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Editor's note: I could fill this whole page with accolades about Christina, but for now I will simply say that she is the Opening General Session keynote at Catersource + The Special Event's 2022 conference and tradeshow in Anaheim, CA May 2-5. Find her on stage Wednesday morning, May 4 at 9:00 a.m., as well as participating in a few other educational sessions throughout the week. Go to schedule.catersource.com or schedule.thespecialeventshow.com for more information. PS: XO CM, love ya & can't hardly wait to see you rock that stage!
—Kathleen

X Marks the Spot: A Forgotten Generation's Plea to the Hospitality Industry

By Christina Matteucci

It's always been easy to say: "I'm a loner."

I belong to a generation of loners. I'm X: one of the "The Forgotten Generation," and us Xers wear our exclusionary mantle with pride. The intrepid latchkey kids, after school we hopped on primitive computers to await the staticky tones of dial up internet—perfectly content—alone. Therefore, as I shut the door to my NYC apartment in March 2020 and began quarantine, I was unfazed. My generation made me a master at isolation! But as a 20-year veteran of the hospitality industry, now I have company—a lot of company.

In the early days of the pandemic, our community was (surprisingly) joining forces instead of competing. We were getting tipsy in online cocktail hours; seeking advice on landing that elusive PPP loan; venting, laughing, crying, and dreaming of COVID's end. The "togetherness" was refreshing, yet something was amiss.

As the "Old Guards" logged on to Zoom and the "Young Guns" embraced Clubhouse, an age-old problem reared its ugly head. We were only seeking comradery from our generational cliques. The Freshmen were shutting the door on our industry's past, and The Seniors were ignoring its future. We are quarantining amongst our contemporaries, and for this Gen Xer, that once familiar solitude now looms ominously.

Turns out there's reason to be scared: enter "The Great Resignation." In November 2021, The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a record high "4.5 million people walking off the job," and that pain is felt across the entire

hospitality sector. While business booms, we suffer a mass exodus of talent. Because we are neither honoring our predecessors nor celebrating our successors, the Great Resignation highlights the damage of our divides. Our industry is being crippled by the misconception that when we isolate amongst our peers, we cling to power. It breaks my heart every time I learn a colleague has "moved on," because there is a simple fix.

Put plainly: our community must endeavor to bridge its ageist gaps. Research by Dr. Mary Donohue (a generational expert and social scientist) revealed employee turnover is reduced by 50% and productivity increased by 11% with Xer-Millennial collaboration. When we cultivate and reap the benefits of a cross-generational industry, not only do we gain resiliency, but we grow stronger because of the mixed company we keep.

As I face 2022, I choose to retire the exclusionary mantle of my generation and I challenge you to join me. Let's seek out the knowledge of those who came before and access the ideas of those waiting in the wings. If Boomers, Xers, Millennials, and Zoomers work in concert, voluntary turnover will decelerate, growth will be exponential, and the survival of the hospitality industry, assured.

Let's do what party-people do best: mingle.

I dare you—I dare us—to collaborate with generations outside our own; to form human connections that traverse decades; to decisively step out of our "comfort cliques;" to mingle knowledge, opinions, and insight... with the hope that because of our efforts, none of us will ever be loners again. ●