

# Intergenerational Teams:

## How One Ministry Shows They Can Work



**Dr. Jay Pasavant**  
Senior Pastor



**Dan Chaverin**  
Executive Pastor



**JR Kerr**  
Teaching Pastor

Three staff members from North Way Community Church (Wexford, Pa.) sat down recently with CMR to discuss the challenges and opportunities of inter-

generational teams. At the table were: Dr. Jay Pasavant, Senior Pastor (age 59); Dan Chaverin, Executive Pastor (age 47) and JR Kerr, Teaching Pastor (age 30).

**CMR: Looking around the table it's clear you value age diversity. Or at least put up with it. Which is it?**

**Jay:** I think a foundation to any discussion concerning intergenerational leadership is that we're having very much of a dynamic conversation. I don't think any absolutes have been nailed down. So, I find it a little difficult to say this is how we define a Gen Xer or a Mosaic or a Millennial. Suffice it to say that the baby boomer generation has provided primary leadership for most of the church for the last 30 years; now it's definitely time to engage the culture that's forming around it and to shift leadership to those who are rising up to take it. Whatever we call that

group, whether it's Millennial or Mosaic, is secondary.

**JR:** I agree. Part of what I respect about Jay and Dan and the other leaders here is the willingness to learn, and admit we really don't know how to talk about this. Our language seems to change with every book we read and every experience we have. There are so many levels—philosophical, cultural, church-wise, business-wise, in marketing.

Obviously, we know who we mean when we say Boomers. I also use the term "Mosaic." A buddy of mine and I actually started calling this generation MosaiCs, because one of our characteristics is that we truly are very diverse. I refer to our generation as MosaiCs because I think the GenXers, GenYers and Millennials are all coming together to form this emerging generation called MosaiCs. I think this term is sticking here

at North Way and with some of my peers.

**CMR: Why did North Way decide to have an intergenerational**

**leadership team?**

**Jay:** I recognized two years ago that in the next five to seven years, I'd certainly be moving into a different role in the church, or perhaps beyond the church, because of my longevity, and because I feel change in leadership is healthy. So we launched a search for a teaching pastor to complete my ministry, and perhaps to take my position.

I began by interviewing guys in their 40s who already had experience in larger churches, had the education, proven track record, and demonstrated that they could lead a church like North Way. But I began to realize that the majority of our members are under age 40. To bring in an older person in a teaching role would then mean there wouldn't be anyone who was speaking the language and the values that would be particularly important to those in their late teens, 20s, and

# I made a decision that I didn't want North Way to age with me and become a church of gray hairs and then one day look around and say, "Where's the younger generation?"

early 30s. So I began to look and pray for a younger person who could represent that point of view.

As Boomers, we probably need to stand outside the younger culture and try to evaluate it. I think JR and many of his peers marvel at how dense and thick and organized and linear and driven and productive we boomers can be. We, on the other hand, marvel at how nonlinear, abstract, creative *they* are. I made a decision that I didn't want North Way to age with me and become a church of gray hairs and then one day look around and say, "Where's the younger generation?" I grew up in a church like that and so did many of my boomer friends. We wonder why and how this happened.

**CMR: There are some organizations that would love to have more Mosaics on staff, but they can't attract them. What's the turnoff for Mosaics?**

**Jay:** I think there are a substantial number of Mosaics who have predetermined that Boomers are incapable of relinquishing control. I'd have sensed a red flag if JR or another Mosaic came along with an agenda to implement and wasn't willing to work with me. Trust is essential. We have to trust one another

**JR:** There are two things I want to speak to: One is a "come and see" mentality versus a "go and do" mentality. I'm generalizing, but Boomers tend to have the former approach to ministry. Boomers tend to say: "We're going to do something so powerful – so relevant – so life transforming; our services are going to be so good that everyone will want to come and see them!" Mosaics tend to see the world and ministry through a "go and do" mentality. We're going to go and do ministry in such a way that it will be

compelling. This is a subtle change, but a very significant shift in how we do ministry. If I had observed that North Way was only interested in coming and seeing, I probably wouldn't have come here.

**CMR: JR, what attracted you to North Way and this team of Boomers?**

**JR:** The first thing that attracted me was having someone I trusted inside the organization. One of the primary things in engaging Mosaics is the "Tweener" generation. They're essential to an organization. We have a guy here named Scott Stevens and he's a Tweener. It was Scott who connected Jay and me. Scott continues to be someone I'll go to again and again. He almost never sees it exactly the way I see it, or the way the Boomers see it, but he sees enough of the things I see. I don't know if I'd have responded if Jay had called me directly.

As a Tweener, Scott was important in connecting us and telling me I needed to talk to Jay. I sensed from the beginning that Jay wanted a dialogue with me, and even thought I might have something to teach them. Even in the interview process, he was asking me my opinion about things in the organization.

The second thing was that North Way puts its money where its mouth is. Our children's director is 26. Six or seven of our elders are Mosaics. Why? We don't just have older people who are elders; we have people who are wise. So North Way is doing it, not just talking about it.

**CMR: How can you make intergenerational teams work?**

**Dan:** I understand there can be some truisms among groups. But, it's pretty important in my leadership that this boils down to the individuals. The individual you want as part of your team must have

godly character, maturity, a love for Jesus. You have to be able to motivate that person in the right direction. There has to be some sort of fit. If those things aren't there, regardless of your generation, there will be issues. If the character and walk with Christ are there, you'll have a good experience. We have extraordinarily gifted people who have a commitment to Christ's mission and his church. That's ultimately what makes our intergenerational team work.

One of the things I think is critical to our success has to do with Jay's style of leadership. By definition, he's a learner leader. He's constantly learning, and that's one of the things that impressed me. He wants to serve Christ in the best way he can, and he's always learning and growing.

If a leader is willing to learn and grow, he won't be threatened by new people who come, and who contribute new ideas. That leader will be able to absorb things that are appropriate. That's one of the reasons we'll succeed as we build a multi-generational team. If a leader's going to be rigid and not interested in learning and being entrepreneurial, then he or she will have a hard time building an intergenerational team. If leaders are learning leaders, then we can all learn from each other.

**JR:** One of the things that's working in our church is the shared leadership. We have older and younger generations leading together publicly. If you don't have that, you're not going to be a next-generation organization or a multi-generational church. If Jay and I can't lead publicly and share the pulpit well, then there's no way our staff and church will do that well. So we're giving a public example of how the church can do that. Our weekend services are filled with multi-generational people who are leading and doing worship well together, and I think that's really working.

**Dan:** One of the things Jay has said is that this isn't a next-generation church; this is a multi-generational church. We're going to honor our saints who've been here since day one. Most have gray hair, and we'll honor their wisdom and service. But we'll also honor the 26-year-old director of kids and the student leaders. We're going to lift everyone up in their part of the body. We've all really soared

when we've talked about what it means to be a multi-generational church. It's fascinating, and everyone seems to resonate with that because everyone's included.

**CMR: Listening to you all, it seems like you're in the middle of figuring this out.**

**Jay:** I think that whenever we consider a shift of this magnitude, we need to allow time for people to embrace it. One of the difficulties is that there isn't a prescribed pathway – it isn't nailed down. That creates a level of uncertainty. There's a level of trust we have to allow the whole team. So you need dialogue across the board when a shift in leadership this significant

is happening.

**Dan:** One thing that comes to mind is the idea that we have a mission, that we have ministries to accomplish which is part of God's mission/his church. We have things we have to accomplish, but we also have people. Relationships are paramount. So we have to find a healthy balance between getting the work of the church done, but not at the expense of relationships. We as leaders want to make a significant difference in our world. We're intentional about praying together as a team. When we get those relationships right, we accomplish a lot.

There's always a tension. You can always get the job done and have a lot of

wreckage and mayhem in the wake. So, obviously, the job can't be everything. Jesus did it perfectly. For him, the mission was in the people. He integrated that perfectly. We aren't really that gifted. But we're trying to make sure the relational pieces are in place. You can't underestimate the relational piece of doing ministry together. The Church is designed as a team and we're diminished when we aren't working as a team. One part can't tell another part that we aren't important. So by definition, relationships – between and among generations – are paramount.

For more about North Way Community Church, log on to: [www.northway.org](http://www.northway.org).

© 2006, Christian Management Association.  
All rights reserved.