

# GenTrends

*Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!*

August 2005

## At What Point?

At what point do kids learn to deal with failure and the consequences of their choices and actions? I, like most parents, want to see my kids succeed at everything. But the reality is that they won't. On one side I lament their tears and feel their disappointment. But on the other I realize how much they're learning about perseverance, critical thinking, and self-esteem.

Sadly, this nation is witnessing the emergence of so-called "helicopter parents"—fathers and mothers who refuse to let go and allow their children to discover the realities of growing up. We see it in community sports programs, the college application process, and even in employment where it has become no small problem for retail managers in particular.

The media publishes reports of parents who beat up on coaches or scream profanity at little league umpires. We hear stories of Mom or Dad arguing with principals over a child's grades so they can get a break on an auto insurance premium. We see parents escorting their grown children to work on the first day of employment. (Really!)

And what are their children doing during these episodes? Learning – to manipulate the system, to fudge the facts, even to throw a tantrum if the person in authority might be intimidated.

Managers have become the front line of consequence for many emerging workers. They find themselves teaching everything from punctuality and courtesy to critical thinking and organization.

I know first hand that it's tempting to give in to my kids, to prevent them from making poor choices or racing to their aid over perceived unfairness. It's hard work for both my wife and me.

I cringe when I see parents select their kids' college classes, do battle with their kids' managers over work schedules, and book them so solid with activities that there's no chance for the children to make any decisions.

Lest you think this is the raving of a lonely lunatic, I've heard from managers who have had it up to here fielding phone calls from parents. One college dean told me that her school now divides the parents and students into separate orientations. "But believe it or not," she says, "the kids start calling Mom and Dad on the cell phone during the parent orientation asking for directions about this and that."

So what do we, as employers, do to deal with this phenomenon?

**Set clear parameters with the parents** – You might begin with diplomacy but be prepared to act firmly if they persist in interfering with the employment relationship. Explain to them that you are forbidden by law from sharing any information about their child, period. Do not feel an obligation to defend your actions or the organization's practices. The less contact you have with them the better.

**Set clear parameters with the kids** – You might mention that any parental inquiries into a child's performance, attendance or scheduling is unwelcome. Young employees who attempt to use their parents as leverage or influence should be discouraged from doing so. While you want to be understanding, don't be afraid to be direct.

Use early detection to ferret out those applicants who might attempt these strategies. Listen closely to what they say about tight schedules, stories about parents and so on. You want to hire the best people, but not those who can't let go.

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## "GenTistics"

Eighty-nine percent of current workers expect to work part-time after retirement.

2004 Gallup-UBS Study



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## Seesaw Torts

Fearful of lawsuits, authorities everywhere have been stripping playgrounds of dangerous things like teeter-totters, swings, and even sandboxes. Now elementary schools in Broward County, FL have playground signs that read, "No Running." One mother interviewed for the July 18<sup>th</sup> *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* fretted about her children and others being bored at playgrounds where the only unregulated activity seems to be grubbing in the dirt.

But Joe Frost, who heads the University of Texas' Play and Playgrounds Research Project, looks at the problem differently. "Play is one of children's chief vehicles for development," the Sun-Sentinel quoted him saying, and "right now it looks like we're developing a nation of wimps." *The Wall Street Journal*

## "Sure You Can Listen to Your iPod at Work"

According to *Workforce Management*, Capital One has launched a training program using podcasts, that their employees can download and listen to while at work. To facilitate this process, the company has purchased 3000 ipods that employees can keep as long as they remain with the organization.

The company has developed more than a dozen lessons on topics ranging from diversity to company financials. It expects that use of these devices will reduce the time employees spend in classroom learning. According to the company, 65 percent of audio learners reported saving time over traditional learning methods.

## So Much for Early Retirement

A 2004 survey by Gallup for UBS found that 57% of workers planned to retire at 63 or older and only 11% by age 55.

Back in 1998 just 36% planned to wait until 63 or older and 23% still harbored the retire-by-55 dream.

## To Ponder

Push-parenting didn't begin the day that Harvard received its first inquiry about a promising fetus. Alexander the Great's mother pushed him to be more than just Alexander the Above Average, and Mozart's father was a push-parent who took the four-year-old boy on play dates all over Europe. However, only in the late 1990s did push-parenting sweep America as one of the most popular mental illnesses. In these last few years I have listened again and again to fashionably disturbed parents play scenes like these . . .

At 4:40 one Tuesday afternoon on the East side of Manhattan, ten minutes before she has to pick up her six-year-old daughter at a bassoon lesson for a cab ride to a lesson in Serb-Croatian, Margaret DuBoff, a forty-four-year-old professional mother, gets a cell phone call from Susanna Krebs, a professional mother of thirty-eight.

"Maggie," says Susanna, "could Destiny play with Melanie from four to five tomorrow? I'm bringing in someone from the State Department to talk about the Middle East, and he does magic, too. Melanie is hope-ssly behind on free trade."

Quickly punching her PalmPilot with her free hand, Margaret says, "Oh Susanna—!" and suddenly wonders if Destiny knows enough about Stephen Foster. "Destiny has her Introduction to Puberty Class Wednesdays at four."

"What's the age of puberty now?"

"Well, the *Times* just said it *hasn't* gone down, but I don't want to take any chances."

"Maggie, has Destiny started to . . .?"

"I only wish! Wouldn't it be wonderful for her resume to include a line in the Guinness Book of World Records? You know, it seems she's been a child for ages and ages; I mean there's got to be a statute of limitations!"

Ralph Schoenstein in  
*My Kid's an Honor Student, Your Kid's a Loser*

## To Read . . .

*My Kid's An Honor Student, Your Kid's a Loser: The Pushy Parent's Guide to Raising the Perfect Child.* Ralph Schoenstein. Perseus Publishing, New York, 2002. ISBN 0-7382-0851-5. This book is, quite simply, very funny and very true. I shudder to think of the neuroses to come. RWW

## Case Study Corner

*Our company services copiers. I have a core group of repairmen who have been with me forever. We meet at the office every morning to dole out the day's assignments. Over the past year, we've hired a couple of young technicians who are now making noise about having to show up at the office every morning. They want to know why they can't just work from their houses. I don't like the idea because there is no way to keep track of them. At the same time, good technicians are hard to find. What would you suggest?*

I would begin by taking a hard look at the nature of what your team does. While you may feel that you're keeping track of them by meeting every morning, the reality is that you're monitoring their performances via work orders, billing, and daily cell phone or radio traffic. It is only natural to feel more comfortable seeing them every morning, but it also expends time they could be on the road seeing additional customers.

Younger workers seem to be more jealous of their time and maintain a focus on the balance of work and the rest of their lives. To these young technicians, driving to the office every morning is a waste of time, especially if their first call is in the opposite direction. For them, it's a simple matter of efficiency. Truth to tell, I doubt if the older technicians would complain. For them, it would mean a extra cup of coffee before going off to work, or getting an earlier start to beat traffic or to finish earlier in the day.

Don't take this personally. These young people are simply taking a strategic look at a habit you've been practicing for years. While you may miss the camaraderie of the morning meetings, I suspect that technician productivity will increase and so will the amount of money you will take home at the end of the day.

**Generations:** Understanding Age Diversity in Today's Workplace

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