

Gen Trends

March 2005

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

Receptionists Redux

What ever happened to the informed receptionist? I have pondered this question for quite some time. Receptionists used to know everything and everybody. If no one in charge knew the answer to a question, you checked with the receptionist. If you were trying to find someone who was AWOL, the receptionist always knew where he was. Increasingly, this is no longer the case. Press "0" at most organizations and the receptionist will transfer you to someone else or voice mail so fast it will make your head spin. What has happened to this bottomless resource of insights, corporate intelligence and gossip?

The answer to this conundrum was revealed to me during a seminar earlier this month. "You see," said a participant, "we don't communicate through receptionists any more. She went on to explain that e-mail, voice mail and scheduling software has enabled each of us to become our own little administrative assistant. Want to call a meeting? E-mail those involved. Got a question about a project? Text - message the coordinator. Want someone to screen your calls? Look at the digital read-out on your phone. Other than picking up in-bound calls from strangers and dealing with the occasional visitor, there's really nothing a receptionist needs to know. Don't get me wrong. I'm not picking on receptionists. It's just that much of their traditional role has been eliminated by electronic wizardry.

But as with any technology, this has become a mixed blessing. On one hand, we can eliminate the middle person by leaving messages with a specific individual. On the other, we no longer have a reason to visit with

people in person unless it is absolutely necessary. While this may save us all time, it's not been my impression that we work less or have a better handle on what's going on within the organization. In some cases, we may not see colleagues whose desks are within 50 feet the entire week. For some, this may be okay, but one must consider the impact this has on the sense of belonging each person feels for the overall organization. The receptionist was a central connecting point, even if it meant simply picking up your messages at her desk on the way in and out of the office. Since emerging generations have never felt this sensation, they will not miss it. But what is the price of this isolation over time on the communication that makes everyone feel a part of the whole? Remember, just because the technology exists to do something, doesn't necessarily enable us to do it better. R.W.W.

A Scavenging We Will Go

College students across the US have begun using the local Wal-Mart as the playing field for games ranging from "aisle football" to "10 in 10" a contest in which teams compete to replace items in the store that the opposing team has piled in a shopping cart. In "A-Z," students have to find products that begin with each letter of the alphabet. (*Alka-Seltzer* for A & *Zantac* for Z, for instance). The purpose of these games? To eliminate boredom especially in small college towns.

Wal-Mart's position? A spokesperson suggested that the company may use the scavenger hunts as training exercises for stock clerks.

Generations

Understanding Age Diversity in Today's Workplace

Don't forget – the Center's comprehensive curriculum on managing age diversity is now available. This turn-key package provides everything you need to train your people on how they can best relate to co-workers of different ages. For additional information contact us at 1-877-229-5501 or curriculum@gentrends.com

"GenTistics"

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, the average child, 8-18, is exposed to 8.5 hours of media every day including TV, the Internet, DVDs, video games, and CDs.



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To ponder . . .

Perhaps the simplest way to measure the power of gaming is to look at the pure size of the market. To those of us still unconsciously living in the Atari era, it is a surprisingly grown-up industry, and a stunningly large business. Games are not a niche anymore. Take a look at those ads in the Sunday paper. Video game consoles and software, though also sold in specialty stores, are now staples of the “big-box” retailers. Penetration of games is almost certainly much broader, economically speaking, than penetration of computers and the Internet. Some 92 percent of American kids from age two to age seventeen have regular access to video games. Only 80 percent live in households with computers. By definition, anyone with a computer or an Internet connection has game-playing hardware. In addition, there are hundreds of millions of dedicated game devices: consoles that hook up to your television, PCs created especially for gaming, all those Game Boys. And whereas parents may complain about the cost, compared to computers – and to computers with broadband connections at \$50 per month – game devices are cheap. One of the most popular consoles, Nintendo’s GameCube, lists for just \$100. No wonder, then, that gaming is everywhere, including homes that can’t afford much computing. No wonder that the Sony PlayStation *alone* is in 25 percent of all US homes. And no wonder that Microsoft was willing to spend \$750 million – that’s three quarters of a billion dollars – just on initial marketing for its Xbox game console. *Beck & Wade in Got Game*

To Read: *Got Game: How the Gamer Generation is Reshaping Business Forever*. John C. Beck & Mitchell Wade. Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 2004. ISBN 1-57851-949-7.

Snowbird Specials

Home Depot has begun offering jobs to seniors who are interested in working in the south during the winter and the north during the summer. Labeled “snowbird specials,” these jobs enable the company to retain reliable workers and balance seasonal staffing needs at the same time. In an effort to deal with an expected labor shortage over the next decade, the company has developed relationships with the AARP, government agencies and the military.

The New York Times

The First Amendment and High School Students

A recently released survey of 112,000 high school students reveals that the majority assigns little or no value to the rights guaranteed by the US Constitution’s First Amendment. According to those polled in 544 schools, 73% of students take their First Amendment rights for granted or don’t know how they feel about them. Among the other findings: **21%** think musicians should not be allowed to sing songs that might offend others. **74%** believe people should not be allowed to burn the American flag. **36%** think newspapers should not be allowed to publish without governmental approval. For full results, go to: www.firstamendmentfuture.org.

Keeping Kids on Track

Brittan Elementary School in Sutter, CA has begun requiring students to wear radio frequency identification badges that can track their movements everywhere on school property. The badges contain the students’ pictures, names, grades and a wireless transmitter that beams their ID numbers to a teacher’s handheld computer when a child passes under an antenna above a classroom door.

Case Study Corner

Six months ago, I hired a financial analyst fresh out of a graduate business program. While she certainly has the skills to do the job, her demeanor with co-workers is condescending to say the least. Last week, one of my colleagues commented that, “She treats the rest of us like the help.” When I have approached her about her communication style, her response has been, “They’ll get used to me. After all, I’m cleaning up their financials and adding to the bottom line. How can they complain?” I didn’t see any indication of this attitude during the selection process. Where do I go from here?

There are a couple of issues that need to be addressed here. Let’s begin with the selection process. It is not uncommon for Dr. Jekyll to turn into Ms. Hyde once the job offer has been made. For some, manipulating employers’ perceptions during the interview process is simply good strategy. While you wanted to hire someone with strong analytical skills, perhaps your focus on that one aspect clouded your perception of this woman as a candidate. Any number of mismatched hires can be traced back to a selection completed in haste or with an unwillingness to ask the really tough questions.

Now to the present situation: Whether you admit it or not, this woman has already lost her ability to effectively execute her responsibilities. After all, simply analyzing numbers is not enough. She must make persuasive arguments for modifying established corporate practices. How can she do this when the staff has concluded that she’s a self-serving #% @*+?

At this point, she is also having a detrimental effect on your credibility and that needs to end. Meet with her immediately and outline how you expect her to change her behavior and how her performance will be measured going forward. If she is unwilling to do so, I would document everything and show her the door. Her continued tenure may cost you valued employees who have little patience for this type of behavior.