

Gen X Leadership

Originally Published in the *Mississippi Business Journal*

The framers of our United States constitution stepped up in a moment of history and crafted a document that has guided this country for over two hundred years. Interestingly, the average age of the delegates was 43. Benjamin Franklin was the oldest delegate to the constitutional convention at age 81, and Jonathan Dayton of New Jersey was 26. James Madison, who would later become the 4th President, was 36, and Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of Treasury, was 32.

In today's generational terms, most of the founding fathers would be from the equivalent of our Generation X. In terms of leadership in this country today, Baby Boomers are clearly the dominant force. The average age of CEO's is 56, and 65 percent of all national leaders are Baby Boomers. A breakdown of the current Senate reflects this stratification of leadership which reflects four generations: (1) Greatest Generation (1901 – 1924) -Three Senators; (2) Silent Generation (1925 – 1942) -Thirty Three Senators; (3) Boomer Generation (1943 – 1960) - Fifty Six Senators; and (4) Generation X (1960 – 1981) - Eight Senators.

A massive generational shift in business, civic, and political leadership will be taking place in this decade. The question is whether this next generation is ready. Squeezed between the massive Baby Boomer generation and the equally big Generation Y (Millennials), Generation X leaders face many challenges, but also have considerable opportunity to lead during this important time in our country's history.

Roger Davis, a successful financial advisor and businessman, is a Generation Xer that is part of a growing group of emerging leaders. Davis, a Jackson native, has been in the financial business since graduating from the University of Mississippi in 1991. In 2006, along with three partners, he formed Woodridge Capital Portfolio Management, an investment portfolio management company. In addition, they have recently launched a quantitative trend-following hedge fund. Despite his responsibilities as a business owner and family man, Davis has been purposeful about engaging himself in civic and political matters. Davis is a volunteer Hinds County deputy sheriff, and in 2008, he ran a vigorous campaign to be the District One Hinds County Supervisor which he ultimately lost by less than one percent of the vote.

Davis also serves as Legislative Candidate Recruitment Chairman for the state Republican Party. In this role, he travels the state working with individuals who are considering running for political office. I spoke with Davis about why he has chosen to get involved in these type activities instead of just tending to his own business. He noted that, "I believe that we have an obligation and opportunity to do our part to make our communities a better place." Davis is an avid reader and student of history. Having been inspired by historic leaders like the framers of the constitution, he knows that it takes engagement to make a difference. It is always easier to just think, "somebody else will deal with these difficult problems." In this media age it is easy for us to be armchair critics and dwell on how bad someone else's leadership is. It takes courage to actually interject oneself into the fray. We perhaps have been guilty as a generation of focusing on our own affluence rather than seeking to make a difference.

I have great respect for those business leaders of our previous generation who have made significant contributions in the realms of business, community, and politics. I look around the Metro Jackson community and their fingerprints are on the institutions that continue to serve us today. I believe we actually tend to forget the time and sacrifice these prior generations made in making our communities what they are. The question in my mind is what will this emerging generation do to advance the gains and tackle the difficult issues of our day. Will we be engaged or disengaged? Will we focus inwardly or on our communities? Will we leave a legacy of positive change or passive resignation?

I am encouraged when I see leaders like Davis and others from this Generation X who are starting businesses, investing their time in civic affairs, and engaging with the political system. Our ability to have the freedom to be involved in these arenas of life is what makes our country great. I hope that we will continue to remember that this freedom is not to be taken for granted, but one to be savored and utilized in our daily lives. For Mississippi's Generation Xers, now is the time to prepare and step up to the mantle of leadership that lies before us.

(c) 2010 [Martin E. Willoughby, Jr.](#)