

Summary of Findings From Depth Interviews With PTV Current and Lapsed Members

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Summary of Findings

Using in-depth interviews rather than focus groups, approximately 200 people were interviewed in nine different markets. The interviewees were either lapsed multi-year members, current multi-year members or multi-year members who only renewed by pledge. The research focused upon why people supported and renewed their Public TV membership or why they lapsed.

1. Our respondents did not consider PTV a charity or philanthropy, so appeals based on these motives do not work well with them. Generally, people support PTV because they watch the programs and like the service.
2. The philosophical reasons for giving differed by generation. The older 60+ members cited civic duty as the primary reason for giving, while the younger generations said they gave because they use the service. (Civic Reciprocity?)
3. Almost all charitable giving comes from a household's budget, and renewal depends upon having discretionary monies available. Generally, whoever pays the bills in a household determines whether a station's renewal is mailed back. Very few people said they budgeted for their PTV renewals.
4. The study categorized five different types of current members:
 - Frugal Civics – older 60+ members giving the basic amount
 - Rational Professionals – under 60, professional, rarely pledge
 - Pledger Ladies – civically active women who like to pledge
 - Cyclers and Rotators – renew only by pledge, on their schedule
 - Premium Driven Casuals – light viewers who like the premium
5. We classified reasons for lapsing into seven categories:
 - Changes in personal finances – unemployment, school expenses
 - Changes in PTV use – watch PTV less, view more cable TV
 - Cyclers and rotators – “I renew when I want to.”
 - Critical Instance – “Biased programming,” “Canceled my program.”
 - Competition for charitable dollars – “I give to others, too.”
 - Confused – did not know they were lapsed, “Wife never told me”
 - Changes in Address – moved away (or died).
6. A critical variable in maintaining membership is an effective Viewer/Member Service department. Many lapsed members report negative experiences with the station as the “straw that broke the camel's back”.
7. The decision to lapse happens at a specific place and time. Lapsing occurs when the station's appeal to renew is not strong enough to overcome habit and inertia (such as: “I keep the letter with the bills, open the letter later, write the check, mail the check”). Hence, for some members, pledge drive giving is “easier”.

8. Many station appeals for support and renewal are based on reciprocity arguments. (“You use it, so you should support it.”) This same appeal triggers lapsing. (“I no longer watch as much, so I don’t need to give.”)
9. Public television has few appeals based on sound philanthropic motives that are convincing. (“Public broadcasting is a valuable community service that deserves your support” versus “Congress has cut our funding... please send money.”) When the latter appeal wears out, more people lapse.
10. For younger generations, the 12-month subscription model of membership appears to have less relevance; hence, it is not a compelling reason to renew (if it ever was).
11. Premiums are important for many members, especially for the young (under 50), for ethnic surfers, and non-college educated pledgers.
12. Long and incoherently scheduled drives that continually preempt a member’s favorite programs cause lapsing.

Why do people lapse off a station’s membership file after being on it for many years? It was well known that the membership files were shrinking because older members were lapsing and newer members were not replacing them. So why do some people renew and others lapse?

You cannot talk about lapsing without, sooner or later, getting around to the topic of money and how each person handles it. The money issue was too personal and uncomfortable for people to talk about frankly in front of strangers in focus groups so we turned to individual in-depth interviews. This allows the interviewer to pursue a conversation with a viewer/member without the distraction of others in a focus group interrupting or changing the drift of the conversation. Here, each person can express his or her own ideas, without worrying about group consensus or “sounding weird.” We found that not only could people talk about money in this setting, they were also more willing to talk about their values, expectations and disappointments regarding Public TV. We have included a note at the end of the paper about this methodology.

Here, we want to present the highlights from the interviews. We talked to almost 200 people in nine different markets. We talked to current multi-year members, lapsed multi-year members and people who only renewed by pledge. The names were drawn from each station’s membership files.

We must make clear that the observations included here are from the interviews. They are not the same as findings drawn from a random sample survey of thousands of members. That part of the research will be fielded in the near future. But in order to construct a viable and sensible questionnaire that will assess these complex issues, we needed to know a lot more about giving and lapsing in the context of people’s daily lives, and we got that from the interviews.

Why People Give to Public Television

There are a number of issues that converge around the acts of charitable giving to public broadcasting. There is the matter of how and why people give money in the first place. There is the matter of programming and how that in turn interacts with giving. And last are the rituals and mores that have grown up around Public Television funding raising and what do members think of these practices. (For example, what is the definition of a member and does that resonate with you?)

The Programming Conundrum

You are what you telecast. Program content attracts and retains certain types of audiences. Broadcast a children's program and you should attract a children's audience. Broadcast wrestling and you will get a younger audience comprised of mostly males. Broadcast a classical music concert and you will get an older audience with many women in it.

The regular NPS prime time Public TV broadcast schedule consists of mostly programs that attract audiences that are well educated, intellectually curious about the world and able to appreciate the arts. Naturally, this is a small audience with small ratings. The daytime children's programming and the weekend program types (cooking, fix up, Britcoms, Welk) attract different types of audiences which are more varied in their ethnic make up and educational backgrounds in comparison with the prime time audience.

The very quality of intellectual density that characterizes Public TV's regular series makes them poor pledge programs. The regular Public TV fare engages the intellect, not the emotions. At its best, the regular programming contains long, uninterrupted narrative arcs that engender contemplation and appraisal, not emotional arousal.

While many feel that reason and logic should be sufficient motivators to engender fiscal support of Public TV by its viewers, it has not proven to be the case. The management of most Public TV stations have come to the conclusion that the amount of money generated by the regularly telecast prime time schedule is not sufficient to support their stations. Hence, the emergence of new fund raising vehicles such as pledge, telemarketing, special events and so on.

Giving Occurs in a Social Context.

Giving is deeply imbedded in the social fabric of our lives. There are steps and processes that one learns about giving. The social constraints and/or demands on giving are varied and complex. How is dropping a dollar in the Christmas Salvation Army bucket different from a memoriam to the cancer society? How is

tithing 10% of your income different from sending in your annual membership to the science museum? Are there substantial differences between various charitable acts? Or is giving all the same thing regardless of the amount of money given or the recipient of the largesse?

Giving is a Process: Some Elements are Learned, Others are inherited

Generally, if people give to more than one charity, they tend to give to many charities. Some people are truly philanthropic, while others are “tightwads” who give very little. “Giving” is a human personality trait, and, hence, something that does not vary much through the years, assuming there is no change in the giver’s economic fortunes. Further, if you are philanthropic, there is a good chance your parents were also givers. There is also a very good chance that your friends and significant others are also philanthropic. In other words, people learn charity at their mothers’ knees. Why some families are philanthropic and others are not is where genes and heredity play a role.

As you might have guessed, pledge drives, with exciting and arousing programs atypical of the usual rational prime time fare sometimes elicit pledges from non-philanthropically inclined people. It is an unfortunate fact that, in American society, most people are not philanthropically inclined. To increase income, Public TV stations have turned to these non-philanthropists for support.

Traumatic events like 9/11 will elicit one-time gifts from a wide range of people who do not plan to give an annual gift to those charities. Likewise, a death or disability in a family occasionally stimulates a gift from people who do not usually engage in giving behaviors. That happens in Public TV, too.

Public TV is Neither a Charity nor Philanthropy

Most people do not know how to describe Public TV as an object of philanthropic intent. People give to Public TV because (a) they use the service and/or (b) it deserves to exist and be supported.

The motives for giving differ somewhat by generations. The older generations cite that it is their civic duty to support Public TV because they like it and it deserves to continue to exist even if they do not watch it that much. The younger generations (boomers and genxers) cite the motive of civil reciprocity (“if I use it, I should pay for it”).

Very Few People Know What a Member is.

In our interviews practically no one described himself or herself as a “Public TV member.” When asked directly, most people we talked to said they did not consider themselves members. They used the term “contributor” or “supporter” of Public TV. When queried about what kind of creature a member might be,

many respondents said that a “member” “belonged to something,” like a museum or a professional association (e.g., lawyers).

Checkbook Charity

One of our first major discoveries (for us at least) was that almost all giving is drawn from the family’s household budget, and not savings or stocks and bonds. Hence the notion of checkbook charity, which means a membership contribution, is drawn from the household or a person’s monthly budget. Specifically, it comes from “what’s left over” after the bills are paid, and many charities are competing for that small bit of discretionary money. So for Public broadcasters, whoever pays the bills will also determine whether the renewal notice will be returned or be put off until next month. Also, it was made clear to us that the act of renewing by mail (or on the Internet) is seen as primarily a rational, not an emotional act (like pledging often is).

People Have Gift Money Zone

People have an internal gauge for the size of a gift they will make. For almost everyone we talked to (there were a few exceptions), a nominal gift is from \$5.00 to \$25.00. An average gift is about \$50.00 and a large gift is often a \$100 or more. A few people gave larger gifts, and when they did, it was often to their church or synagogue. Most people had what we began calling a money “comfort zone”. People feel comfortable giving certain sums of money to certain kinds of charities, and they got uncomfortable when they strayed outside this “zone”.

Since much of Public TV member income comes through renewal mail, it should not be surprising that giving to Public TV is considered an average, not a large or major gift.

Many people who pledge for premiums that “cost too much” have moved outside their comfort zone. The premium should hopefully help mitigate the discomfort... but for some people “buyer’s remorse” sets in almost immediately, resulting in unfulfilled pledges. Others, who fulfill, often lapse a year later, because the renewal ask is out of their giving comfort zone.

People Have Money Personalities.

Some people manage money quite well (rational/disciplined types) while others are poor managers of money (irrational/impulsives types). But there are times and circumstances when one “switches modes.”

We have met rational money managers (mail renewers) who sometimes give a number of additional gifts each year to the station because they are moved by a particular appeal, especially during pledge drives. They have enough money and they give more. They are the rationally generous givers.

Another major influence on money management style is an individual's demographics. Women give more than men. The same holds true for education... namely, the higher the degree, the more likely one is to give. (Demographics are imperfect predictors, however. There are lots of doctorates who are tightwads.)

Are There Only Two Kinds of Gifts?

Our interviewees told us there were essentially two kinds of giving. Truly altruist giving is sending money to the Red Cross, where the key tenet is that one expects nothing in return. The other kind of "gift" includes a reciprocal exchange of either goods or experiences. Most giving in this area is to one's church, Public broadcasting, museums, one's alma mater and so on.

This kind of giving shouldn't be surprising in a consumer society where exchanges occur regularly for goods, services and even experiences. The norm in a materialist society is that there is always "something" in exchange for the money! This is the famous WIIFM (What's in it for me?)

Who gives?

Generally, for Public TV as well as for most other non-profits with huge member lists, the largest group of regular givers are older folks, many in their 60s, 70s and 80s. And most of them will have a college education, regardless of age. Women do much of the giving, not their husbands. And for Public TV, women do much of the pledging.

But there lots of people under the age of 60 but they tend to disappear in file "averages". We found people under 60 give in very different ways from their civic generation parents or grandparents. Getting more of them to give requires understanding their uniqueness and planning for it.

Why People Give?

Almost all people give to us because they like and view Public TV. For many members, Public TV is an important part of their lives. The values expressed by the programming are congruent with their values.¹ When the core values of the programming are no longer congruent with a member's values, that member generally lapses.

¹ That philanthropy is value driven is not new. What is not often remembered is that if the donors/members do not share the values as evidenced in the programming and fiscal appeals they will not join, much less, renew. See Kay Sprinkel Grace, **Beyond Fund Raising** (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997).

Types of Members

One of the purposes of the study was to compare lapsed members with members. We found a variety of member types on the file. The range of types was influenced by age/generation, gender and education. (See the appendix that discusses the issues of generations and age.)

In all age groups – millennials, genxers, boomers, and matures (GI and silent) – there were people who were passionate and deeply identified with Public TV and its programming. The distinguishing feature of these people was that they viewed *many different prime time genres and viewed in different dayparts*. These core members are PTV lifers. They give year after year, often giving an additional gift from time to time.

There are others, though, whose usage and commitment is different and who give differently to Public TV. In order to understand a station's file and to estimate its financial "health", it is necessary to recognize all of the major types and to estimate each group's relative presence on the station's file.

Segmentation: A First Effort

After the field surveys are finished, we will be able to ascertain if these are valid segments and how large each group is. Groups A, B and C below are distinguished by their rational and considered behavior. The other groups are more impulsive and consumer oriented. These later groups contain lots of boomers and genxers.

- A. Frugal Civics. They are rational and supportive. They renew by mail and they generally give the basic amount. Many of them are in the older civic generation, although there are a sizeable number of older boomers in this group as well, and they have been recently joined by a number of "serious" genxers. Many of the men in this group report not liking pledge drives but most will renew next year. This segment is probably the largest group on the file.
- B. Rational Professionals. This group tends to be under 60 and full of rational and supportive professionals. In our interviews, they were mostly men, with a smattering of women. Many were practicing lawyers, accountants, or pragmatic mid-level managers. This group does contain ethnic members. They renew by mail and give about \$50. They watch pledge and like the programs, but they rarely pledge. They say they often go to Borders or Barnes and Noble the next day to buy the premium. We do not know how big this segment is.
- C. Pledger Ladies. This segment contains mostly women, all of whom love Public TV, and pledge is just another way to show their support.

A goodly number of them do send in their mail renewals, but pledge is what they like. These pledgers are active, participatory folks who belong to many groups and clubs. They are engaged and have fun. Some are deeply religious, introspective without being too serious, and really like (love) many forms of music programs in the pledge drive and appreciate drama in non-pledge periods. In a sense, they might be called impulsive. We suspect this is a smallish segment with a high annual gift amount.

- D. Cyclers and Rotators. **Cyclers** are mostly boomer and younger generations. They are distinguished by a number of factors: (a) they use pledge to renew; (b) they want the premiums and choose them carefully; (c) they are on their own renewal cycle, which can range from 16 to 30 months. **Rotators** move their membership dollars between Public TV stations in a market. (For example, in Denver there are five public radio stations and two PTV stations.) The people in Group D differ from Group E (below) because they view prime time, really like Public TV and view it a lot. Group D should be a large segment of the file.

- E. Premium Driven Casuals. This group contains casual Public TV viewers who tend to catch an occasional prime time show and are more likely to watch on the weekends (how-tos, Britcoms and Welk). They like the pledge shows, especially the music shows. This segment contains the largest concentration of ethnic members. This group differs from first year lapsed because they have given more than once and will give again because they like Public TV and view ethnic related programming. We expect that this group will grow in coming years, especially as ethnic pledge music programming becomes more visible and targeted.

Among the above groups (especially C and D) we found a number of interesting variations, especially among younger pledgers. First, many of these people were impulsive and talked openly of their lack of money management skills. Second, they wanted and liked the premiums. Pledge is fun and premiums are the brass ring. Third, like the protagonists in NBC's **Friends**, these genxers have developed a social network among themselves. Hence, our invention of the concept "The Secret Life of Premiums". Premiums have many uses for these people, including being passed around and shared with friends and relatives. They like events (walks, marathons etc) and ache to find each other in social situations.

Lapsing

Most stations have a categorization scheme that we must live with, namely, members are either new, multiyear (current), lapsed or rejoins. "Membership" is

for one year and, after a certain grace period, the station membership declares a person “lapsed” if they do not return the renewal notice. This is often referred to as the “subscription” membership model. Curiously it is assumed in this model that those who pledge are expected to renew by mail one year hence. Often there is also talk of such concepts of conversion and maintenance of members as if were dealing with magazine subscribers. Naturally, as you would expect, this model is currently under careful scrutiny given that the member files are shrinking because people (members) are not behaving they way they “should”.

The Anomalies

The first anomaly is the “small amount givers”. On any station’s file, there are a number of people who do not give enough money to qualify for a basic membership. We talked to a number of them in the study. They tend to be older and often guilt drives their giving behavior. They typically send in a check for \$10 or \$15 dollars. It is usually not lack of money that determines the size of their gifts. They are chronic lapsers.

Second, are the “serial small gift givers.” They usually have few resources and often can’t afford a membership. So they give very small amounts throughout the year, but somehow, even though the sum of their giving equals a basic membership, the station’s software does not move them up to that category. So the question is: are they members? The answer, from a station’s standpoint, appears to be no, despite the givers’ obvious commitment. They tend not to lapse as much as cycle on and off the file, waiting for a time when they feel flush enough to send in money.

The Seven Deadly Cs of Lapsing

We will describe the seven categories of lapsing. The supporting visuals and the psychological components of why people lapse are in an appendix. Note that any of the member types described earlier can use one or another of these excuses to lapse. We have just organized people’s reasons for lapsing into this convenient set of categories.

1. Changes in personal finances. Some members lapse because they become unemployed or have been downsized. Almost all of this lapsers type that we interviewed joined through pledge and renewed/rejoined through pledge. Naturally, just about every one of them was a boomer, and many say they will be back when they get a job. And we believe them.
2. Critical Incident. The station’s programming triggered the lapsing. Usually it is because of a program being canceled (e.g., Nightly Business Report) or that the lapsers thought a particular program was biased, slanted or offensive. All report complaining to the station before lapsing but did not

receive any response or satisfaction. Poor “viewer services” is definitely part of the reason for their lapsing. Many of these lapsers report a history of frustrating encounters with the station. They made a conscious decision to lapse and they are still watching and fuming.

3. Change in PTV Usage. There are two groups here: those lost to cable because they feel they are using PTV less and second the mommy lapsers. For those who lapse because of cable, it not the cable bill that is a primary reason (although it is a big part of the lapsing decision) but rather they “feel” are viewing less PTV and getting what they want when they want it from cable.

Mommy lapsers are mostly women who no longer view Public TV as much as when her kids were younger. The distinguishing feature of mommy lapsers is that they do not view much prime time Public TV (even when they were members). So this is the negative spin of the reciprocity argument – “since we are not using it as much, why support it”? Often, it is the wife who makes the renewal decision since she pays the bills. In many of these Mommy Lapsing families, the husband is still a heavy Public TV viewer and usually does not even know they have lapsed.

4. Cyclers and Rotators. These are pledgers, who have rejoined numerous times, who are now waiting for a pledge drive to pledge again. Most do not consider themselves lapsed. They have their own schedule of when it is time to rejoin. Almost all of them are boomers. The station considers them lapsed, however.
5. Confusion. These are poor souls who often think they are members and have no idea that they are lapsed. Usually they do not pay the bills at their house. The “in the dark” lapsers range from professors, lawyers, wives and husbands who view regularly and come to the interviews to tell us how passionately they love Public TV.
6. Competition for Charitable Dollars. People in this category give small amounts of money to many charities and feel – from time to time – that they must limit their giving because of budget constraints. A few are disenchanted with PTV but most feel someone else is entitled to their money. Many of them will return in due course.
7. Coffins (or Other Changes of Address). People move away and others die. Some of the decline in the older part of the file (72+ months) is due to the deaths of civic generations members. In Nielsen’s metered market samples, such as those in Denver, 20 - 40% of the families’ move or change addresses in a given year! How the “in and out” migration of people effects renewal rates is poorly understood.

The Donative Cycle: Joining, Lapsing and Rejoining

Membership (or whatever you care to label station support) is a complicated **process** that occurs across time with literally thousands of touch points (events) occurring between the station, its programming and its viewers. The key tenet is the concept of process – a dynamic changing set of variables that effect a person’s decision to join and to lapse. Neither joining, lapsing and rejoining are static decisions, but rather each decision is the result of certain variables conspiring to a tipping point that moves a person in one direction or another.

As the reader has no doubt already discerned, the lapsing decision is oftentimes triggered by events that have little or nothing to do with PTV programming or its image or its “brand”. First, and foremost, the motive or driver for lapsing is both socially contextual and psychologically grounded in a specific moment in time. At the instance of decision, there may or may not be a great deal of focused attention (“oh my , there is their renewal letter sitting on my desk, I’ll read it tomorrow.”) Even deciding to decide later is deciding. Everyone knows what the choice is: renew or not renew. Putting it off till tomorrow is still a decision. And what is the key motivating factor: dissonance or stasis? People like being comfortable and not uncomfortable. And for many people giving away money can create some concern, especially feel if you do not have much discretionary money.

The Need for Balance or Homeostasis

If you were to stop smoking, in a few hours you should become uncomfortable, as the addictive consequences of nicotine withdrawal set in. You can experience similar levels of physiological discomfort from dieting, stopping caffeine or even being late for work.

The same holds true pure psychological states of discomfort. People have comfort zones. When they are out of their psychological comfort zones, they feel uncomfortable and seek to divest themselves of those unpleasant feelings.

Under what circumstances is “giving away money” or donating to a charity a cause of dissonance? You would think that for some people, donating creates a special or positive feeling! Well donating could be a source of discomfort if a person perceives that he or she does not have the money, even if they are making a six-figure salary.

The moral is: if you are uncomfortable with something and it is possible for you to “escape” the discomfort, you will do it. People lapse because something has edged them “outside their comfort zones”. The decision often has nothing to do with the merits of the “case” that a particular charity can make, it is that in this

particular instance “I do not want to open the letter, or pick up the phone or go answer the door”.

So Why Do People Lapse?

The “seeking balance” or “homeostasis paradigm” seems to be at work in lapsing. We are positing stasis or dissonance as a driver or motivator, something that tips a decision one or the other. Naturally, this “state” occurs momentarily and other cognations or thoughts are often entertained simultaneously.

The decision to renew or not renew rarely occurs amidst the Olympian heights of rationale discourse. Rather we are arguing that the renewal decision is based on more mundane, if not trivial, matters like fleeting thoughts about how comfortable I feel doing this charitable act at this particular instance?

When somebody says. “I didn’t renew because I don’t not have the money” is another way of saying “I don’t feel like giving today. I don’t think I have the money to spare, And I wonder if that sweater is still on sale at Macy’s? Besides I think just gave them money. I should look it up in my checkbook. I don’t want to do that just now. Anyhow I can live with the guilt.”

We shall review some of the C’s of lapsing and show how oftentimes circumstantial events conspire to tip the lapsing decision. Further, most of these examples deal with mail renewal, where in most instances there is no “transaction” involved, except the act of giving away money to a PTV station. Renewing via a pledge drive is a different matter because there is a transaction involved and no doubt an armada of different motives and rationales.

Personal Finances. Granted the best example of why one should lapse is someone who is unemployed. One no longer has the income to afford a membership, and it is more logical (and psychologically comfortable) to lapse. For some people this an automatic or a conditioned response given one’s economic circumstances.

Alas, the perversity of human nature is that we interviewed a number of unemployed people who did not lapse! For some unemployed persons, the discomfort associated with not sending in the renewal given their tight budget was unacceptable. Non-lapsing unemployed individuals spoke to us of finding other areas to cut back in their family budget, so they could still renew their basic membership. In this instance, as one unemployed person explained to us how she re-set her priorities; a basic membership cost the same as eating out once a year with the family and they decided to forgo the meal and sent in their renewal. (Naturally, this could form the basis of generic pitch.)

Critical Instances. Lapsing because of a critical programming or scheduling instance can be sudden, but even then, these lapsers report spending a fair

amount of time and effort communicating (or attempting to communicate) with the station. So the paradigm is: I become irritated and angry over the station's programming and I seek redress (balance) by communicating my opinions with someone at the station but the result is not satisfactory, so I lapse. That does not completely redress my hostile state, but I have the satisfaction of canceling my membership. Ironically most of them are still viewing because they like the programming.

We have enough circumstantial evidence from our interviews and the lapsers' testimony to feel that many of these lapsers could be recovered, with a little help from the station manager or someone from the membership department.

Declining use. These lapsers come in a variety of forms as we noted earlier. The easiest to understand are the cable lapsers. This category was comprised mostly of women who paid the family bills. Ruminating that they spent about \$50 or more a month on their cable bill - \$600 per year – the family had to watch a lot of cable TV to make it worthwhile. So when the Public TV renewal notice arrived alongside their cable bill they choose to lapse. “I decided not to renew because I thought we were using Public TV less. And we can't afford both...” In fact oftentimes people maybe be watching the same amount of Public TV this year as last year, but it's just logical to assume that “I am viewing less because I pay so much for cable and we have got to be watching less free TV”.²

The key reciprocity pitch is: if you use, support it. So do these women lapse because they perceive themselves using it less? Certainly, many of these cable subscribers could well afford a basic membership, with or without their large cable bills. What if Public TV had viable institutional philanthropic appeals, in addition to its reciprocity pitches, that it could make it possible to tip people toward supporting the “institution of PTV as important to have as a community resource regardless how much I might use it”?

Mommy lapsers are classic examples of reciprocity pitch backfiring. Since she and the kids no longer view as much PTV as when they were younger, why renew? Under what circumstances would a mommy lapser return to the file? Many of these people give large sums to charities each year (especially to their college alma maters), yet they cannot find \$40 for Public TV? How can we reach them? The mail appears almost hopeless, given that many of them report getting between 25 to 50 pieces of direct mail a day. (“I guess we're just in the right zip code,” one told us.) There is some evidence that the best way to reach them is through pledge, especially music pledge shows with premiums that they can get

² We did run into an interesting variation on the “value of cable” issue. In every market we encountered a number of younger members who had dropped (or never subscribed to) cable because it was inappropriate for their children and/or not good value for the money. How large this cable rejecter segment is for Public TV membership is not known at present but it certainly is there.

for their family to enjoy. Also, given the sums they give their college alma maters, what kind of Public TV institutional pitch would appeal to them for their continued support?

Some lapsed simply do not find enough interesting programming on Public TV. We interviewed a number of older men who found Fox Cable News more appealing to them, since it espoused values they liked. The PTV disconnect for them is that they do not see their values being present in any of the PTV programming that they usually view. These guys are gone for good, if you are to believe them. They turn on cable TV in the morning and leave it on all day, in the background. If they were ever to return it would be through a pledge drive.

And last what do we make of the mail renewer drifters: those people who merely put off renewing, month after month, as the renewal notices are pushed aside? They make the decision not to renew right now, but rationalize they will do it next month.

We know from talking to many drifters that the renewal decision is made around bill paying time. Poorly understood is the psychological structure of the expression “depends on how flush I am feeling”. They say they will renew if they are feeling flush (meaning there is some discretionary income available for charitable giving). Now it is flip to say that \$40 (if that is the basic membership level) is not a large sum of money. But the entire amount of discretionary monies may “feel” to be less than that. The comfortable decision is to put off the decision. They are still watching and enjoying the programming, but the renewal appeal’s salience is not enough to push them to the tipping point.

In Closing

As one critic has pointed out, our constant focus on reciprocity (“you use it so support it, and here is your thank you gift”) may have cast the seeds of our own membership decline. During pledge breaks, the focus is often on the station and its needs (“we need 30 new members”). Stations are inanimate objects and have no needs, real or imagined. People have needs. Communities, given the people who live in it, have needs. If Public TV has needs, it is to have the resources to serve its local communities with programming and services.³

Closing the Circle

Throughout the hundreds of interviews, there was often a palpable sense of gratitude, trust and affection for Public TV from the people we talked with. This

³ This argument shifting the focus from the station's “needs” to the viewer and communities needs is made quite effectively by Kay Sprinkel Grace in **Beyond Fund Raising** and developed more fully in her latest volume along with Alan L. Wendroff **High Impact Philanthropy** (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.,2001).

feeling was beyond simply sending in their renewal notice. There was, for many people, an aching, almost an unrequited affection for the station and its programming. There was yearning and longing to communicate their affection to the station, and puzzlement about the station's inability to reciprocate – except to send another piece of direct mail for an add gift. Clearly, we need to learn more about closing the communication/affection circle between the station and its viewers/members. This inability to communicate effectively with members and viewers ought to be explored in greater depth, since it has introduced, however subtly, a sort of affective dissonance between the station and its members/viewers. (Whatever happened to all that talk about relationship marketing and using the Internet for personalized communication?)

As we craft our surveys, we need to know more about reciprocity and its strengths and weakness as an argument for support. We need to know more about the issue of philanthropic rationales for support. And last, we need to learn how to close the circle of communication with our supporters. We must show them that there is reason to feel that a contributor to Public TV is, indeed, a member of something, and does “belong” to an institution that helps make the community a better and more comfortable place in which to live.

Appendix 1

Examples of Laddering

Laddering Interview Technique

- ◆ Laddering is a questioning methodology where we ask consumers how they made a choice, then probe to uncover the rationale for their choice.
- ◆ Probing focuses on identifying specific attributes that influence viewer/member choice, then probing for the benefits they get from those programming attributes. Probing then continues until the consumer values are identified.



Laddering Example

Q: Why do you prefer Washington Week to other public affairs shows?

A: The guests dig deeper into the topic at hand.

Q: I see, why does that matter?

A: Well, I like to hear the facts and gain multiple perspectives on the issue.

Q: And why is it important to gain multiple perspectives?

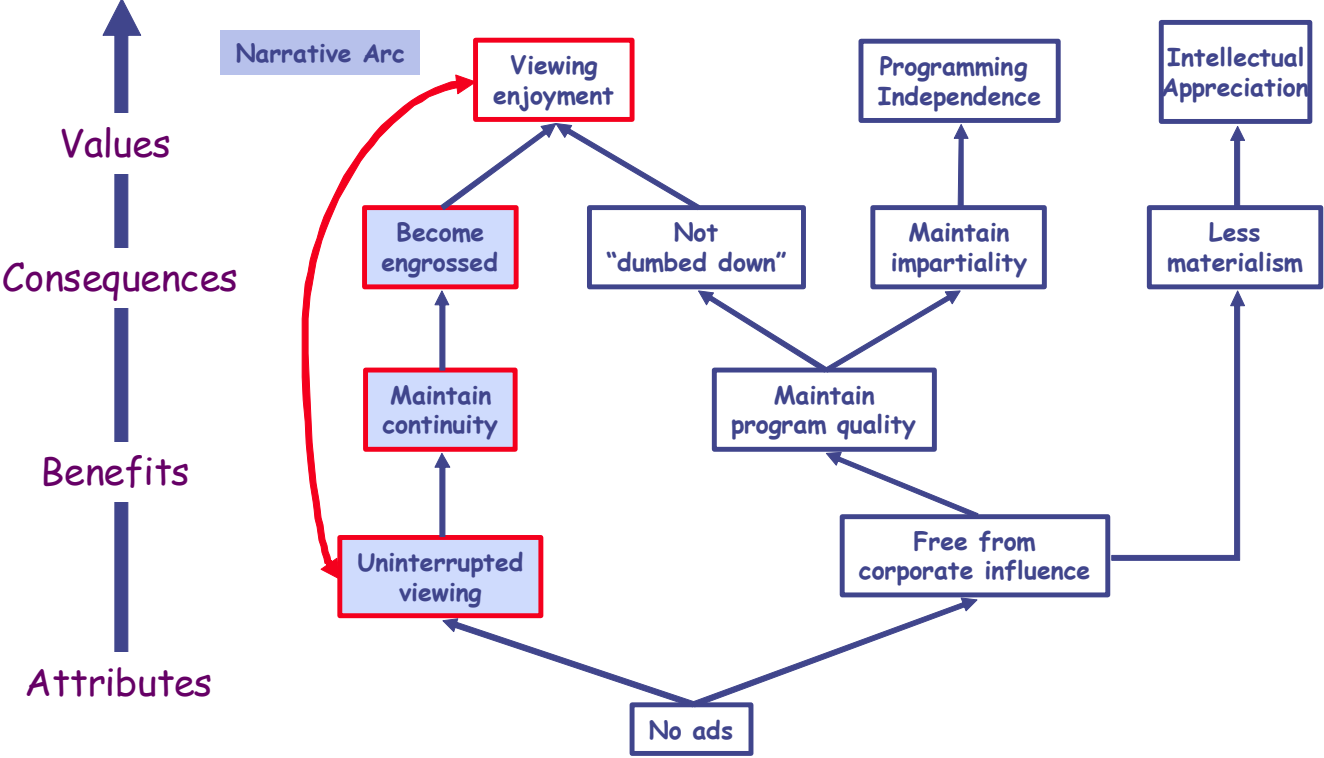
A: I like to form my own opinions, I don't like to be spoon-fed a single viewpoint.

Q: That makes sense. How does it make a difference to you, personally, that you gain information to form your own views?

A: I want to be informed. I am an independent thinker who enjoys discussing current issues with friends over coffee.

Results of Laddering Interviews

Advertising-free programs

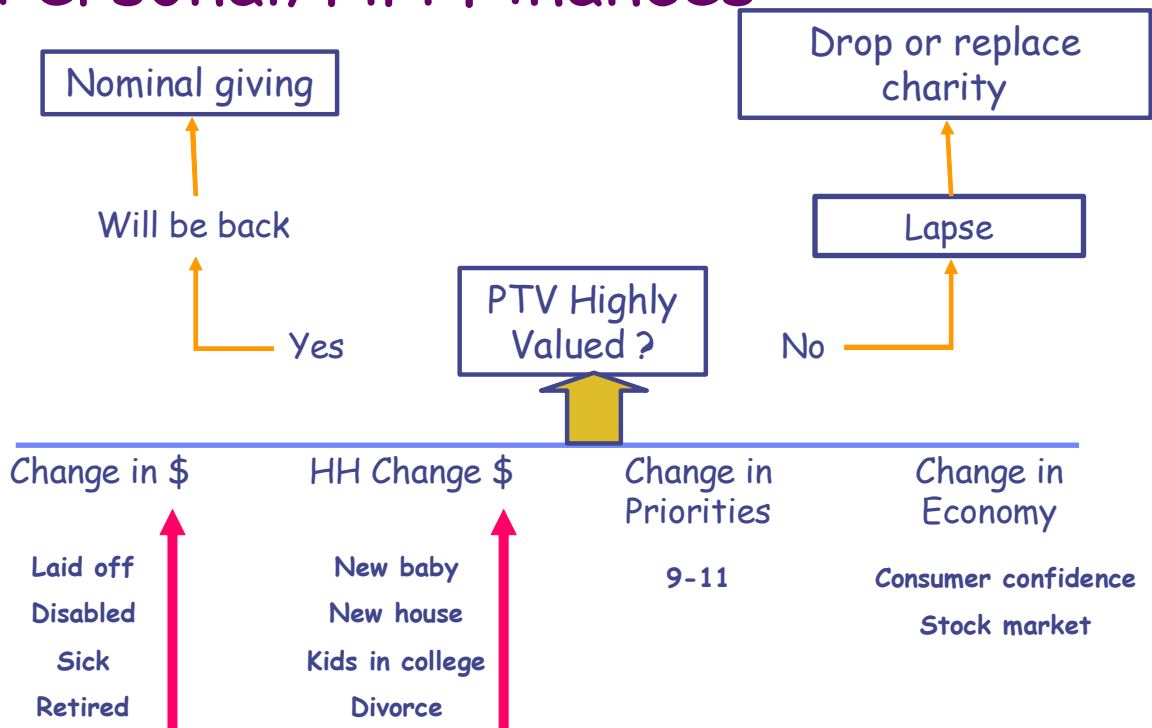


Appendix 2

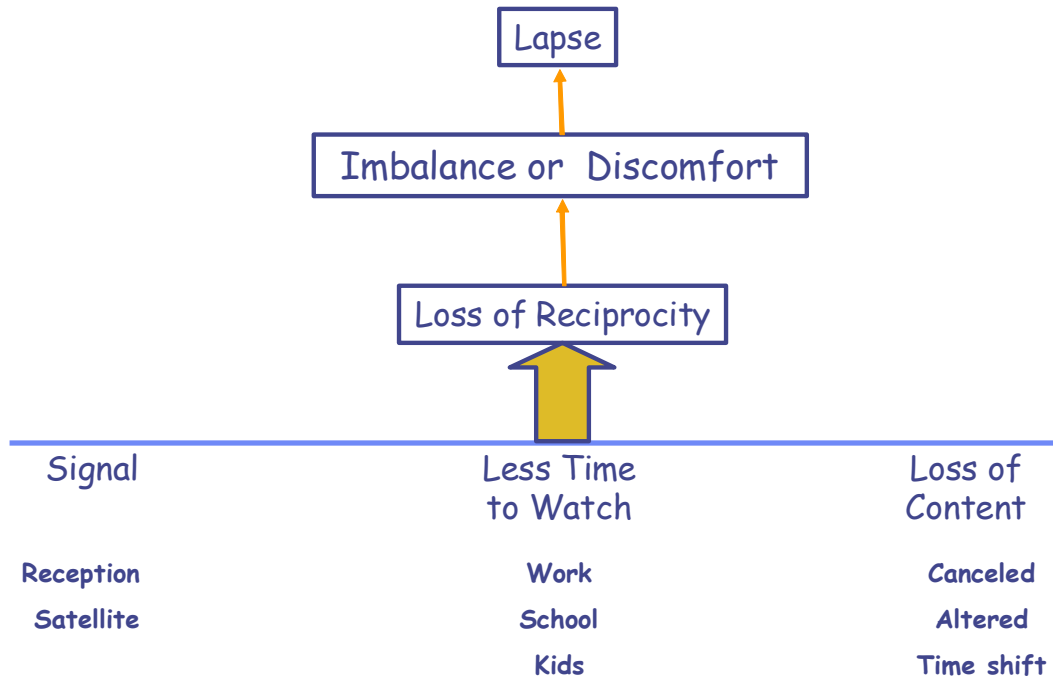
The Seven C's

- ◆ Change in personal/HH finances
- ◆ Change in use
 - Mommy Lapsers
 - Cable competition
- ◆ Critical incident
 - Programming
 - Viewer/Member Services
- ◆ Cyclers
- ◆ Competition for charitable dollars
- ◆ Confusion
- ◆ Coffins (or other changes of address).

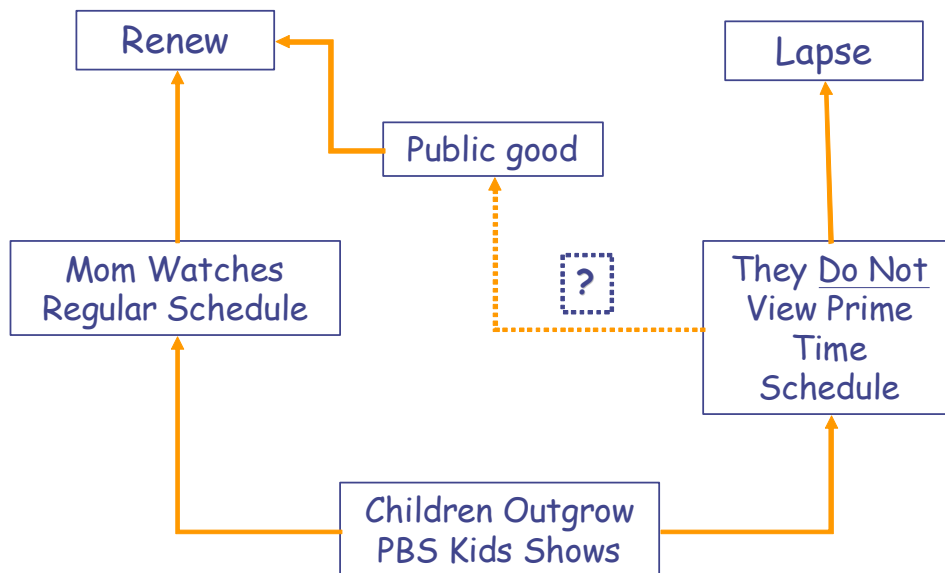
Personal/HH Finances



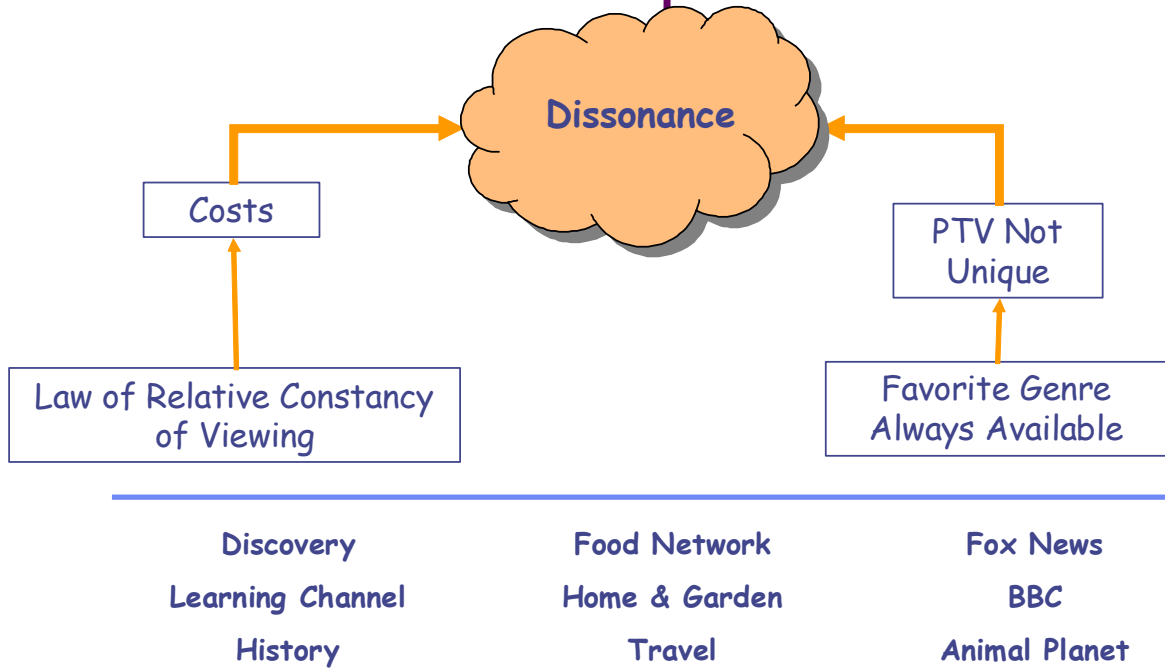
Decrease in PTV Use



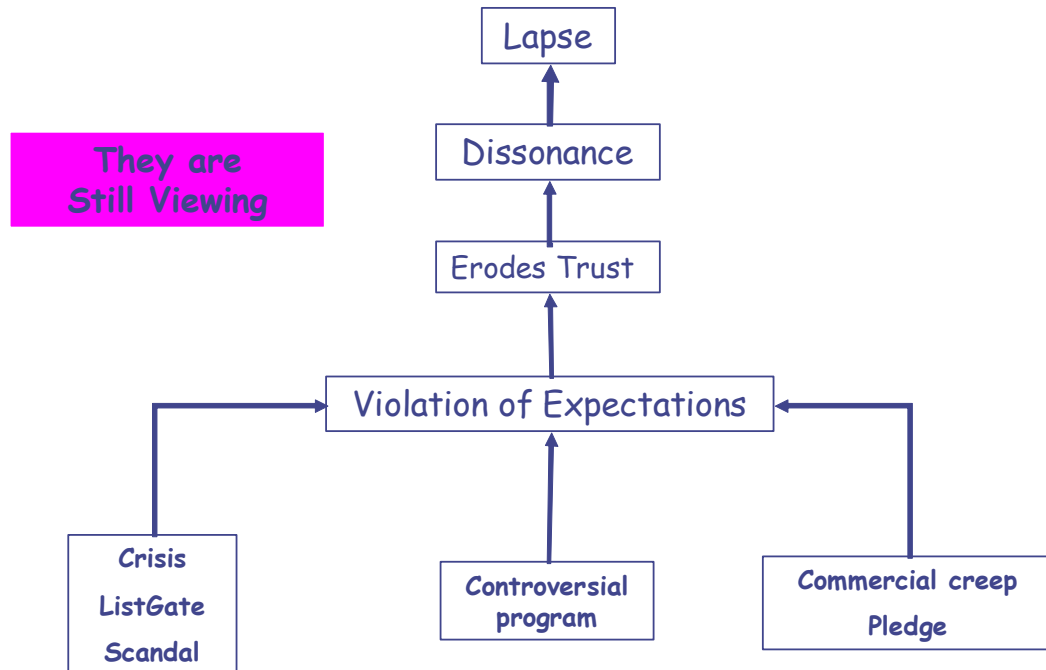
Decrease PTV: Mommy Lapsers



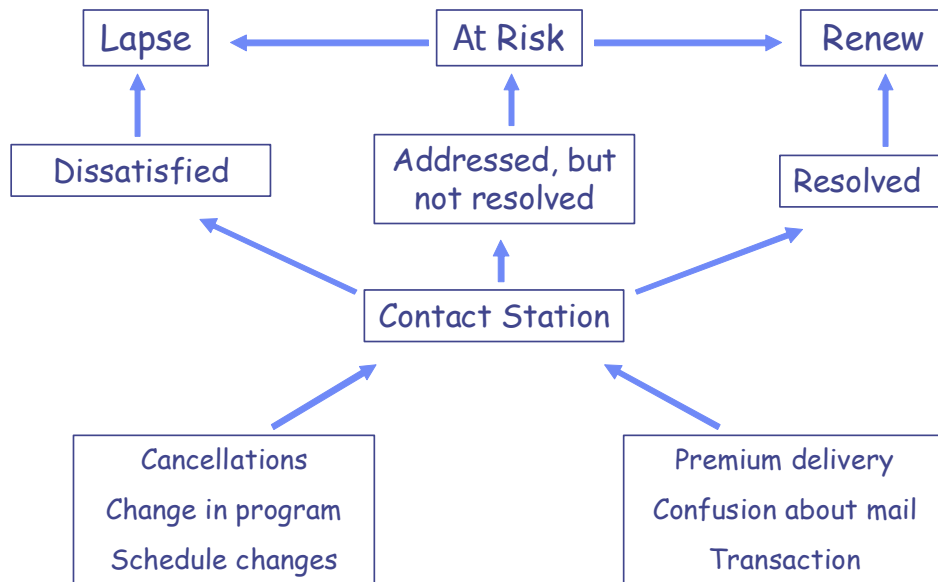
Decrease: Cable Competition



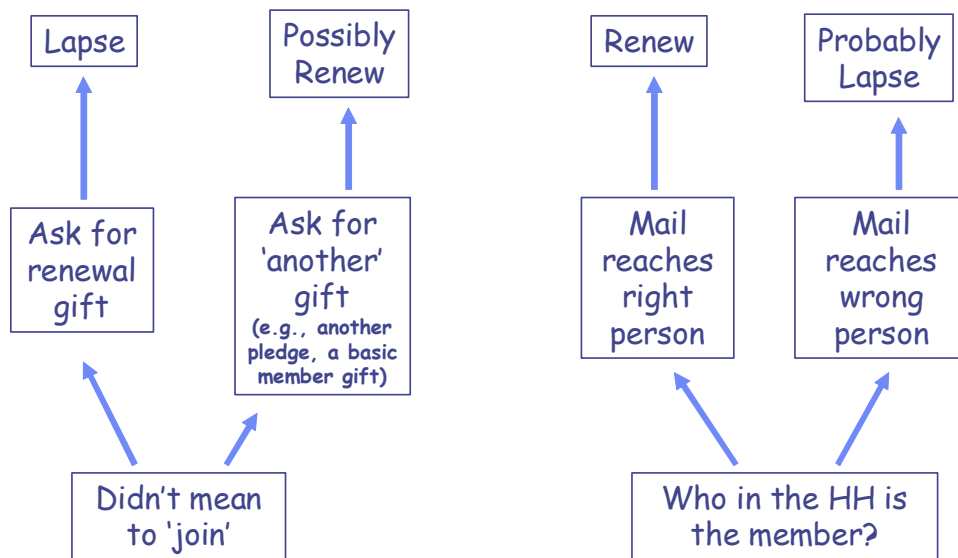
Critical Incident



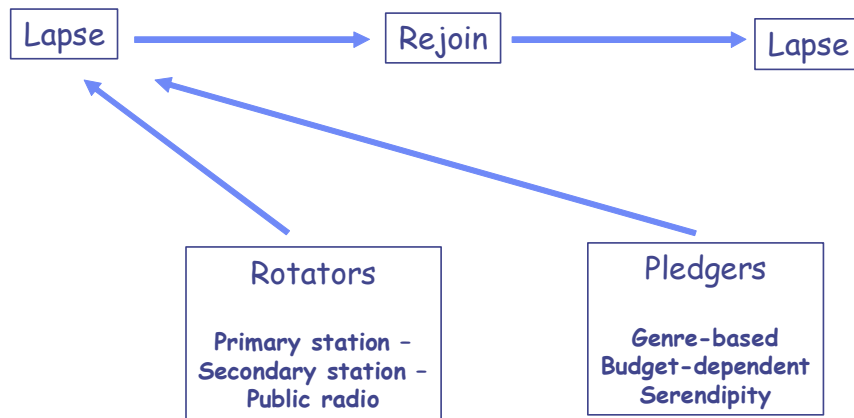
Viewer/Member Services



Confusion



Cyclers



Competition for Charitable \$



Basic Needs

Homeless H
Shelters H
Food Bank H

Church

Tithe R
Missions H
Faith H/R

Personal

Health H
Friend/
Relative R

Interest

PTV R, Radio R,
Museums R, Animals H,
Arts R, Environment H,
Political H/R

Appendix 3

Generation Cohorts

Generation	Birth years	Total Ever Lived (in Millions)	Total Alive as of 1999 (in millions)
Lost	1883-1900	48.5	0.1
G.I.	1901-1924	74.4	16.3
Silent	1925-1942	54.9	36.0
Boom	1943-1960	78.7	68.8
Gen-X	1961-1981	93.0	81.8
Millennial	1982-2002	100.2	70.2

Cohorts

- Generations are linked through shared life experiences in formative years
 - ◆ Pop Culture
 - ◆ Economic Conditions
 - ◆ World Events
 - ◆ Natural Disasters
 - ◆ Heroes & Villains
 - ◆ Politics
 - ◆ Technology

Generational Markers: Collective Experiences

■ Matures -

- Depression
- New Deal
- World War II
- G.I. Bill

Matures

■ 1901 - 1942

- ◆ G.I. Generation: Leaders
- ◆ Silent Generation: Followers

Matures

- Despite contrasts between *G.I.* and *Silent Generations* they are a single cohesive generational cohort
 - ◆ Economic upheaval as children
 - ◆ Discipline & self sacrifice are cornerstones
 - ◆ Bound together by common goals: overcome economic hardships, build suburban America and need to defeat common enemies

Matures: Attributes

- Believed in:
 - ◆ Hard work
 - ◆ Self Sacrifice and Postponed gratification
 - ◆ Team work
 - ◆ Authority - respect it
 - ◆ Conformity - fit in

Generational Markers: Collective Experiences

■ Boomers -

- Great Society
- Prosperity
- Suburbia
- Nixon/Watergate
- Color TV
- Sex, Drugs & Rock-n-Roll

Late Boomers

- Before the '70's ended the great expectation of Boomers bumped up against hard realities - 26% of adult population
- The Generation brought up with the expectation of affluence began to understand there might not be enough to go around.
- Later Boomers were more profoundly affected by disillusionment than early Boomers.

Boomers

- Boomers see little value in self-sacrifice for a common goal
- They focus on self-reward & individuality not teamwork
- They want fulfillment & enlightenment
- They want to be on top and in charge

All Boomers

- Are aging & they know it!
- They haven't saved enough for their future
- They feel pop-culture, movies, television no longer is designed for their generation
- As they age they may create a gerontocracy of such unity that it will either dominate the American political map or provoke all out generational warfare.

Generational Markers: Collective Experiences

■ Gen X -

- Divorce
- AIDS
- Sesame Street
- MTV
- Crack Cocaine
- Game Boy
- PC's

Gen X-er's (1961-1981)

- X-er's are the generational cohort that's never been able to presume success
- The '80's were tough for the X-ers - recession, conspicuous consumption
- The X-er's grew up with the generational debris of the Boomers - divorce, latch key kids, homelessness, gangs, etc.

Gen X-er's: Attributes

- Love technology
- Are media sophisticates
- Advocates of all kinds of diversity
- Like retro (old things in new surroundings)
- Value attitude, candidness
- Have fun

The Millennials (1982-2002)

- The first batch of Millennials are the high school class of 2000
- They are pleasant, cheerful, helpful, ambitious and community-oriented
- They are growing up at a time of unprecedented prosperity and social pressures
- A new *G.I. Generation*?

The Millennials

- Parents' attitude toward Millennial children
- It's ok to check out your kids' friends & also what he's up to on the Internet
- It's for our children's own good
- And the kids agree
- They are ultimate do-gooders
- They volunteer, and yes, they'll give.

Generation at a Glance

	Mature	Boomers	Gen X
Defining Ideas	Duty	Individualism	Diversity
Celebrate	Victory	Youth	Savvy
Success Because	Fought hard, won	Were born a winner	Have two jobs
Style	Team player	Self-absorbed	Entrepreneur
Reward Because	You've earned it	You deserve it	You need it
Work is	Inevitable obligation	Exciting adventure	A difficult challenge

Generation at a Glance

	Mature	Boomers	Gen X
Life Surprises	Some good / some bad	All good	Avoid at all cost
Leisure	Reward for hard work	Point of life	Relief
Education	A Dream	A Birthright	Way to get along
Future	Rainy day to work for	Now is more important	Uncertain but manageable
Managing Money	Save	Spend	Bargain

Generation at a Glance

	MATURES	BOOMERS	Xers
Home Stuff	Timex Milk and cookies Sex on your honeymoon	Casio Milk and Oreos Sex in the backseat	Swatch Milk and SnackWells Sex on the Internet
Media	<i>Peyton Place</i> <i>This Is Your Life</i> <i>War Of The Worlds</i>	<i>Dallas</i> <i>Candid Camera</i> <i>Close Encounters</i>	<i>Melrose Place</i> <i>America's Funniest Home Videos</i> <i>Independence Day</i>
Technology	Slide rules Rotary phones	Calculators Touch-Tones phones	Spreadsheets Cell phones