



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

BRIDGING THE GAP OF GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE FIRE SERVICE

March 30, 2026

BIG QUESTIONS:

- **WHO** are the different generations?
- **WHAT** challenges do generational differences present us with in the fire service?
- **HOW** can we sustainably and genuinely bridge these gaps?



<https://www.dsahrsolutions.com/building-bridges>



THE “WHY”

BIG QUESTIONS: “WHY?”

- Why are you here?
- Why does talking about this matter?
- Why is this relevant to the fire service specifically?



WE ALL SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO EACH OTHER AND TO THE FIRE SERVICE.

We all have a responsibility to preserve and perpetuate firehouse culture. All generational cohorts have a responsibility to the fire service and to each other:

It's the older generation's responsibility to effectively teach traditions, it's younger generation's responsibility to listen, then apply what they're taught.



THE “WHO”

WHO ARE THE DIFFERENT GENERATIONS?

- Different ages and age ranges
- Just exactly how old is everyone?
- Please use the QR code on the next slide to share what you think the median (middle of the age ranges) is





BABY BOOMERS

1946-1964

years of birth

62-80

age range
(in 2026)

10%

percentage of the
US fire service
(in 2020)





GENERATION X/“GEN X”

1965-1980

years of birth

46-61

age range
(in 2026)

28.5%

percentage of the
US fire service
(in 2020)





MILLENNIALS

1981-1996

years of birth

30-45

age range
(in 2026)

38.5%

percentage of the
US fire service
(in 2020)





GENERATION Z/“GEN Z”

1997-2012

years of birth

14-29

age range
(in 2026)

23%

percentage of the
US fire service
(in 2020)



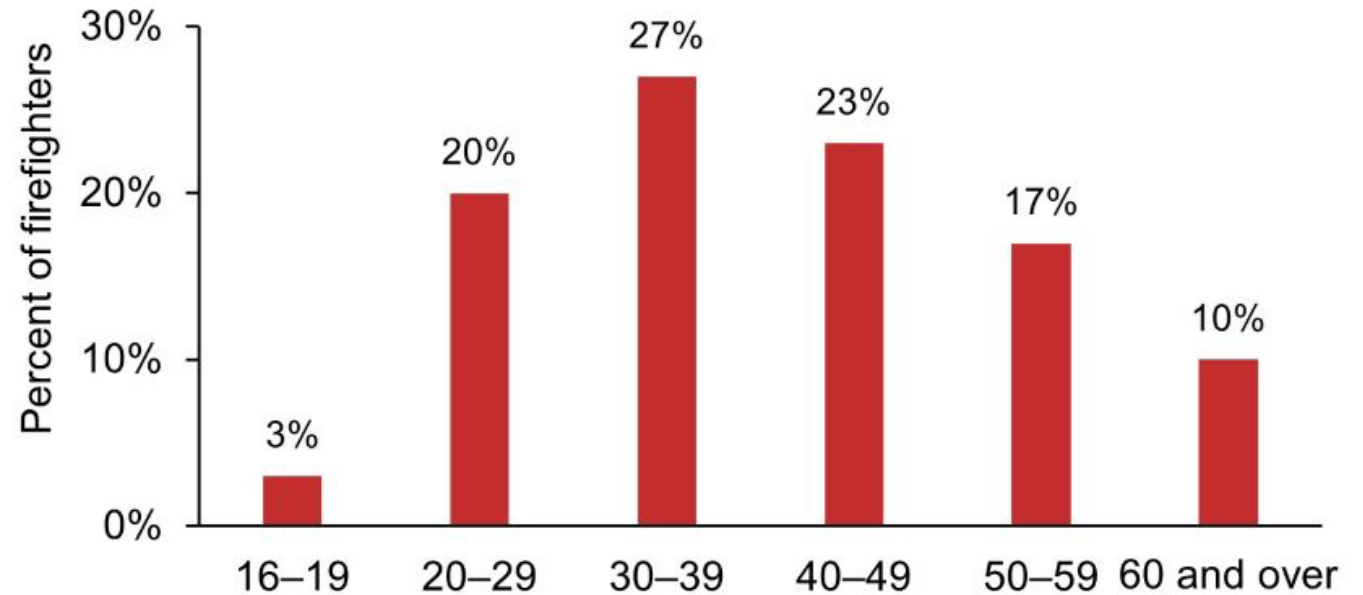




BIG QUESTIONS: “WHO?”

- **Baby Boomers**
 - age 62-80
- **Gen X**
 - age 46-61
- **Millennials**
 - age 30-45
- **Gen Z**
 - age 14-29

Number of Firefighters in the US
by Age Group: 2020



<https://www.nfpa.org/education-and-research/research/nfpa-research/fire-statistical-reports/us-fire-department-profile>



**WHAT DID THE FIRE
SERVICE LOOK LIKE WHEN
YOU STARTED YOUR
CAREER?**



2014

- Average home cost: \$337,300 (\$465,600 adj.)
- Average salary: \$48,200 (\$66,500 adj.)
- US President Barack Obama
- Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper
- Apple launches iPhone 6 and Apple pay
- IAFF celebrates 60 years of MDA partnership
- Super Bowl XLVIII halftime show performer Bruno Mars featuring Red Hot Chili Peppers
- Last class of millennial to graduate high school (born in 1996)
- “Raised” in the fire service by:
 - 60 years old – born in 1954
 - 45 years old – born in 1969
 - 30 years old – born in 1984



BIG QUESTIONS: “WHO RAISED YOU?”

- **Baby Boomers**
 - age 62-80
- **Gen X**
 - age 46-61
- **Millennials**
 - age 30-45
- **Gen Z**
 - age 14-29



THE “WHAT”

THE CHALLENGES WE FACE

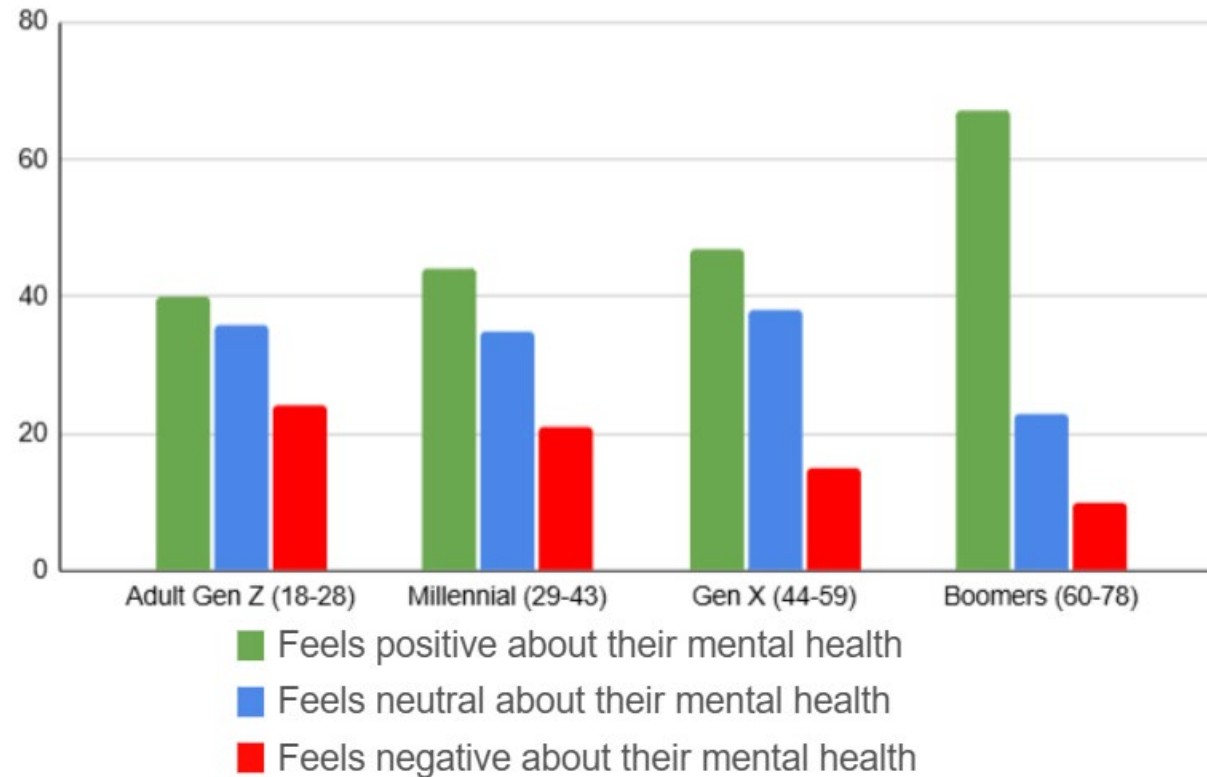
- “They don’t make um like they used to.”
- “I shouldn’t have to tell them this!”
- “These guys are so soft.”



VIEWS ON PERSONAL MENTAL HEALTH (2025)

- Gen Z had lower views toward their own mental health than Baby Boomers
- Baby Boomers had the best self-reported view of their own mental health

Self-Reported General Attitude Toward Own Mental Health



<https://theharrispoll.com/briefs/mental-health-awareness-month-key-findings-on-u-s-attitudes-and-barriers-to-care-2/>



THE “WHY”

**CLOSE YOUR EYES AND
THINK ABOUT YOUR TRUCK,
YOUR STATION, YOUR
BATTALION, YOUR CHIEFS.**



IN 10, 20, 30 YEARS...

**WHO'S SITTING IN
THOSE SEATS?**



**HOW DO YOU FEEL
WHEN YOU THINK
ABOUT THOSE FACES?**

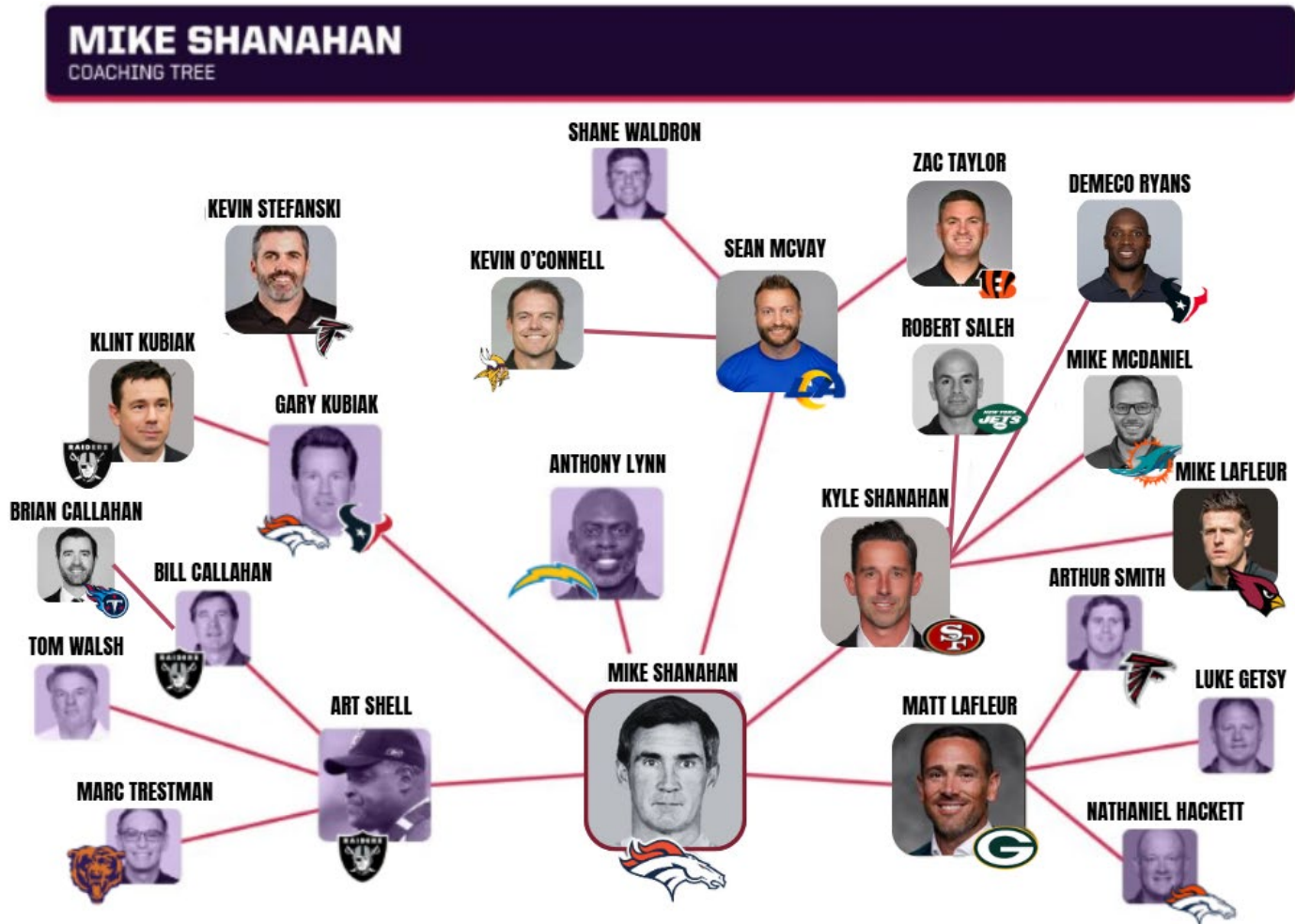








WHO'S IN YOUR COACHING TREE?



<https://theanalyst.com/articles/mike-shanahan-zone-run-blocking-scheme-super-bowl-lvi-los-angeles-rams-cincinnati-bengals>



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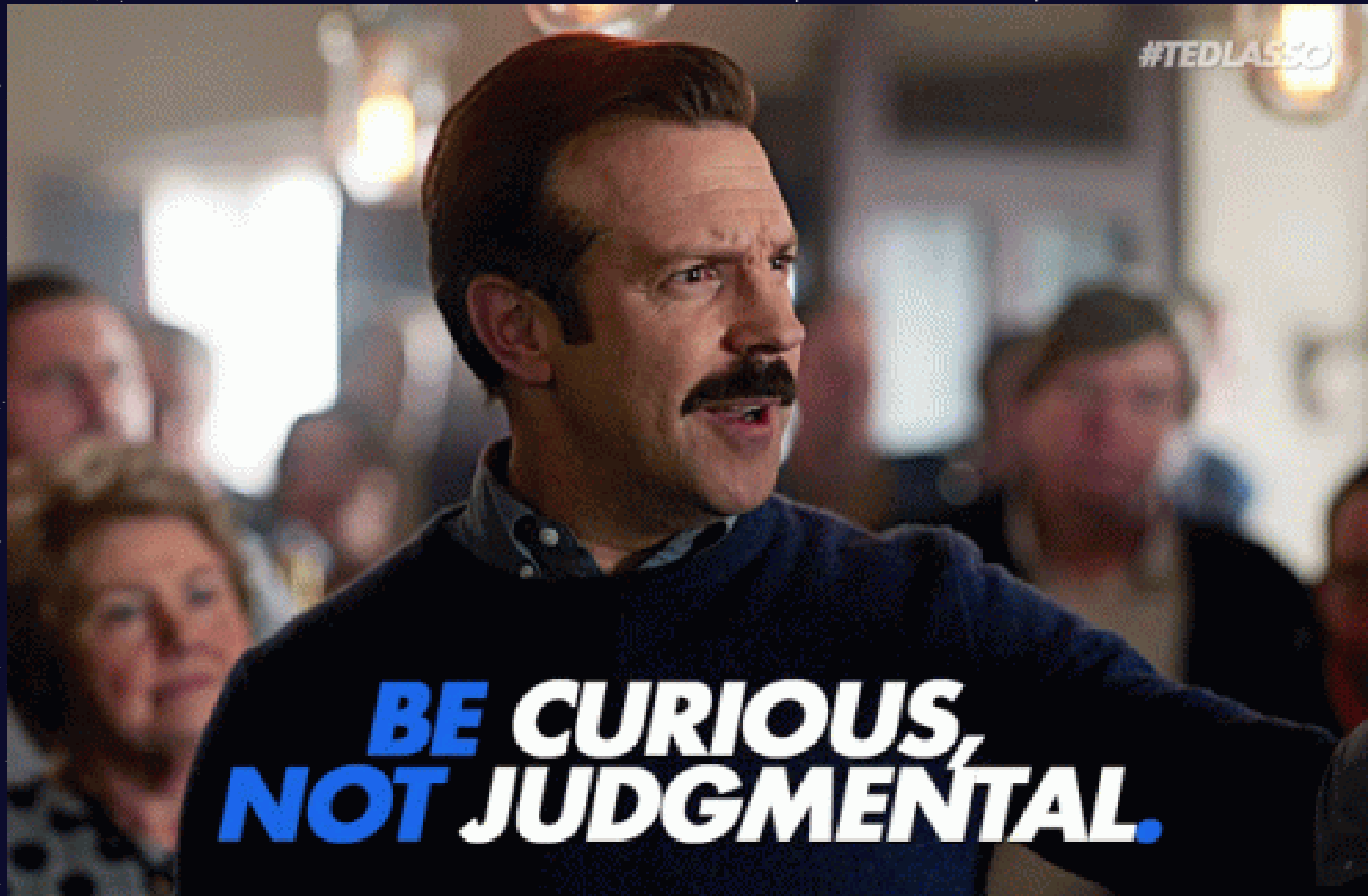
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THE “HOW”





#TEDLASSO

**BE CURIOUS,
NOT JUDGMENTAL.**



5 BROAD WAYS TO BRIDGE GENERATIONAL GAPS



Genuinely take the time to get to know each other



Teach clearly in ways that learners can understand



Work together – it's not a competition and when one of us improves, all of us improve



Keep an open mind



Remember that we are all here to do the same job



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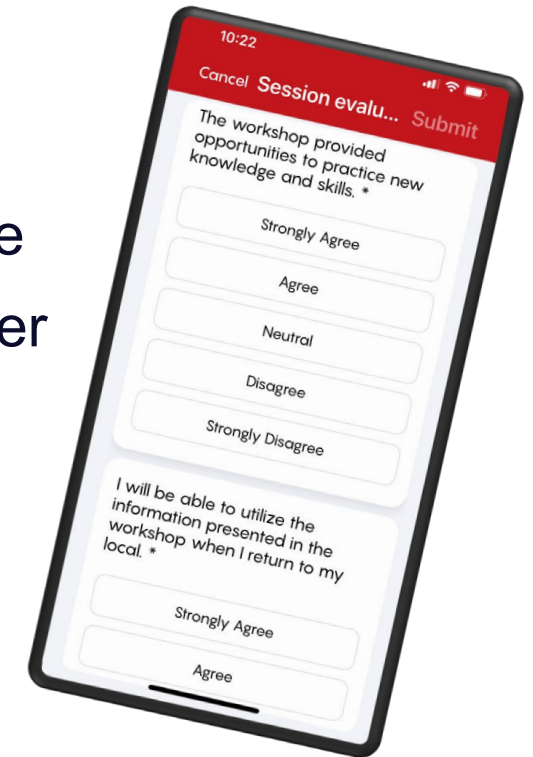




THANK YOU!
ANY QUESTIONS?

EVALUATION AND WIN AN IPAD!

- **Submit your workshop and overall evaluations to be automatically entered in two drawings for a new iPad!**
- **Complete your evaluations using the IAFF app:**
 1. Download the IAFF app and sign in with your iaff.org username
 2. Tap the 2026 Strive for Excellence Summit event image to enter the event's dashboard
 3. Tap "Sessions" and tap on the workshops you attended
 4. Tap "Evaluation" and complete the evaluation
 5. Tap "Submit"



For the event's overall evaluation, follow steps 1 and 2, then tap "Event Evaluation" located in the event's Dashboard.

