

# Putting a Face on the Generations

Business leaders provide insight into their values, strengths and leadership styles.

Compiled by Kelly Harth



Born  
1926

## Traditionalist

Bob Mars • W.P. & R.S. Mars Co. • Chairman

**Duluthian:** What year were you born? **Mars:** 1926

**D:** What characteristics do you value in the workplace?

**M:** Respect, dedication, an interest in growing the company. We all are in the industrial supply business where quality sales are important. Our purpose is to serve other businesses with quality supplies and to do that in a caring fashion. People buy things from people who are responsible and want to help.

**D:** What are some of the strengths your generation brings to the workplace?

**M:** I believe that we came to work with greater education and a willingness to devote a great deal of time to the cause. At the same time, devotion to local public needs were in the forefront. Many business people served on the city council and school boards. We attended PTA meetings (men) and now it is basically a mother's task. We paid cash for things we needed and credit cards were not in the system. Employees of our company were eager to invest their own time for training so that they could do better.

At age 19, I was the commanding officer of an LCT (landing craft tank) in the Marshall Islands in the South Pacific with a crew of 25 men. You grew up pretty fast in that type of responsibility and activity. You learn many of the characteristics that are required in the management of a company.

**D:** How would you describe your work ethic?

**M:** We have seven children and that required long hours and devotion to doing the job well and promptly. We have served on lots of boards and spent long hours with others doing public service. The area has been very good to us and there is a "pay back" in life. I began with this family-owned company in 1949 as a member of the third generation management team. I wanted it to be a much more successful operation when I left, and that has been accomplished.

**D:** At what age do you anticipate retiring?

**M:** I retired on December 31, 2007, after 58 years. My desk is still here and I will continue to be here daily.

**D:** In what ways do you use technology to communicate with coworkers and clients?

**M:** The younger people in our company do much better at this than I. My handwriting is still pretty good and most of my communication is done in that method. Mr. Duffy taught me how to write at Congdon Park School.

**D:** What type of leadership do you find most effective?

**M:** We share – but we each have goals. Our company began a Profit Share Plan in 1962 and every employee has a piece of the action. We have very little turnover and we are all good friends. We employ about 100 people and there is a great deal of respect for each in our group. We have employees working with the company at different locations: Waterloo, Iowa, and Virginia, Bloomington and Duluth, Minnesota. There is a great deal of interplay between them to get the job done and we work hard at keeping those relationships alive.

**Duluthian:** What year were you born? **Nelson:** 1951

**D:** What characteristics do you value in the workplace?

**N:** Three values have been the cornerstone of my personal and professional life: trust, compassion and respect. These values, when fully integrated into a workplace and embraced by all members of the work community, provide the foundation upon which a highly productive and satisfying workplace climate can flourish. From these values spring others which are important in any workplace: honesty, integrity, sincerity, commitment, creativity, accountability, reliability, flexibility, connectivity.

**D:** What are some of the strengths your generation brings to the workplace?

**N:** My "generation" grew up during a time in our history when values and authority were challenged and individuals were committed to strengthening the rights and value of all people ... a time when the freedom and experimentation of our youth developed into a strong commitment to our lives and our work. We tend to be individualistic, yet caring about others. Our occasional self-absorption tends to make us highly sensitive to criticism and quick to react to "unfriendly" comments. We are highly committed to our work, our families and our social networks. We continue to challenge ideas and issues in the workplace as we do in our personal lives, and consistent multi-tasking is second-nature for us. We are over-achievers in many ways and perfectionists in others, characteristics which define themselves in our workplaces. We are generally quite open-minded and optimistic about our futures. We value work, as we have been able to achieve financial status superior, in most cases, to that of our parents, and we are probably the last "generation" to work primarily in one industry/work sector most of our adult lives. Work provides for many of us, a major part of our identities, so we are a bit driven and highly dedicated. We created the concepts of the "workaholic" and "superwoman," and these characteristics play themselves out in our workplaces today. These qualities may tend to drive others and ourselves a bit crazy.

**D:** How would you describe your work ethic?

**N:** Extremely committed, self-imposed and hyper-sustained.

**D:** At what age do you anticipate retiring?

**N:** With my work ethic? It's unlikely that I'll ever fully retire. Since I love my profession and thoroughly enjoy the individuals with whom I share my work, my hunch is that I have a good part of another decade to serve students and my community before formally retiring.

**D:** In what ways do you use technology to communicate with coworkers and clients?

**N:** Outside of direct interpersonal communications, the use of e-mail is my preferred tool for staying connected to my colleagues both within and outside of LSC. It allows me to stay informed about issues and to respond quickly to others. I am always "connected." While not a techno-geek by any means, I am fascinated by and interested in how technology can strengthen our work with and services to our students. I have strongly supported and helped to develop the vision for the advancement of technology on our campus to inform, to serve and to educate ourselves and others.

**D:** What type of leadership do you find most effective?

**N:** Leadership based on the development of strong personal and professional relationships defines my style, one which is, I believe, effective. Empowering and trusting others to work effectively within their circles of influence and creating supportive and compassionate work cultures are important leadership qualities. Establishing clear goals and levels of accountability, adapting our work cultures in flexible ways to meet the needs of those we serve, and creatively planning for a future filled with change are all critical elements of any effective leadership style. Perhaps most important of all, an effective leader must respect the uniqueness and similarity of all people and must truly care about others, qualities at the heart of my own leadership during my 34-year career as an educator.

## Boomer

Born  
1951

Dr. Kathleen Nelson • Lake Superior College • President



Born 1978 Gen Xer

Seth Oliver • Oliver Companies Inc. • President and CEO



**Duluthian: What year were you born? Oliver: 1978**

**D: What characteristics do you value in the workplace?**

**O:** I value a workplace of Accelerance of Execution. Accelerance is an organization that is constantly moving and expanding its capabilities by taking on projects that challenge and expand their capabilities, which allows it to accelerate even further. Execution is a culture of making decisions. If it's the wrong decision, we'll go back and try something else, but making a decision is key to keeping the organization accelerating.

**D: What are some of the strengths your generation brings to the workplace?**

**O:** Strength is too traditional of a concept to describe what my generation brings to the workplace. Perspective is better.

My generation brings "Be Real" to the workplace. Be Real means leaving the pompous/pretense/brag/ego/hierarchy and all the other fake things at the door and be real; my generation likes to get "leveled with." I want the cake without the icing. Actually, I don't even want the cake; I want whatever people are really eating. The stuff that people show the general public is usually a fake version of what's real.

**D: How would you describe your work ethic?**

**O:** Work hard, play hard.

**D: At what age do you anticipate retiring?**

**O:** Whoever invented the idea of retirement should have been fired. Working is a part of life, just as sleeping and eating are a part of life. When do people stop sleeping and eating? When I stop sleeping and eating is when I'll retire. I believe in working hard while I am young and have the ambition and energy levels to sustain the stresses of growing a company so that when I am old the company can maintain a human infrastructure that allows me to be a chairman instead of a chief executive.

**D: In what ways do you use technology to communicate with coworkers and clients?**

**O:** Ten years ago, I used to write a lot of letters and faxes. About five to six years ago, e-mail completely took over. I carry a cell and a PDA for my calendar and e-mails, which is sync'ed up real time to my Exchange server which allows me to access the same calendar and e-mails on the road, in my condo or at my office.

**D: What type of leadership do you find most effective?**

**O:** I find Leading with Question Marks to be the most effective. Leading with question marks requires me to first accept that I will never know as much as everyone else. Then I make sure to ask the right questions to enough people that know more than me before executing decisions. As a baseline to leading with question marks, every leadership group needs proper follow-through. Too many leaders fail to follow up with decisions they've executed, which is stupid because almost all first-round ideas need second-, third- and fourth-round tweaking before those ideas are effective at performing their intended function. Proper follow-up prevents leadership groups from being known as "the flavor of the month" groups, which is the complete opposite of effective.

**Duluthian: What year were you born? Amendola: 1982**

**D: What characteristics do you value in the workplace?**

**A:** I appreciate a workplace that values recognition for a job well done. I really think that setting goals and offering fun little rewards when they are achieved is something that really gets me committed to a project. I think open and honest communication between staff and management as well as displaying a positive and supportive attitude are the two things that will make or break a position for me.

Knowing that I have a team to lead stretches me to personally develop myself every day to make sure that these things are No. 1 and No. 2 priority every single day in my career. Team members that are punctual, dedicated, consistent and persistent are the top four things I really look for in a person.

**D: What are some of the strengths your generation brings to the workplace?**

**A:** I don't know that I can speak on behalf of my whole generation, but the people I know and run businesses with are extremely dedicated to what they do. We have a personal connection and a story behind why we do what we do so fiercely. I think my generation is very open to constructive criticism and even more so if a hand is offered to help work on our weaknesses. Some examples would be a good book to read to develop more, or perhaps a Dale Carnegie class offered through the Chamber.

**D: How would you describe your work ethic?**

**A:** Again not sure if I speak for everyone in my generation, but I LOVE to work. I'm a bit of a workaholic. Early mornings and late nights do not bother me when certain criteria are met. I love to be recognized for a job well done. I really appreciate having the weekend off to rest and recoup, and finally I know there is a BIG light at the end of my tunnel of long days. This is what makes me a dedicated, prompt and excited person when I'm working.

**D: At what age do you anticipate retiring?**

**A:** I've always said I'd like to retire at 35! I'm not sure where that number came from but I've said it since I was 17. But now I think I would like to be financially free enough to retire at 45 and take time off to travel the world, spend time with my family and get out to do some of the things that are burning in my heart, such as a mission trip and a spiritual sabbatical.

**D: In what ways do you use technology to communicate with coworkers and clients?**

**A:** I would say the majority of my communication is technological. If I don't send out an e-mail, I usually send out a text to my coworkers. As for my clients, an electronic newsletter as well as a hand-written birthday card is my preference.

**D: What type of leadership do you find most effective?**

**A:** I prefer a coach as opposed to a dictator. Help me to identify my weakness and then help me to think of ways to make them strengths. A leader who is patient yet firm with what it is I need to get done. I work well with things like to do lists and really appreciate it when I know that what I'm doing matters. **D**



Millennial Born 1982

Laura Amendola • Tadasana Massage • Owner  
• Cold Fusion • Co-owner