

# Gen Trends

January 2005

## *Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!*

### Tool or Solution?

It Can Depend on Your Perspective

I didn't touch a computer until I was 29. Even then, I spent a great of time getting used to "C:\\*.\*\DOS and so on. For most of those over 40, computers have always been both a source of fascination and frustration. On one hand, they have been embraced for efficiency and as a means of entertainment. On the other, they can promote a sense of dread because they have become so ubiquitous. And then there are the endless software upgrades, viruses and networking issues.

Those under 40 view things differently. Generation X came of age with the IBM PC and Radio Shack's TRS 80, among others. The DOS operating system was to them what the IBM Selectric was to their parents. As they matured into the workforce, they took this basic operating system and turned it into the Graphic User Interface technology we have today. Millennials too are learning to put their imprint on this electronic wizardry. But here's the big difference:

Those over 40 tend to look to the computer for a solution. Those under 40 look to the computer as a tool on the way to a solution. Learning software, for instance, is not an end in itself. Using the software to produce the information necessary to decide on a solution is the bottom line.

This distinction was brought home to me recently during a seminar attended by a mix of Boomers and Xers. The Boomers expressed frustration about having to learn an endless stream of new programs and upgrades. "We learn it," they said, "but it doesn't do anything other than fill our heads with more clutter."

The Xers on the other hand said that they applaud new upgrades and software. It helps them remain on the cutting edge. (It should also be stated that they are probably more intuitively adept at learning new programs.)

Lest you take me to task for over-generalizing, I realize that there are those in their 40s and up who pride themselves on their understanding and use of computers. But the reality is that the majority of those in the workplace today view this wizardry as a necessary evil in many instances.

Those under 40 also have another agenda. The more software they know, the more marketable they feel they are to other employers. Whether this true remains to be seen. *R. W. W.*

### A Special Offer!!!

## *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)

Call 1-800-227-5510 to book us for your next meeting.

## "GenTistics"

10% of Millennials are compulsive spenders. Researchers blame the early and widespread use of credit cards: 80% have them and half got their first in high school.

Tomorrow in Brief



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## To ponder . . .

Most traditional industries and government agencies have historically been blessed with low rates of voluntary attrition among professionals and managers. This is still generally true in Japan where people rarely leave organizations voluntarily before retirement. But in Western industrialized countries there is widespread recognition that younger employees have significantly different values than their baby boomer bosses and are much more impatient and willing to leave their companies for a better opportunity elsewhere.

“Generation Y is different,” said one staffing director. “What we’ve got to understand is people want to come in to learn and grow. And the faster they do that the better. Today we hire students who took college classes in Six Sigma. The culture shift for us is we’ve got to challenge people more when they come in, and give them more opportunity to grow. They don’t want to wait to apply their skill sets. They’re ready. But our culture says: ‘Wait, your turn will come.’ So people leave to apply their skills somewhere else.”

This values clash between older and younger workers has serious implications as organizations try to expand their capabilities for the future. Because unless companies reconcile the differences between the generations, this values conflict will result in increased attrition among younger workers. And losing promising young employees is an even more serious problem when retirement rates are high.

*David DeLong writing in Lost Knowledge*

**To Read:** *Lost Knowledge: Confronting the Threat of an Aging Workforce.* David W. DeLong. Oxford University Press, New York, 2004. ISBN 0-19-517097-0. Author DeLong, a research fellow at MIT does a good job of illuminating the issues of knowledge transfer and provides a roadmap for dealing with the challenges it presents.

## The Law of Unintended Consequences

In the past 20 years, American society has placed more and more emphasis on monetary incentives as a means for influencing the behavior of children. These include paying for good grades, earning points at arcades, and of course, the ubiquitous frequent buyer programs.

While much of this is well-intentioned, the result can sometimes produce unintended consequences. Allow me an example:

This month, a teacher friend of mine informed me that he has been getting calls from parents about having to pay higher auto insurance rates for their children. You see, it has become common practice for insurers to provide premium discounts based on academic grades. In the most recent occasion, a father called in to ask Jeff to raise his son’s grade from a B to and A and help him save several hundred dollars. The difference was just two points on one paper.

While Jeff felt the pressure, he did not relent. But there is a larger issue here. What is a child to learn when a parent models that kind of behavior? Let’s hope it doesn’t happen to us.

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## Dr. Splatt

Brewster Bartlett, a ninth grade biology teacher in Derry, NH has developed a novel technique for capturing the interest of over-stimulated students. With the help of a National Science Foundation grant, he teaches “The Science of Roadkill” to inquiring young minds. While the fieldwork may be a little gamey, it has proven to be a lively class project. Students analyze roadkill numbers in the state, cross-reference them with locations, seasons, traffic patterns and other factors to postulate reasons for the mortality rates of different critters. Says Bartlett, “It’s certainly more interesting than studying lichen.”

## Case Study Corner

*Every summer, I hire a large number of college students to work construction jobs in my firm. Over the past several years, I have seen a noticeable decline in motivation. They won’t work over time. They are consistently late and fun seems more important than money to many of them. Is it me or is this a national trend? Either way, what to I do about it?*

It’s not you. We’re hearing from employers around the country that the drive to earn summer money does not have the urgency for some that it once did. We can attribute this to a number of factors including larger allowances from older, more affluent Boomer parents. We might add to this the heavily scheduled lives that teenagers lead. If you’re competing with sports and social activities, you’ll lose a good deal of the time. Finally, some students have simply budgeted for what they need. When they’ve earned that money, the life-balance argument wins out.

As for a solution, we need to take several factors into consideration:

1) Your target market. What kind of students do you attract? Ivy League or community college? That’s not to say one is better than the other. But they certainly have different agendas. Where you advertise, and the job description you use, will have a direct impact on the applicants who knock on your door.

2) Your selection practices. What questions do you ask? What methods do you use to determine attitudes about work and work ethic? Taking the time to put applicants “thru their paces” is just as important for part-timers as it is for full-timers.

3) Your engagement efforts. What do you do to engage these young workers. Help them to understand the valuable work they contribute to the job. If you show you care, they will show that they care.

4) Your retention efforts. Do you make a practice of recruiting students for multiple summers? What’s in it for them? Do you stay in touch during the year? Can they pick up work during vacations? Maintaining the relationship is the key to retaining them over time.