

**TITLE: "PUTTING THE BOOMERS OUT TO PASTURE"**

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Since 1971: *"Software for the finest computer - the Mind"*

*"The Baby Boomers will be more remembered for the problems they left behind as opposed to anything they accomplished during their tenure."*

*- Bryce's Law*

**INTRODUCTION**

As we all know, the Baby Boomers are regarded as those people born following World War II, I believe it is from 1945 to 1960. This generation has seen a lot: the space race, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the USSR, and eleven U.S. Presidents, just to mention a few. In the area of Information Technology, they actively participated in the transition from mainframes to client/server computing, the Internet, and an unprecedented number of technological developments, including cell phones, cable, video enhancements, etc. They were there during the MIS movement of the 1960's and 1970's, they helped invent the packaged software industry, and spearheaded e-commerce.

As they are entering their 60's, the Boomers are now approaching retirement, and we are already seeing them rapidly fade from view in I.T. departments. For example, I.T. is now considered a young person's game dominated by workers in their 20's and the manager (the "old man") in his early to mid 30's. In contrast, Boomers are now generally regarded as dinosaurs who are slowly being put out to pasture. They haven't completely left yet as they still possess valuable knowledge about legacy systems and are blessed with certain skills required to maintain such systems, e.g., Systems Analysis, Technical Writing, COBOL, ISPF, CICS, TSO, IMS, ROSCOE, MVS, etc. They are hardened veterans who still enjoy their work but are growing weary of the changes in the corporate landscape, such as short-term planning, outsourcing, and the development of disjointed systems by the spirited younger workers. Inevitably, the Boomers are often asked to clean up the mess left behind by such projects.

The transition from the "Greatest Generation" to the Baby Boomers in I.T. was relatively smooth, with the veterans mentoring the Boomers and guiding them on their path towards succession. However, the transition from the Boomers to Generation X (those born between 1965-1976), Generation Y (1977-1994), and Generation Z (those thereafter) has been much more turbulent. I attribute this to three reasons:

1. The change from mainframe to PC based computing - the technologies were perceived as dramatically different and, as such, companies left one set of workers behind to tend to the mainframes, and hired a new generation oriented to the PC's. Regrettably, there was little common ground between the two. Whereas the two groups should have been working together all along, a polarization of the two groups ensued instead.

2. Changing socioeconomic conditions which affected family dynamics, such as having both husband and wife working full-time jobs and letting family responsibilities slip through the cracks. This led to changes in our morality and other cultural differences whereby the younger generation doesn't have the same set of interests or priorities as the Boomers.

3. An increasingly competitive global economy which has forced a change in the pace and priorities of business.

This has all resulted in several changes in orientation and perspective. For example, instead of long-term planning, quick and dirty solutions are now considered the norm; e.g., if something cannot be done in 30 - 90 days, its not worth doing. This emphasis on speed versus craftsmanship has led to questionable quality, poor service, and repetition in work effort (which is why systems and software produced today are considered "disposable"). These changes in orientation also created a spirit of competition as opposed to cooperation, independence as opposed to teamwork, and a decline in corporate loyalty. Such attitudes are not limited to I.T., and can be found throughout a business as well as our society in general.

So what will be the Boomers' legacy? A rise or fall in our standard of living? Viet Nam or the war on terror? Our growing dependency on foreign oil? Our fascination with gadgets? What?

Frankly, I believe their legacy will be the generation gap they helped create. I consider this rather ironic since they liked to grouse about the gap between their fathers and themselves. But the "Greatest Generation" did a

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better job of transferring the reins of power than the Boomers ever did. The divisiveness between the Boomers and Generation X/Y/Z is so substantial, that even if the Boomers tried to coach or mentor, Gen X/Y/Z probably wouldn't heed their advice. This has led to a major hiccup in the transference of management and systems knowledge. Consequently, Gen X/Y/Z is much more reactive as opposed to proactive in their management style, which will be felt for years to come. How many 9-11's or Hurricane Katrina's do we need to suffer through before we learn how to plan and adapt to changing times? For example, the patchwork systems being implemented by companies today will inevitably lead them to lose their competitive edge tomorrow. Executives are only now beginning to realize how weak their corporate systems are and how ineffective their companies will be in the years ahead. This is what has triggered the latest attempts to reinvent systems theory, but I fear it is too little, too late.

So, as the Boomers begin to ride off into the sunset, do we thank them for their efforts or do we open an express lane for them?

**END**

*About the Author*

*Tim Bryce is the Managing Director of M. Bryce & Associates (MBA) of Palm Harbor, Florida and has 30 years of experience in the field of Information Resource Management (IRM). He is available for training and consulting on an international basis.*

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