

# The Future of Freedom



**ENGAGING WITH THE NEXT GENERATION  
OF LEADERS TO ADVANCE FREEDOM OF  
RELIGION OR BELIEF.**

Patrice Pederson



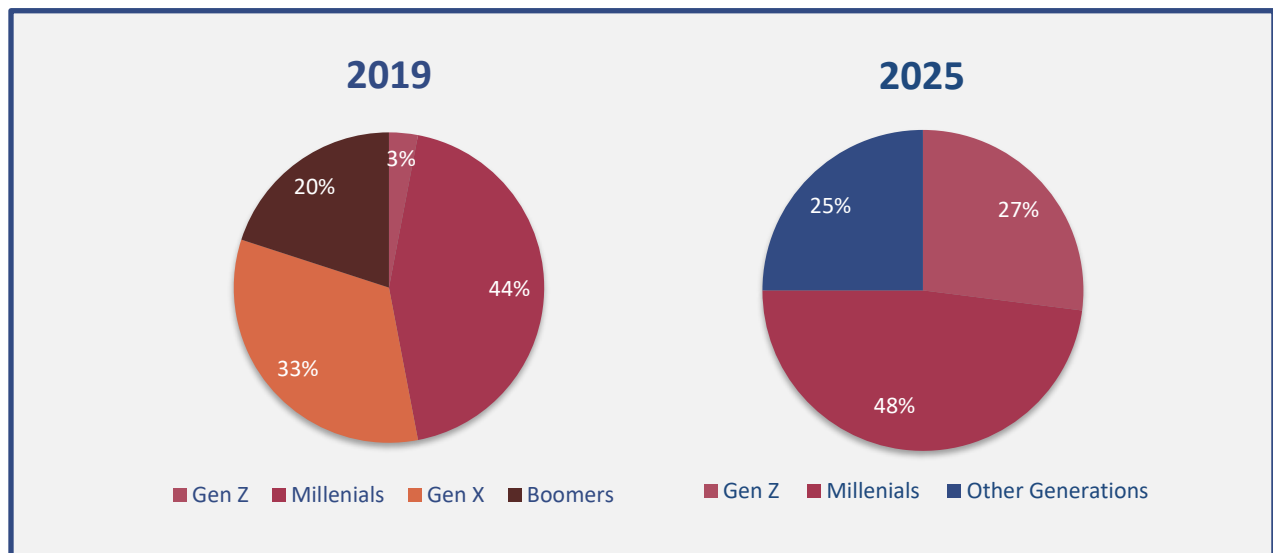
[patrice@firstfreedom.org](mailto:patrice@firstfreedom.org)



+1-801-358-1102

## PLEASE MIND THE [GENERATION] GAP

The world is at a tipping point. With Baby Boomers retiring in droves, Millennials and Zoomers will soon dominate the workforce. This is bad news for the international religious freedom movement because we have largely failed to appeal to these generations. In fact, our entire strategy seems to have been built by and for a generation with one foot already out the door.

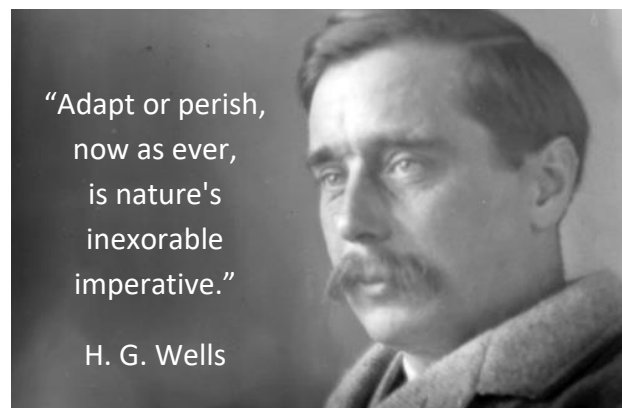


Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

We are only two years away from Millennials and Zoomers comprising 75% of the workforce. And yet, according to the IRF Roundtable's 2022 end of year survey, only 10% of participants were in that demographic.

If we do not attract a new generation of leaders, soon there will be nobody left to carry the torch.

There has been a lot of talk about Millennials and Zoomers, but a few key differences are particularly relevant to the way we present information, the way we interact with one another, and the way we describe our cause.



	Boomers & Gen X	Millennials & Zoomers	Current Approach
<b>Content Consumption<sup>1</sup></b>	Long-form, curated by “experts,” and scheduled. Separation between education and entertainment. Ex. speeches, meetings, letters or email, newspapers, television	Short-form, self-curated, and on-demand, with infinite options. Usually visual and interactive. “Infotainment” Ex. reels, chats or texts, social media news feeds, YouTube, memes	Conferences and meetings with long monologues. Occasional brief Q&A.
<b>Job Longevity<sup>2 3</sup></b>	Boomers: 8y3m Gen X: 5y2m	Millennials 2y9m Zoomers 2y3m	Massively complex issues, no “onboarding” to movement.
<b>Technology<sup>4</sup></b>	Digital immigrants & Digital translators Default to phone and emails with attachments. Technology adoption fatigue	Digital natives Default to rapid fire texts or chats or posting info for mass consumption. Expectation of continuous technological improvement	Work is done the hard way. Communication is slow.
<b>Workplace Relationships<sup>5</sup></b>	30% of Boomers place a high value on workplace relationships. More deferential to authority figures, expected to show a “stiff upper lip” in public. Likely to spend social time with a spouse and kids.	70% of Millennials place a high value on workplace relationships. Prefer to work in a social and collaborative atmosphere. Want to interact with influencers as equals and see them be vulnerable. Delayed marriage and childbearing.	Gatherings are very formal and hierarchical. Opportunities to socialize are limited and expensive. Current champions have gatekeepers and are generally inaccessible.
<b>Religiosity<sup>6</sup></b>	Majority (59% & 53% respectively) see religion as important	Minority (42%) sees religion as important.	Persistent framing of the issue as “religious freedom,” rather than freedom of thought, conscience, or belief.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/01/political-news-habits-by-generation/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.careerbuilder.com/advice/blog/how-long-should-you-stay-in-a-job>

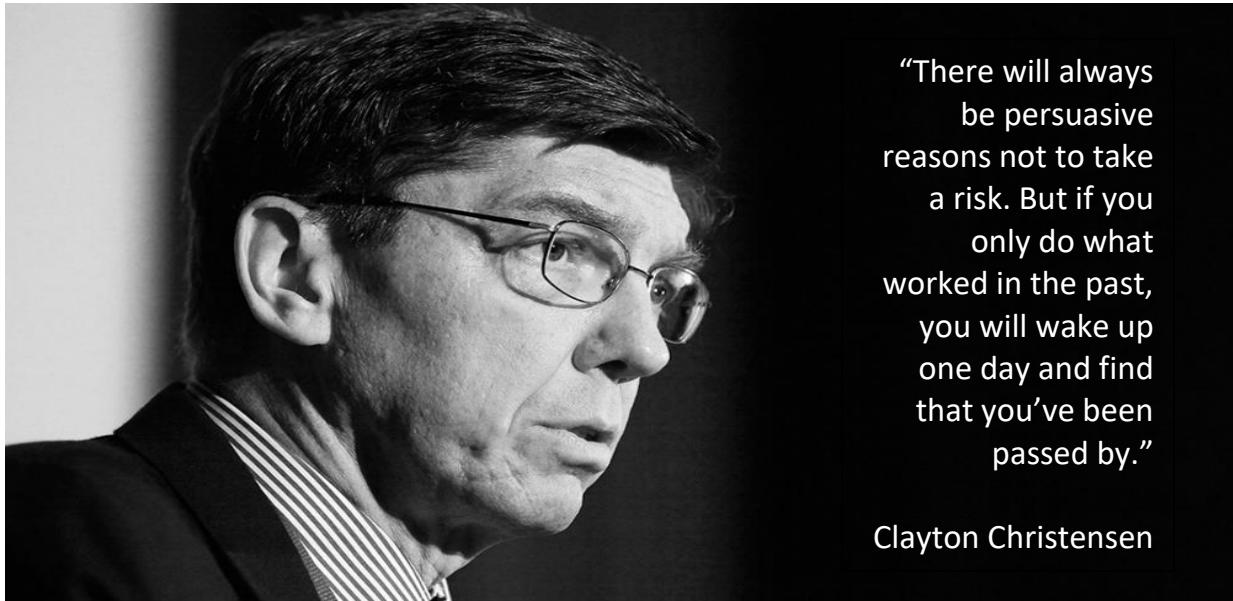
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/231587/millennials-job-hopping-generation.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.inc.com/larry-alton/why-millennials-gen-z-are-going-to-take-small-business-world-by-storm.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://chat.openai.com/chat/fa91bf9e-08f7-4aa9-ae98-a9d0c32bb509>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/generational-cohort/>

## CLASSIC INNOVATOR'S DILEMMA



The Innovator’s Dilemma by Clayton Christiansen is one of the most influential business books of the last 30 years, and its lessons are remarkably on point for the global religious freedom movement.

We are losing “market share” (i.e., people who support religious freedom) by listening to our current “customers” (donors) and providing what appears to be the highest value “products” (speeches, meetings, reports) but ignoring “low value customers” (youth who do not contribute much financially) until we are overtaken by “competitors” (identity politics, “safe spaces,” cancel culture). We’re like Kodak working to build a better camera when everybody is switching to digital.

We must start an agile division within the movement to target the youth market.

The difference with Dr. Christensen’s theory is that our “new division” must not be walled off from the rest of the movement. This particular customer (Millennials and Zoomers) have a strong need for the stability and institutional wisdom that the old guard can provide. So, the new division must be integrated throughout the whole.

## REASONS FOR HOPE

- 1) Millennials are “driven to make a difference.”<sup>7</sup> Being passionate about their job is more important to them than money.<sup>8</sup> This is good news for both public service and civil society (although there might be some difference with Zoomers on this front.)<sup>9</sup>
- 2) Most place a very high value on diversity, equity, and inclusion, with an even greater emphasis on cognitive and experiential diversity than previous generations.<sup>10</sup> This is especially true of Gen Z, and great news for FoRB.
- 3) 78% of young people consider themselves at least slightly “spiritual” (although not always religious).<sup>11</sup>
- 4) Anecdotal evidence indicates a lot of cafeteria-style religiosity (a little of this, a little of that) as well as more frequent church hopping. Both require FoRB.
- 5) Research is mixed on the relative value Millennials and Zoomers place on collaboration vs. independence, but in-general both generations tend to value collaboration more than previous generations.<sup>12 13</sup>
- 6) 78% of Millennials prefer experiences to stuff, and the type of experiences they value are ones which foster connection—with their peers, their community, and the world. FoRB advocacy provides amazing opportunities for such experiences.<sup>14</sup>
- 7) Entrepreneurship and especially social entrepreneurship are extremely popular, with 66% of millennials saying they want to “start my own business.” However, in that same survey, only 25% said they wanted to “own my own company,” and even fewer—13%—say they want to “be a chief executive or a company president.” This is why partnership with Boomers and Gen X’ers is so vital—to help carry the load of “adulting.”

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<sup>7</sup>[https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/future-entrepreneurship-millennials-gen-z-lead-way-paul-segreto?trk=pulse-article\\_more-articles\\_related-content-card](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/future-entrepreneurship-millennials-gen-z-lead-way-paul-segreto?trk=pulse-article_more-articles_related-content-card)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.theladders.com/career-advice/survey-millennials-want-passion-more-than-money>

<sup>9</sup><https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/sg/Documents/human-capital/sea-cons-gen-z-is-not-millennial-plus.pdf>

<sup>10</sup><https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/about-deloitte/us-inclus-millennial-influence-120215.pdf>

<sup>11</sup><https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/sg/Documents/human-capital/sea-cons-gen-z-is-not-millennial-plus.pdf>

<sup>12</sup><https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/sg/Documents/human-capital/sea-cons-gen-z-is-not-millennial-plus.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://blog.adeccousa.com/way-to-work-survey-1/>

<sup>14</sup>[https://eventbrite-s3.s3.amazonaws.com/marketing/Millennials\\_Research/Gen\\_PR\\_Final.pdf](https://eventbrite-s3.s3.amazonaws.com/marketing/Millennials_Research/Gen_PR_Final.pdf)

## OPEN SPACE CONFERENCE: AN ALL-DAY COFFEE BREAK WITH A THEME

Open Space Technology is a method for organizing large groups of people with a shared goal. The agenda is created in real time by participants who also record summaries of each discussion to share back to the whole. It has been used over 60,000 times in 124 countries involving millions of people, including at NASA and Google Ventures, and has proven to be very effective at moving large groups of people from talk to action. It is also very well-suited to virtual events.

Open Space is an ideal tool to achieve our goals of engaging and retaining young people because it amplifies both the freedom and responsibility of participants. Youth are more likely to stay engaged when they feel like their voice is being heard.

### FORMAT:

Gather 800 - 1,000 participants annually for a 24-hour virtual “un-conference” using Open Space Technology, with the following breakdown:

- 1) 700 youths
- 2) 150 mentors
- 3) 25 co-sponsoring organizations
- 4) 10 IRFBA members
- 5) 50 volunteer facilitators

Open Space relies on the “Law of Two Feet,” which is: “If at any time you find yourself in any situation where you are neither learning nor contributing, go someplace else.”

We will carefully select 150 mentors from diverse religious, cultural, and geographic backgrounds. They will include representatives from multiple different sectors which influence society, such as current ForB champions, religious leaders, lawmakers, lawyers, academic researchers, business leaders, technologists, filmmakers, writers, artists, philanthropists, and perhaps a few celebrities. Each mentor will be invited to nominate three participants for the youth innovation summit. IRFBA members and event co-sponsors may nominate five participants each.

Nominees will then be required to complete basic training on ForB as a qualification for participation.

## A SUSTAINABLE TRACK, NOT ONLY AN EVENT

Open Space is powerful because of its ability to transform talk into action. Conversations that begin with information sharing naturally turn to “What can we do about it?” Plans are created, partnerships are formed, pledges are made.

The trick is in the implementation of those plans, and in keeping participants engaged between conferences. To this end, the First Freedom Foundation is looking to partner with forward-thinking organizations to develop a year-long FoRB Fellowship. The fellowship could include the following components:

- 1) Full-time employment in the FoRB movement for the duration of the fellowship—either within a partner organization which has committed to sponsor/mentor a fellow, or by starting up a new venture and participating in our incubation program.
- 2) A robust curriculum consisting of
  - the classics of liberty
  - practical skills such as PR, fundraising, leadership development, etc.
  - transformational “way of being” training from the Arbinger Institute. (Arbinger is our secret sauce to help young leaders understand the importance of FoRB for others as well as themselves.)

The content will be discussed in weekly virtual meetings with other fellows. Current FoRB champions could also be invited to join these conversations as mentors.

- 3) Quarterly in-person practicums where fellows can put their skills to work. Current champions could also be invited to participate.

Ideas for practicums include:

- Gathering at either the annual IRFBA ministerial or IRF Summit where fellows would meet one another, members of IRFBA, civil society leaders, and fellowship alumni.
- On the ground humanitarian work. For example, fellows could visit the refugee camps in Cox Bazar where they could help document the atrocities refugees experienced, build a press kit, launch social media awareness campaigns, set up virtual appointments for local leaders to meet with international influencers, or host virtual hearings for victims to testify before congress, etc.
- Grass-tops advocacy. For example, fellows could lobby the Human Rights Council to advocate for religious prisoners of conscience. Fellows could gain experience setting and conducting appointments at different embassies, identifying and encouraging allies, providing governments with the information they need to carry the argument, and rallying public support through PR and social media.
- Planning the youth track for their concluding IRF Ministerial or IRF Summit where fellows will pass the baton to the next cohort.

Fellows who want to be social entrepreneurs will receive additional training in organization development, weekly coaching calls, and the option to participate in a “Shark Tank” experience where they pitch their projects to donors for funding.

**Why we believe this will succeed:**

- 1) Open Space is well suited to Millennials and Zoomers. Everyone has an equal voice. It’s interactive with no social pressure to endure long monologues. And the conversations evolve according to participants’ interests and attention spans.
- 2) The freedom of the format creates responsibility of ownership. Previous efforts have attempted to “recruit” youth to others’ visions, which is largely why retention has been such a challenge. In this model, mentors and young people find one another based on shared interests, and then the fellowship supports the youth in their own ideas with technical tools, training, and funding to help them succeed.
- 3) The fellowship is relationship-oriented. Intense experiences (like visiting refugee camps) produce strong bonding which will create a positive social pressure to stay in the cause.
- 4) Franchises and “intra-preneurialism” have been shown to be dramatically more successful than entrepreneurialism. By reducing the startup headaches through our incubator program, and also integrating emerging leaders into existing organizations, we increase the likelihood of success. We also decrease the fear of commitment because young people will know that even if they do choose to step away, good projects are likely to be carried on by their sponsors, mentors, and/or peers.
- 5) The practicums provide the exact type of connection-building experiences millennials crave, so it should attract significant interest.



## NEXT STEPS

### NEEDS:

- Convening power / status to attract high quality participants
- Mentors from different sectors of society who are willing to give young people their time and attention
- Project partners willing to sponsor internships for youth-directed work
- Nominations of young people who are eager to make a positive impact in their communities and the world
- Funds to help small organizations cover stipends, travel costs for practicums, and also a program manager to manage the training curriculum

## CONCLUSION

The international religious freedom movement has been making dramatic leaps and strides. Five years ago we could barely be considered a movement. But with the creation of IRFBA and the IRF Summit, and the global expansion of the IRF Roundtable, we are finally worthy of that label.

But already we are facing an existential crisis.

We have a narrow window of opportunity to transfer decades of institutional wisdom before it is lost forever. Far worse, if we fail to attract youth to our cause, it will die a tragic death. We must leverage the time we have left with the Boomers to provide a backbone of support for the rising generations which are struggling to find their legs. Instead of throwing the retirement parties that our current champions deserve, we need the Boomers' sustained help until the torches can successfully be passed.

With religious freedom decreasing in most countries around the world, and religion itself getting branded as hateful, controlling, and secretive, we have a short timeframe to adapt or die. It will require a rapid exchange, with the Boomers sharing their institutional wisdom, and the Millennials and Zoomers explaining what does and does not work for their generations. It all starts with listening to each other now.