz</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabrizio Michelassi</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur S McFee</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard C Thirlby</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merrill T Dayton</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce L Gewertz</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne Schwesinger</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael B Farnell</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory J Jurkovich</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymond J Joehl</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Millennials: Grande, nonfat, sugar-free, half-caff, 2-pump, vanilla latte with 1 inch of foam, 180°C, light whip, and a sprinkle of cinnamon and sugar—this ordered while sitting in a drive-through with a long line of cars. Exaggeration? Hardly—I have the source sitting right here.

Traditionalists (Silent Generation, veterans; 1922 to 1945)

Traditionalists have been described as loyal, they follow the rules, are no-nonsense, motivated by a job well done, and a hand-written note would be reward enough. They feel fortunate to have a job, not that the company is lucky to have them. Their concept, “Let’s do one thing, do it right and then move on.” They were loyal employees—“company men”—expecting to stay with a single company throughout their career. They expected to pay their dues, gradually working up the company ladder, and wanted to leave a legacy. Delayed gratification was the norm. They are dedicated, patriotic, good citizens, conventional, respect order and structure, and those who chose medicine viewed it as a vocational calling, not just a job. Their profession and self-identity are one and the same. Sacrifice is perhaps the most apt word to describe them—everything done in order to provide a better future for their children. They worked hard to live. They respect hierarchy, law and order, conformity. They are cautious, financially conservative, and probably the last generation in this country that understands money. For every penny in to Social Security (and they remember when it was established: 1934), they expect a penny back. They pay in cash but save as much as they can. Their preferred feedback: no news is good news. If life does not seem fair, they take the bumps along the road with quiet resolve.

They had a first person experience with Pearl Harbor and World War II, the Great Depression, and the New Deal. They respect authority, duty, and honor, and a command and control style of leadership. For them there were 2 absolutes: church and government. In the Midwest, manual labor as children often meant finishing morning chores including feeding the animals, before breakfast. The comparison of children today is loading the dishwasher—not quite the same thing. Theirs was the last generation in which as a rule, women stayed at home and raised the family on Dad’s single income. Divorce was a scandal if not a disgrace. Their heroes included Babe Ruth, FDR, MacArthur, Patton, Eisenhower, Winston Churchill, and Superman. Some may remember when the Star-Spangled Banner became the national anthem (1931).

To learn, they want a teacher with formal education options; they will attend a lunchtime seminar, sit in
folding chairs with paper plates of food, and listen to the
speaker. Higher education was a dream, realized by the
minority. To study, they were taught to isolate themselves
from TV, record player, or a busy street. Clear a study
space, with good lighting, a straight-back chair, paper,
pencils, eraser—a silent cocoon. New technology in their
formative years included the vacuum tube radio, rotary
phones, and a hand crank mimeograph machine; they
can even recollect the smell of a freshly “minted” mimeo-
graphed paper. They have only a rudimentary
acquaintance with computers and the internet. They pre-
fer work communication to be face-to-face, formal,
direct, respectful, or by typed letter. Even though less
than 10% of the present American workforce is
comprised of Traditionalists, the current hierarchical
structure of academic medicine was largely created and
fostered by the oldest generation of faculty.7

Baby Boomers (Boomers, “Me” generation; 1946 to 1964)
I confess to being a part of this generation, and the char-
acteristics I am about to review ring true for me in almost
all respects. Overwhelmingly, Boomers are characterized
by their work ethic: early to arrive and late to leave the
office; the term workaholic was coined for them. They
live to work, identify and define themselves through their
work; it is an anchor of personal fulfillment in their lives.

Not only does work define their own self-worth, it also
sets the standard for evaluating others—a tension point
between Boomers and later generations. They expect
others to follow the same work ethic and same work
hours. They are willing to sacrifice their personal lives
for professional success; in fact self-sacrifice is considered
a virtue.10 So busy with work were Boomers that they usu-
ally had only 1 to 2 children (I must have missed that
message). They have great ambition, are optimists, and
their perfect career would be to excel, make a difference,
achieve the corner office with a lofty title, and impor-
tantly, be well compensated. They are responsible for
changing the work week from 40 to 60 hours; only
now, when nearing retirement, do they want to scale
back. Thoughts of work/life balance arrived late in their
careers. They are driven by personal gratification; they
love to talk about their favorite subject—themselves.
Like Traditionalists, they maintain institutional loyalty
and are often willing to work beyond the traditional
time of retirement, albeit with their newly conceived
reduced time commitment. They are motivated and
want to be rewarded with recognition and salary. They
pride themselves on filling their houses, garages, shed
out back, or even renting extra space in the eternal race
to accumulate the most stuff.7 Because Boomers represent
the largest generational group, at an estimated 80 million,
they grew up in a competitive environment. They
currently have a dominant workforce, accounting for 55% of active physicians, and they occupy the majority of positions of authority.11 Boomers want to ease gradually into retirement, which is fortunate because their sheer mass of human capital will require years to replace in both number and expertise. They believe promotion should be earned, requiring years of achievement, respecting authority, but more a “change of command,” reflecting a recognition of hierarchy but a belief in the potential for advancement.12 Their view of work is deeply ingrained; they may become judgmental, passive-aggressive, and intolerant of challenges to those views. They grew up with a stay-at-home mother and a hard-working father—a “Beaver Cleaver family”—with an abundant, healthy post-war economy, in a safe environment where they had the freedom to go anywhere in the neighborhood, unsupervised, and play without concern. They attended schools without security guards or metal detectors. Later in early adulthood, when rushing to catch a plane, they could arrive within 10 minutes of take-off and actually make it!

Baby Boomers’ educational system, compared with today’s, emphasized a higher level of proficiency in basic literacy tools: grammar and written expression.5 In contrast to Traditionalists, for whom higher education was a dream, Boomers viewed it as a birthright. But as children of the 1960s, their sense of idealism soured to cynicism as network TV covered not 1 but 3 assassinations, Watergate, the Vietnam War, and civil rights struggles. Trust in and the status of government was tarnished, and the sentiment of “never trust anyone over 30”13 evolved. The sexual revolution, rock ‘n’ roll, long hair, Neil Armstrong stepping onto the moon, and credit cards all influenced Boomers. Technologic breakthroughs included color TV, Polaroid instant print photos, touch-tone phones, and calculators. They idolized John Kennedy, John Lennon, and John Glenn. Communication was face-to-face or at a meeting; only much later in life did e-mail filter into their repertoire. As such, they are labelled “digital immigrants”14 (as compared with Gen Xers being “digital pioneers” and Millennials, known as “digital natives”). As adults, however, the Boomer divorce rate skyrocketed to 50%, families were redefined to include single parent, probably a reflection of years of work-over-home attitude. With aging, their emphasis has shifted to recognize more work/life balance, and realization of their own health has prompted increasing numbers to join health clubs and weight loss centers with vigor similar to their earlier career determination.

**Generation X (Gen X, Xers, 1965 to 1980)**

Sandwiched between the 80 million Boomers and the potentially even larger 90 million Millennials are the much smaller 46 million Xers. Capsulizing this generation would be self-reliant and skeptical.15 Little wonder why given the tragedy and scandal that pervaded their lives: a tripling of the divorce rate, Watergate and Clinton scandals, explosion of 2 NASA shuttles, church scandals, deterioration of Social Security, corporate downsizing, and dissolving of pension plans, effectively abandoning their most loyal employees.12 This led to a serious mistrust of anything corporate. Either single-parent homes or both parents working became common, creating a new phenomenon, the “latch key kids.” They grew up with the 3 “Ds”: disappointment, disasters, diminished expectations.5 Afternoon TV included CNN with 24/7 reporting and gave them front row seat coverage of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing; their response—“They will be back.”5 Xers responded by developing independence, adaptability, and resilience.

They seek a different path than did their Boomer parents of work/life balance, they view medicine as a “job,” and they want to limit their work hours to allow more time for their personal lives now, not when they hit retirement. Xers believe their Boomer parents suffer from VDD: vacation deficit disorder.16 They have inverted the equation: Xers want to “work to live.” They believe that work life and home life should be harmonized, not counterposed. They focus on developing their own skills— portable skills to ensure their career security—because they don’t trust job security.17 They want rapid feedback, serious mentoring, promotion, and are ready to move to a different company if the opportunity there appears better. They want instant instead of delayed gratification for their accomplishments rather than just for hours logged at the office.10 Their rewards have shifted to more freedom, time, and work flexibility. This is evidenced by the fact that one-third of the medical school graduates of 2002 expect to work part time (equal response by women and men).5 They have become critical consumers and speed is a requirement. They ushered in the technology boom of the 1990s, are technology savvy, and expect the latest digital technology to be available. Their skepticism translates to holding little regard for authority and hierarchy, and loyalty is to themselves before institutions. These traits grate on Boomers, who have often characterized Xers as slackers whose work ethics don’t measure up to their own workaholic standards. Ironically, Boomers seem to forget they are the parents of Gen Xers!5

**Millennials (Gen Y, Generation Next, Echo Boomers; 1981 to 2000)**

Estimates of the number of Millennials range from 75 to 90 million. The dominant influence in their lives, starting literally at birth and continuing to the present, is the
omnipresence of technology. First was the computer, then rapidly they evolved to digital mobile devices. They are technology “natives,” so attached and comfortable with instantaneous digital, global internet connection, it is like their oxygen. Most booted up a computer before they rode a bike, and as young adults, 70% of them check their phones every hour; they love their phones but strangely, hate talking on them. They are constantly “connected,” but that does not necessarily mean they are really communicating.

Gen Y has been described as “like Generation X on fast-forward-with-self-esteem-on-steroids.” However, in striking contradistinction to Xers, who were undersupervised, Millennials were smotheringly oversupervised. Millennials’ parents filled their young children’s schedules with play dates, structured safe-play, and learning times, carefully selecting their kindergartens, but only after screening interviews of the staff and school administrators. This level of parental involvement continued through high school and even into college, earning them the title of “helicopter parents.” Gen Yers were treated to a carefully crafted and nurtured cocoon-like environment, resulting in close bonds to their parents. Trophies and purple ribbons were awarded just for participation. These were the empowerment (some would call them entitlement) years; everyone won, everyone got a medal. Praise flowed easily and regularly. Instilling large doses of self-esteem was aimed at guiding the Yer toward achievement, specifically targeting the correct schools, top brands, and desired careers. Yers could and would assert they exceeded self-esteem to the point of narcissism.

As young adults they expect feedback: frequent, personal, focused, positive feedback from their mentors. They have been called the most doted upon, privileged, and needy generation so far. Gen Y has been described as “like Generation X on fast-forward-with-self-esteem-on-steroids.” However, in striking contradistinction to Xers, who were undersupervised, Millennials were smotheringly oversupervised. Millennials’ parents filled their young children’s schedules with play dates, structured safe-play, and learning times, carefully selecting their kindergartens, but only after screening interviews of the staff and school administrators. This level of parental involvement continued through high school and even into college, earning them the title of “helicopter parents.” Gen Yers were treated to a carefully crafted and nurtured cocoon-like environment, resulting in close bonds to their parents. Trophies and purple ribbons were awarded just for participation. These were the empowerment (some would call them entitlement) years; everyone won, everyone got a medal. Praise flowed easily and regularly. Instilling large doses of self-esteem was aimed at guiding the Yer toward achievement, specifically targeting the correct schools, top brands, and desired careers. Yers could and would routinely question authority; Mom had your back. They grew up to be socially bold and they expressed their opinions. They have been taught to be accomplished, critical consumers; a quality that extends from consumer goods to education, even to making employment decisions. They expect more than just the right products; members of this generation want “trial before purchase, customized products, the ability to change their mind, and brands that deliver genuine benefits.” The Millennials want what they want, when they want it, and they are not afraid to ask. They gained self-confidence, even became self-possessed; some would assert they exceeded self-esteem to the point of narcissism. As young adults they expect feedback: frequent, personal, focused, positive feedback from their mentors. They have been called the most doted upon, privileged, and needy generation so far.

They are the most diverse generation ever. They work well in groups, whether in a single location or remotely connected using blogs, digital text messaging, or social media. The pace of everything has accelerated. Peer connectivity is immediate, and multitasking is as easy as clicking or swiping. One Yer observed, “I get my news, my weather, my directions—even my clothes—from the Web.” They could exist solely in a cashless society, using exclusively plastic and electronic payments. In contrast to the quiet, isolated study space of the Traditionalist, one Millenial described his environment “at study”: the TV is showing reruns of “Friends,” a laptop is perched on the couch cushion, the student in sweat pants and T-shirt, actively texting on the phone, e-mail minimized but the sound alert active on the computer, a collage of browsers open including CNN for news, Google in case a question needs answering, Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, and Abercrombie.com for shopping. This has been labelled “continuous partial attention,” and somehow it is said to work.

The Millennials experienced, if not directly, then by instant media, school violence, Oklahoma bombings, 9/11, AIDS, and upheavals in global economy and politics. Although they remain optimistic, these experiences have made them realistic with an overlay of fear. Higher education was a “given,” but they are stunned and dismayed by the expense. Student debt topped $1 billion for the first time in 2012, with the average graduation debt in excess of $27,000. But when they graduated from college, the wealth of job opportunities that they had anticipated had vanished. Jobs were scarce. When the world refused to affirm how great they were, they were left disappointed—a sort of crisis of unmet expectations.

Digital media has literally reconfigured their learning methods. Digital gaming, often involving multiple players remotely connected, involves trial-and-error—a “play-to-learn” concept. Gamers don’t practice before they play, they learn by doing, and true to their upbringing, eventually everyone can win! Internet access to seemingly every conceivable answer, whether through Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, PubMed, Up To Date, or other sites brings “just-in-time” learning to the fingertips of Yers. They show little interest in reading, and studies show that older generations spend far more time absorbing news, literature, and fiction than this graphic-based group. Millennials turn to podcasts, narrated videos, 2-paragraph summaries from a wide range of internet sites. The value of information as a commodity has diminished; it’s the search engine—the access to information—that matters now. However, information technology is just a tool. Millennials need to understand how to discern good information from bad and how it all fits in perspective. This is defined as information literacy. Beyond that is information fluency, the ability to grasp information literacy and apply critical thinking skills.
and work, blending the two, intermixing time parceled to each. Where Traditionalists seek lifetime careers, Boomers stellar careers, and Xers portable careers, Millennials strive for parallel careers.25 It is projected that they may completely change careers several times. They do not look at an organization to see how they will fit into it; rather, they look at how that organization will fit into their lives.19

Challenges to harmony

So what’s the problem? The Association of Academic Chairs of Plastic Surgery conducted a survey, and 70 of 98 faculty members responded that they have difficulty relating to the residents’ work ethic.29 Business leaders have complained that today’s graduates do not have the basic critical thinking skills they need to thrive. Yers prefer not to read, seemingly cannot sit and listen, and rely too heavily on a cut-and-paste approach to assignments.23 Despite their generation being defined by instant messaging, the ability to communicate effectively seems lost. “They might be whizzes on communication devices, but their communication skills—both in writing and in person—have a long way to go.”26 Some medical educators are very concerned with a perceived lack of professionalism among Generation Y.30 Educators tend to view Gen Y as lazy, unmotivated, and selfish, and this view is shared by some in the business world.19 Older generations perceive the younger generations as having an entitlement mentality, that they are presumptuous and want to be accommodated with their demands. Xers, known to be distrustful of authority, can seem disrespectful. Their ingrained skepticism and loyalty to their own portable career may be interpreted by Boomers as disloyal to the work institution, being self-centered. To counter, the younger generation’s viewpoint might be summed up in a quote from Larry Wilson of Competitive Edge: “It’s a whole new world out there, with new playing fields, rules and players. Your choice is either to learn this new game or continue to be the best player in a game that is no longer being played.”

Solutions to achieve harmony

I, a Boomer, typed “managing the multigenerational workforce” into Google search, and in exactly 32/100 of a second, had 2,850,000 articles to choose from. We won’t get through them all. A well-known and respected example is from the book, Generations at Work by Zemke,7 in which he suggested the acronym ACORN for solutions: Accommodate generational differences; Create choices; Operate from a sophisticated management style; Respect competence and initiative; and Nourish retention. These address aspects such as individualizing work hours, schedules, and locations—mostly driven by the new work/life balance; differing academic promotion tracks, technologic solutions for education and conferencing, rewards and recognition, leadership training, faculty development and E-learning programs, and communication and feedback. There are numerous, thoughtful, well-written articles on the subject, based on more than a decade of experience in the business and education world.

However, I want to focus on the relevance of the 4 generations to the Western Surgical Association. In his Presidential Address to the Central Surgical Association entitled, “Assessing the vital signs of regional surgical societies: What is the prognosis?,” Chris Ellison stated that the longevity of a scientific society depends on 2 factors: a broad mission and adaptation of that mission to changing times.31 His statistics showed that membership numbers and annual meeting attendance had generally declined despite better academic productivity and quality. The overall picture was concerning. When I have spoken to younger generation surgeons about what did, or in many cases, what would entice them to join a non-specialty regional/national surgical society, a few recurring themes surfaced. Because access to high-quality scientific material is readily available in moments electronically, one vital edge that a meeting provides is the opportunity to meet face-to-face with key thought and practice leaders, specifically in a setting that allows comfortable interchange. This is just not possible electronically. It builds interest, trust, and collegial respect regardless of age difference. It facilitates a new level of open, unfettered dialogue in future interactions such as patient management advice, fellowship opportunities, or even professional partnerships. Along the same line, what I referred to previously as information fluency is often gleaned by listening carefully to senior surgeons’ comments that are filtered through the lens of long experience. Although this may be captured at a microphone, it also could be over a cup of coffee or a glass of wine. The scientific program would ideally move to be even more interactive. The technology is available today for speakers to set up questions on the fly to which the audience can respond immediately on their smart phones. There are multiple technologic advances that are available along the same line. Younger surgeons also want a meeting that is special, memorable, worth “out-of-pocket money” and giving up work revenue to attend. This implies a good location, ideally set up to be family-friendly, but clearly the scientific portion must also be enhanced by social opportunities. It has been said that “the most important aspect of clinical meetings is no longer to share information, but to sustain the culture and
community of [the organization].”15 Others have identified additional factors to attract younger surgeons to join and participate in surgical organizations. Engagement. Younger surgeons think about “now” in contrast to Boomers and Traditionalists’ thinking of first “paying your dues.” To join, Xers and Millennials want a voice, input, and influence.

Does this mean that we need to redesign the organization of the Western, revamp the meetings and social events? Certainly not. I think we should consider making some changes that are designed to capture the interest of younger surgeons by capitalizing on the incredible strengths of our members. Where do we stand right now relative to the 4 generations I described? The breakdown of the generations of the 585 members who have birth dates in our WSA are in Table 3.

It actually should not be a surprise that we do not have a single Millennial in our organization, yet. The oldest Millennials are only 33, often just 1 to 2 years beyond residency, perhaps still training in a fellowship or just started as junior partners or faculty. The most powerful enticement for prospective members would be for them to attend one of our meetings. Exposure to our high quality presentations and discussions, special panels, “quick shot” topics, the new video session, and the opportunity to share breakfast or coffee with national leaders will be convincing from the scientific perspective. Perhaps even more powerful is the camaraderie, genuine decades-long friendships, and plain fun that is evident to anyone. But I don’t think we can afford to wait until these young, impatient, eager, live-life-now surgeons are, at a minimum, 3 years beyond their training for them to discover us. In reality we are competing with many organizations for new members who have limited money and time allotted for professional organizations. I think we need to consider adding “candidate-type” memberships to give them an early opportunity to meet and understand the Western Surgical Association. Moreover, if there is a single trait common to the younger surgeon, it is technology. We need to embrace and incorporate newer technology into our meetings and organizational structure. For many if not most of us, this step might be intimidating. I say no problem. We can have fun with this because in return for the senior-to-junior mentoring in information literacy, the Xers and Millennials can reverse mentor us in what we see as new, cutting edge technology, but they regard as routine daily communication. Interactive presentations, panels, podcasts, even—dare I suggest—the 140-character Twitter communication should be considered. I would also suggest adding an information technology committee to our organizational structure, and importantly, select both young and mature surgeons to collaborate. Cross-generational enthusiasm and wisdom seem ideal.

The business and educational spheres have experienced the full impact of Xers and Millennials for more than a decade. We, in medicine, are just now seeing this huge wave of highly educated, inspired, confident, technosavvy young surgeons swashbuckling into our professional lives. If we are prepared to guide and manage, their advances and achievements will be awesome. Pearl S Buck may have said it best:

“The young do not know enough to be prudent, and therefore they attempt the impossible, and achieve it, generation after generation.”

Please join @CliveGrant in Indian Wells, November 8-11for #WSA2014.

| Table 3. Breakdown of Generations in the Western Surgical Association* |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Generation               | Birthdates    | Ages, y        | Number in WSA (%) |
| Traditionalist           | Pre 1946      | >67            | 277 (47)         |
| Boomers                  | 1946–1964     | 48–67          | 223 (38)         |
| Millennials (Gen Y)      | 1980–2000     | 13–32          | 0 (0%)           |
| *Of 585 members who list their birthdates in the database. |