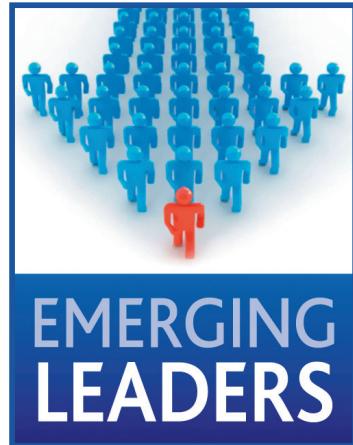


HONORING OUR PAST AS WE ADAPT FOR THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION



BY GRAHAM SAUNDERS
CONTAINER GRAPHICS



Much is made of the transition taking place in our industry from the Boomer to the Millennial generation.

Articles are written and forums organized around the question, "How do we adapt to the future workforce?" With Millennials now making up the largest share of the U.S. labor force, this is no doubt an important question to address. At Container Graphics (CGC) we have felt the generational transition just as much as the rest of the industry. At one recent retirement party for three employees, for instance, we said goodbye to over 160 years of company service and industry experience. I'm sure you've been to similarly bittersweet events.

In the midst of these changes, I believe that there is another question that is just as important, if not more so, "Given this generational change, how do we carry our past forward?" Our pasts are valuable and should not be lost in the transition. As a result, we have to be sure that we properly steward our organizational cultures at the same time that we adapt them for new generations.

Unfortunately though, carrying

forward organizational culture is not an easy task. Culture is intangible, making it hard to pin down. Transferring values, beliefs and behaviors is not as easy as transferring hard skills such as how to knife a die or run a corrugator.

Despite the challenge, at CGC we have recently embarked on a project to do just that: to communicate our legacy and our culture to our entire team so that it lives on with a new generation of employees. While it is still a work-in-progress, I'd like to share three insights from our process so far.

Be Concise

Earlier in my career, I was a consultant to legacy companies looking to reinvent their businesses. I quickly learned that my job was often not about generating brilliant, new insights for my clients. Instead it was about bringing an outside perspective to their existing ideas and helping them to communicate these ideas in a way that was succinct, compelling and therefore easy for the organization to adopt. This was our goal in describing CGC's culture.

We settled on the below four "pillars" that we believe represent what we see play out when we are at our best.

- **PEOPLE & TALENT** We are only as good as our people.
- **GROWTH & INNOVATION** We exist to meet customer needs.
- **OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE** We take pride in our work.
- **FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP** We invest for the long-term.

These pillars form the core of what we now call our "Operating Philosophy," which builds on these themes in greater detail. The most important step in our process so far has been nailing down this simplified framework. As you think about your own process, bear in mind that if you can simplify what you are communicating to a handful of elements, you make it easier for your team to grasp and internalize.

Revisit Your Past

Maybe the most fulfilling stage in our process involved revisiting old documents, communications and records from CGC's early years. These files became grist for the mill as we developed the materials for our project, often taking words directly from older documents and reusing them in our new communications. This is seen most clearly in the foundation of our Operating Philosophy, our CS1 commitment, which was originally conceived by our founder Phil Saunders. As you consider your plan for carrying forward your culture, be sure to revisit materials from your early years. These

AS YOU WORK THROUGH YOUR OWN PLAN FOR CARRYING FORWARD YOUR CULTURE, CONSIDER OPPORTUNITIES FOR BRINGING IN THE VOICES OF YOUR COLLEAGUES

are the best insights that you have into your early DNA.

Check Your Assumptions

Ultimately your culture is reflected in the thousands of decisions that your team makes every day. Whether or not they live out your culture has a lot to do with how you involve them in the process. With our project, we formally and informally involved many managers and day-to-day staff in evaluating our early ideas and concepts. This ensured that we weren't too far in our thinking

from the rest of the organization and gave our teammates the opportunity to leave their mark on the project. As you work through your own plan for carrying forward your culture, consider opportunities for bringing in the voices of your colleagues.

As a dyed-in-the-wool Millennial, I strongly believe in many of the workplace changes being discussed in our industry. However, as we Millennials become leaders in the industry, we will also be responsible for carrying forward the cultures and legacies of our companies. Hopefully these insights prove helpful in that task. ■

Graham Saunders is VP of Business Development at Container Graphics, where he oversees all corporate accounts and investment activities. He is also a third generation Board Director. Prior to CGC, he was an advisor to Fortune 500 and leading private businesses as a strategy consultant at Jump Associates. He is a graduate of the London School of Economics and of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

CS1
Customer Success:
Priority Number One