

# GenTrends

*Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!*

February 2005

## Do Young People Really Care?

One of the never-ending themes I hear from managers centers on the apparent detachment of many young workers. "Do they really care about anything?" asked a supervisor recently. My response was, "Certainly, but how are you trying to engage them?" This new generation of workers is a product of the influences around them as were previous generations. The difference is that these emerging workers have grown up emulating parents who over-pack their schedules and then complain how they don't have time to think. Then consider the situational enforcement of expectations they have experienced in schools and at work. Add to these the impact of invasive technology and the result is a generation of young people who view work as one channel in their 24-hour day, even when they *are* at work.

Back in the 70's, there was a promotion that began "SEX . . . Now that we've got your attention . . ." In a way, this is an apt metaphor for the challenge facing front-line supervisors today. Daily attempts at motivation and management are competing with the likes of reality television, instant messaging, and a global emphasis on convenience. Why work at your job when you might find a way around it and still get paid?

YET. . . some managers are capturing the minds of young workers and finding ways to engage them in spite of the competition for share of mind. How? In three ways:

**Showing them why.** A simple survey of your people will probably confirm the fact that few truly understand how the organization operates.

Young workers are no different. What happens to each dollar that comes into the organization? How much does everything cost? How does the organization plan for new products and programs? What are the consequences of organizational blunders? How does each individual truly make a difference on a day-to-day basis? If no one had told you the answers to these questions, would you care either?

**Look for the positive models.** While most managers can tell me stories about slackers and kids who seem to be dead from the neck up, it is the rare occasion that someone relates a positive situation. But there are millions of them out there. Which young people are setting the standard in your organization? How can you toot their horns?

**Turn them loose.** If young people are engaged, they'll think of new approaches to the same old drill. So let them experiment (within logical parameters, of course). Nothing engages workers like letting them put their own imprint on the job.

R.W.W.

## Generations

### Understanding Age Diversity in Today's Workplace

The Center for Generational Studies is pleased to introduce a brand new curriculum for managing the intergenerational relations in your workforce. This turn-key package provides everything you need to help your people understand age diversity and how they can best relate to co-workers of different ages.

It is packed solid with content and insights, all delivered in a multimedia format which is sure to keep the attention of even the most impatient young worker.

We are offering a *beta* version of the package for half off the retail price of \$4995 to *the first 25 organizations* interested in reviewing it and providing feedback. For additional information contact us at 1-877-229-5501 or [curriculumpak@gentrends.com](mailto:curriculumpak@gentrends.com)

## "GenTistics"

What makes you an adult?

Having first child - 22%

Moving out of

parents' home - 22%

Getting a good job

with benefits - 19%

Getting married - 14%

Finishing school - 10%

Based on a Time Magazine survey of 601 adult Americans aged 18-29



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## To ponder . . .

We know we are in the presence of deep smarts when we see an expert quickly size up a complex situation and come to a rapid decision – one that proves to be not just good, but wise. After we have seen someone do this a few times, we think of him or her as “really smart” – but we don’t mean just their native intelligence, although they often have that in abundance. We mean that we trust their judgment, that when many opinions are on the table, theirs have more weight with us. When we ask them a question, we have the sense that some powerful computer in their brains is rapidly sorting through relevant firsthand experiences, pieces of process knowledge, and evidence shaped by personal beliefs and interaction with other smart people to come up with a nuanced answer.

So people with deep smarts have a different kind of expertise than those who deal exclusively with abstract problems (e.g., a theoretical mathematician). People with deep smarts address practical, real-life, and often-urgent issues, and management is a field that requires this kind of expertise. Deep smarts are not infallible, of course. Even the most experienced expert can mislead or be misled – and we do talk about such hazards in this book, but this kind of special expertise is vital to organizational well-being.

*Leonard & Swap writing in Deep Smarts*

**To Read: *Deep Smarts: How to Cultivate and Transfer Enduring Business Wisdom.*** Dorothy Leonard & Walter Swap. . Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 2005. ISBN 1-59139-528-3. This fascinating book addresses one of the future’s critical challenges, transferring knowledge from one generation to another. The book is well researched and documented with case studies and an enormous bibliography.

“The real problem with aging is politics, not demographics. How do ethnically homogeneous countries such as Germany and Japan open themselves to immigrants? How do the French and Italians, who expect to retire in their fifties, accept years of additional work? How do Americans agree to cut or delay the benefits from Social Security and Medicare?”

Countries face difficult choices ahead as they navigate the aging of their populations. But there is nothing in their future to stop them from succeeding, except the lack of political will.”

Business Weekly

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## Who Needs Curfews?

It used to be that when you borrowed the car Mom and Dad would say, “be home by midnight” and then stayed up waiting for the garage door to open. But between the time you left and the time you returned, they relied on your judgment, good or bad, to drive and behave responsibly. Now they no longer need to do that. A new service called Teen Arrive Alive will track a child’s whereabouts using satellite technology and cellular phones

For \$15 a month subscribers can receive on line reports about their child’s driving behavior, including speed, direction and location every two minutes. But since it is interrogated with a cell phone, a parent can also text message their child if someone else is driving them around in another car. You can track them to the movies, and from the movies to the mall, and from the mall to their boyfriend’s house.

No longer do parents need to trust their children when they’re out of sight. No longer do children need to develop a sense of responsibility for their actions.

Author George Orwell was on target with his book “1984”; he was just 21 years early.

## Case Study Corner

*I am 32 and one of 12 regional managers within a retail clothing chain. My peers range in age from 42-55 and have all worked their way up within the firm over many years. To them, this job is their life. To me, it is a stepping stone to other opportunities. When I have revealed this, you’d think I’d betrayed their trust. Now they just seem to be biding their time until I’m gone. But I have no intention of leaving right now. How can I re-establish a trusting relationship?*

The reality is that the relationship will always be colored by this perception of you. But there’s nothing wrong with that. While some of your peers may feel betrayed by your comments, others may be secretly envious that you have more options than they. Besides, I should caution you about leaping to conclusions about what others think. A few off-hand comments do not mean that everyone has convicted you of treason.

As for restoring the relationship, I don’t know that there is that much to restore per se. Your peers have gained some insight into your attitudes about work and careers. At the same time, you have gained some insight into how they view your role within their fraternity. Remember, what they learned about work roles is considerably different than what you probably experienced as you came of age.

If you feel it necessary, mention your perceptions when the opportunity presents itself, though probably not in a formal setting like a staff meeting. You don’t need to seek their approval. At the same time, it will give everyone a chance to air his or her feelings in a social or informal setting.

Will all this have an impact on your tenure with the company? Perhaps, but that’s water under the bridge. You, yourself started this by making your ambitions known. If you’re doing your job well, those to whom you report may be spurred on to take a closer look at what you have to offer the firm. If not, you’re already keeping your options open. aren’t you?