

# Gen Trends

*Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!*

November 2005

## It's Not Just an Office Thing

Chris is a firefighter. He's 31 and has been in the department for almost ten years. His Lieutenant is 49 and supervises 14 individuals ranging in age from 21 to 48. After attending a program I conducted earlier this month, Chris introduced himself and said, "Now I understand why my Lieutenant struggles so much in supervising us."

He went on to explain, using their response to a fire call as an example. "The Boomers," he said, "will arrive at the scene, strap on their gear with a sense of anticipation. They pretty much know what their assignments will be, but they wait for the Lieutenant to give them the signal. I and the other guy my age will strap on our gear and be ready to go. But we also have a history of asking why the assignments are so and questioning strategy. We trust our Lieutenant, but we're trying to understand. He, on the other hand, thinks we're challenging his authority. While we've all learned to deal with each other's style over time, you put it into perspective. He gets frustrated with all the questions and we're unwilling to simply follow direction without understanding strategy."

I asked him about the youngest members of his team. Chris hesitated. Then he said, "They're different. They're certainly willing to work hard, but certain things just don't seem to occur to them. While they'll be ready to go at a fire, or even an exercise, they tend to stand back and watch until someone tells them exactly what to do. Truthfully, it makes me wonder what they'll be like in a crisis. Even in the station, they're different," he said. "They have something in their ears at all times. They seem distracted. While we live

as a family for 24 hours at a time, they rocket out the door the minute the shift is over. There's nothing specifically wrong with that, but they don't seem to understand how much we depend on each other."

More than once, I've been taken to task for painting Millennials as lazy or lost. But as I listened to Chris, I heard many of the same words I've heard from others: wired, distracted, not engaged, lack of initiative, they don't think ahead. But it's not that simple. When one examines all the influences these young people have grown up with, it is easy to see that we are competing for "share of mind" with media, convenience, and impatience in a society that yells "You deserve it all now."

As we survey those successfully managing these young people, we hear three themes: 1) Be clear and specific. 2) Be consistent. 3) Be flexible (within parameters). These are not the employees of years past. We could digress into the reasons for these changes, but I'll save that for another column. Ask yourself, 1) "How clear and specific are my instructions and expectations? Am I re-communicating them regularly?" 2) "Am I consistently enforcing these same expectations even if it means some will walk?" Unfortunately for some, job rules are a rude awakening. This begins with attendance and punctuality. 3) "Am I looking for common ground rather than setting arbitrary rules?" The ultimate outcome is what counts. A part-time researcher in my office asked if she could start at 9 a.m. rather than 8 a.m. because she has late classes and rehearsals. "Sure," I said, "As long as you're consistent." It's worked out fine. Let's go to work.. *RWW*

## Upcoming Center audiences include:

American Power Conversion  
Municipality of Anchorage  
Air Conditioning Contractors Association  
Georgia Society of Association Executives  
Kodiak College  
Material Handling Equipment Dealers Assn..  
Northwest Public Power Association

## "GenTistics"

Fifty-two percent of college students believe it is okay to download and swap copyrighted files. Twenty-five percent of faculty and administrators agree.

2005 Business Software Alliance/Ipsos poll



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## Test Your Knowledge of Millennial Markers

What disability did Erik Weihenmayer overcome to reach the summit of Mt. Everest?

- a. deafness
- b. blindness
- c. amputation
- d. paralysis

Who was the lead singer of the band Nirvana?

- a. Trent Reznor
- b. Lance Bass
- c. Lars Ulrich
- d. Kurt Kobain

What two celebrities had their first year of married life caught on camera for an MTV show called "Newlyweds"?

- a. Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston
- b. Jessica Simpson & Nick Lachey
- c. Madonna and Guy Ritchie
- d. Tom Green and Drew Barrymore

Which trick helped Johnny Moseley win the gold medal in the 1998 Olympics Freestyle skiing moguls event?

- a. dinner roll
- b. 360 mute grab
- c. reverse 180
- d. spread daffy

What pop superstar got married in Vegas and had the marriage annulled 55 hours later?

- a. Ashlee Simpson
- b. Hilary Duff
- c. Mariah Carey
- d. Britney Spears

What Keanu Reeves movie became the first DVD to sell one million copies?

- a. Speed
- b. Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure
- c. Johnny Mnemonic
- d. The Matrix

**Check out the answers in next month's issue of GenTrends.**

## To Ponder

Contrary to many popular assumptions and stereotypes, the character of teenage religiosity in the United States is extraordinarily conventional. The vast majority of U.S. teens are not alienated or rebellious when it comes to religious involvement. Most are quite content to follow in their parents' footsteps. Most feel quite positive about religion, pointing out many advantages and benefits they see religion offering individuals, society, or both. When it comes to practicing religion, most U.S. teens appear happy to go along and get along.

As part of their general religious conventionality, very few U.S. youth, younger than the age of 18 at least, appear to be exposed to, interested in, or actively pursuing the kind of "spiritual but not religious" personal quests of eclectic spiritual seeking about which we have heard so much lately. Most contemporary teenagers readily grant other people the theoretical right to pursue a religious seeker's quest and to explore and practice multiple religions. But very few teens are interested in doing that themselves. And very few even know another teen who is a seeker. Rather, the vast majority are happy simply to accept the one religion in which they were raised. And those with dual-religion parents normally either embrace one, try to pay respect to both, or decide they are not interested in any religion. Whether spiritual but not religious seeking is or is not prevalent among older youth, we cannot say, but it is not among contemporary 13- to 17-year old teens in the United States.

Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton in  
*Soul Searching*

## To Read . . .

**Soul Searching:** The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton. Oxford University Press, New York, 2005. ISBN 0-19-518095-X. This insightful work puts to rest many of the misconceptions that abound about religion and today's youth. We researched and great stories.

## Case Study Corner

*I am 33 and recently appointed as manager of a large event facility in a small mid-western town. I report to a board composed of local businessmen and leaders whose average age is 63. While they say they trust my judgment, they tend to second guess any significant decisions I make. How can I keep them happy and still maintain my effectiveness?*

As people your age increasingly assume senior level responsibility, we will see more and more of this disconnect occurring. Your board may be dealing with several issues. Number one, most are twice your age. That's a complicated issue all by itself. Number two, you probably replaced a manager more their age with whom they could identify. Number three, you're getting to know each other's styles, and that takes time regardless of age differences. Finally, you most likely bring a different orientation to the job than your predecessor. Your comfort with technology may be an anathema to them. They telephone, you e-mail, for instance. Your focus on balance of life and work is probably very different from their assumption that the job is never done. You may tend to make decisions without as much consultation as the manager before you. Take all this together and I can understand the challenge you're facing.

Here are a few suggestions/solutions. First, plan to spend more time with them individually. Grab lunch. Do coffee. Ask for advice even when you already know the answer. I know. This takes time. But with time comes trust. This practice doesn't have to last forever and besides, you might discover some really neat insights that could come in handy later.

Second, when this second-guessing does come up in a meeting, keep them focused on the real issue. Be careful not to accuse them of mistrusting you. That just polarizes the relationship. You might begin by saying, "Help me understand your concern" and then wait for their response. If they really have to outline the issue, you may find it goes away. Patience, time, and relationships foster desired outcomes.