

# As We See It

## Gateway Staff Members Give Their Take On Their Emerging Generation and John Burke

Many staff members at Gateway Community Church are in their mid-30's. We asked two of those team members for their take on their emerging generation and on John Burke, their baby boomer leader. Charles Dishinger, director of operations and Ted Beasley, teaching pastor, are both 34 years old.

**CMR: Complete this sentence: Baby boomers, don't make the mistake of...**

**Charles:** ...assuming you know what our generation is like. Don't just get to know the generation by what you read in books, but go out and experience it.

At Gateway, we are out there in the world where that generation is. Also, our generation tends to throw out labels. I don't necessarily like labeling myself as part of the emerging generation or GenX. Because our generation tends to avoid labels, we often don't want to even be labeled as a 'church member'—it seems too exclusionary.

**Ted:** ...thinking that the church can function like a well oiled machine. It doesn't operate in a rational manner. Things move so much faster these days with technology and there are so many demands on people that you can't control relationships. You can't control the moving parts in this so-called machine. They all operate in unpredictable ways. It's impossible to create a perfect church service. We can have 50 things go wrong. Because of complexity, I can't expect my team to have things run perfectly. What I can expect is that they will improvise. Sense-making (paying attention to the moment, feeling confident and freed to adapt a game plan to a situation) and improvisation—those are two skills that we are looking for in our leaders.

**CMR: What do you want us to know about your generation?**

**Charles:** People in our generation look to see if you practice what you preach. If you aren't authentically living it out, what

you are saying doesn't have value for me and I won't listen to you. We want our teachers to share what they are struggling with, to share what God is teaching them. We don't necessarily want someone to preach at us, but tell us how you are growing.

**Ted:** This generation is skeptical and I think future generations will be even more so. Unless you get past the resistance, they won't take steps toward transformation. As teaching pastor, I initially approach [messages] traditionally: establishing theme, central question and what scripture

says about that question. I dig into scripture. But I then immediately ask, "What is my audience's resistance to that truth? Why don't they want to believe or accept?" I battle at resistance. I build my message around their thoughts, not my thoughts.

**CMR: There's a perception that the emerging generation has a different work ethic. What is your take on that?**

**Charles:** I'm kind of a mix of both (boomer and emergent) because I came out of the corporate world. To some degree, as a manager, I'm focused and do care about the end results. I've tried to sit down [with staff], in light of

Gateway's strategy and initiatives, and say "Let's agree where you need to be, where you need to take your ministry area." I often make the mistake of saying too early "here is what I would do to accomplish that objective." But because the emerging generation values creativity, there's probably a thousand ways to accomplish those goals. So there needs to be room for creativity. The process of how a goal or objective is accomplished is often as or more important as just setting the goal. I think the people I manage want the flexibility and to feel empowered to make mistakes and learn along the way.

Another mistake I make is defaulting to corporate mode. A staff person may not come into the office until 10 a.m. because they were meeting offsite with people. My old mentality was be

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at the office at 9; leave at 6. But they are out there shepherding, building relationships. They need freedom to accomplish that important work. That is what we battle as managers—can I let go enough, do I trust them enough to let go and let them do it their way? How do you create accountability in a way that is empowering as opposed to a way where they feel micro managed. After a while being micromanaged, you either turn them into robots (they'll stop being creative) or go somewhere they can be creative. We want Gateway to be fun. Yes we do have a responsibility to be good stewards of our resources, but let's do that in a way that is life-giving.

**CMR: How do you measure success?**

**Ted:** One of the big questions that I've always had in business and ministry is how do we measure success? I have an MBA, so I know how to answer that from a traditional perspective: you look at cash flow or in a church you look at involvement, baptisms. But I think boomer leaders need to understand that those sorts of measurements are OK but they don't motivate people from the emerging generation.

One of the ways to judge success is stories. What stories are coming out of the strategy? The activities, the goals need to be in terms of stories. We've become very good at telling stories in process of pursuing a goal. That's what motivates and keeps us going.

I would also say if there is a venture in a church setting that isn't producing sto-

ries then you should consider ending it or ask the question, "Why aren't there stories emerging there?" For example, if a lot of resources are being poured into the Moms' Group, but we don't hear stories about moms finding community there, you really have to ask the question, "Why do we do that?"

**CMR: So, do you really call John Burke on being too goal-oriented?**

**Charles:** John is very good at a lot of things. He is a phenomenal speaker/teacher, writer and musician. (His background is chemical and petroleum engineering.) John also has a great business mind. He can spin so many different plates—he thrives on it—it energizes him. I'm not sure that this answers your question, but our staff has to continually ask: "Are we doing too much? Are we focused on the right things for the long haul?" What if we charge the hill and we spend one or two years doing it, but by the time we get at the top of hill we're dead because we are exhausted? How do we get to top of hill so folks are energized? How do we do that in a way, not only for John but for all of us, that breaths life into us; that doesn't burn us out, keeps us charged for ministry for the long haul.

**Ted:** [Referring back to sense-making and improvisation.] That's how John gets in to trouble sometime. He's an engineer. He wants a formula. It's better to not try to control, but to make sense of what's going on and try to adapt to it.

**CMR: Tell us about the community you try to create at Gateway among your staff.**

**Charles:** What I've realized is that the people I manage and the people they lead need to be cared for and shepherded more so than just getting the task done. People just don't want to be used to accomplish a project. That thinking probably spans all generations, but it seems more important to [younger] volunteers and staff. I'm finding that I'm having to spend just as much time building trust and relationships with my team as I am spending time discussing projects.

**Ted:** The staff who have been in the marketplace are surprised that I care more about them as a person than their task. It takes a while for them to get over that. Also, they are surprised at the community aspect that I expect and try to promote. I do a lot of walking the floor that is mostly to see how they are doing, how I can help, and ask about them personally. Usually those older than me want to justify their existence [what they are doing, working on] and really what I want to do is find about them. They think work is work.

When we interview staff, we look for people who are willing to be vulnerable at work and be part of a community. The community we are trying to build here is as important as the task.

You can learn more about Gateway church by logging on to [gatewaychurch.com](http://gatewaychurch.com).

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