

## Give Back More than You Receive: WAI Conference 2016

It is important to make an attempt at understanding and relating appropriately to one another and pass along more than you receive to the next person striving for his or her goals. Women in Aviation International (WAI) and the Association for Women in Aviation Maintenance (AWAM) both support this venture. In my opinion, the Women in Aviation International Conference serves to educate and evaluate the dynamics of individuals in the field of aviation. We educate and evaluate through tours, seminars, scholarship awards, and interaction with one another.

For a tour, we visited the Beechcraft Heritage Museum outside of Nashville. The Museum consists of Beechcraft collections complete with the first ever Beechcraft and one of the last 20 ever made. One of the key figures they pay tribute to is Louise Thaden who repeatedly beat Amelia Earhart in air races. It is a wealth of historical knowledge as well as numerous Doctor Killers. I especially appreciated the Starship: the largest aircraft equipped with canards I have ever seen.

To quench our educational thirst, there were over 55 seminars available to participate in during the conference. Many of the times overlapped so it was impossible to attend them all. They had seminars ranging from *Unmanned Aviation for Pilots* to *Leading with Enthusiasm*. I attended a few interesting ones, however, I will only mention one here. If you are interested in what else I participated in, feel free to ask me in person. *Generational Diversity in the Aviation Workforce* was an especially interesting seminar. The presenter was Kristy Kiernan, an adjunct assistant professor from Embry-Riddle.

*Generational Diversity in the Aviation Workforce* was a fascinating choice. In aviation maintenance there are a few Traditionalists, an abundance of the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the entering Millennials. We started off with a discussion about the definition of the generations. A generation is defined by when an individual was born:

Traditionalists 1928-1945

Baby Boomers 1946-1964

Generation X 1965-1979

Millennials 1980-2000's (Generation Y and Z)

Millennials may be further broken down into Generation Y or Z, however, the seminar lumped them all together into a Millennial category because we were specifically talking about the younger generation in the workforce or now entering the workforce. Kristy further defined these generations as to be only in the United States: a generational category must have some sort of shared experience growing up and similar location to be considered a generational category.

The first topic we discussed was the stereotypes of each generation. Millennials are perceived to be entitled, detached, and disrespectful. Baby Boomers and Traditionalists are perceived as inflexible, stubborn, and resistant to change. Each generation has their positive aspects as well: Millennials are usually tech savvy and innovative while the others are disciplined with eons of practical experience and knowledge. These are all broad observations and no one individual is the epitome of each stereotype.

The generation I was born into is Generation Y (Millennial): we grew up with electronics and technology booming. Even as I write this, I realize I am utilizing 3 electronics to assist me: my cell phone

for music, my iPad for further research, and the computer I am typing on. It is all very fluid for me and natural to rotate between multiple electronics for various applications in one session. This may be more difficult for a typical Baby Boomer or Gen Xer to believe: why would you need to use 3 electronics for one task?

Baby Boomers, on the other hand, seem to be less electronically savvy (stereotypically) yet possess indispensable knowledge that my generation does not yet have. They also have a tenacity for hard work and do indeed work hard. As a Millennial, it will take me many, many years to absorb even a fair portion of their knowledge and wisdom. But I suppose I will never break my habit of multi-tasking on my many electronic devices.

In my smaller group's discussion during the seminar, we determined that each generation could learn from one another quite easily: technological knowledge versus practical knowledge. Communication is key and it is imperative that the younger generation absorbs knowledge from the older generation before they start to retire. After having heard all the groups share, Kristy emphasized that we all, as an upcoming generation and older generation, should "make sure the people behind us get to where they want to go." In time, my generation will be the knowledgeable one and will have to deal with similar frustrations about the emerging Generation Z. The cycle will continue and some friction now and then is inevitable. The key is mutual respect and to make an effort for understanding why each individual from these different generations act and react the way they do. It was a very interesting seminar that answered a few questions yet begged more.

The highlight of the conference for me personally was in the interaction with other attendees. Within the WAI Conference lies a few AWAM meetings that are essential for a newer technician such as myself. Hearing the seasoned women's and men's stories and advice about maintenance are indispensable. Also, the Women in Aviation Hall of Fame ceremony was especially moving. One of the nominees was Brenda Robinson, who is truly amazing. Mrs. Robinson is the first black woman to earn her wings of gold as a naval aviator and went by the call sign "Raven". She is the first black woman in Dowling's history to graduate with a degree in Aeronautics. After flying as the first female black pilot at American Airlines, Mrs. Robinson retired after 34 years. First, I thanked her for her service to our country. Then I thanked her for being a professional black female role model for those of us entering fields which do not have an ideal number of women of color (or women in general). The reality is, it is still a newer experience to those in the aviation workforce which presents its own set of stereotypical challenges.

Conferences like the Women in Aviation Conference assist in furthering the understanding and evaluation of the individuals we interact with in our career. Between the tours, seminars, and interactions with other individuals in aviation I learned more and enjoyed the process of learning. The conference is also a reminder that as an organization we attempt to give back more than we receive, for those around us and upcoming around us.

Sincerely,

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