

Gen Trends

February 2003

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

Fostering Productivity Among Teen Workers

Just as Sesame Street began teaching the youngsters of the 70s that learning should be entertaining, the explosion of new gadgets aimed at today's young people has taught them that boring is bad even for mundane tasks such as eating.

Is it any wonder then that employers struggle to keep young employees motivated? As an enormous generation of teenagers enters the job market, every manager will face the daunting task of balancing productivity with entertainment. What can you do? Here are some ideas:

Explain the big picture. I work with retailers whose employees assume that the profit margin in a supermarket is 50% or more when in reality it is one percent. I work with contractors whose employees have little idea that the company only keeps five percent of the thousands billed. Taking time to educate your people about the path from revenue to bottom line will encourage them to save money, work harder and think smarter. After all, it's their raises that are lost in turnover and lackluster productivity.

Be a role model for what you expect. Supervisors work in the proverbial fishbowl. But younger generations are entering the work force having had fewer opportunities to see what is required on the job. Effective managers maintain consistent work habits, go out of their way to develop and help others and always seem to be having a good day. Like it or not, grouching about the lack of work ethic among youngsters does not solve the problem. They're looking for a clear example of how to act.

Give them credit for smarts. I hear many managers complain about the lack of critical thinking skills displayed by many young people. These youngsters are simply used to thinking differently. Remember, they are the product of menu driven thinking. Give them clear directions, encourage them to take a few

risks, process their mistakes and watch them flourish.

Look for the fun in everyday activities. This is a generation that has been taught that everything should be entertaining. If you focus on the outcome and let them focus on the task, they may turn some mundane procedures into games and such. But if the work gets done within the parameter provided, who cares? Really!

Establish the relationship with the employee, not the parents. Managers constantly tell me how parents call, complain, coach and generally interfere with their child's performance. Bottom line? Don't let them do it! Firstly, you are violating the privacy rights of the employee. Secondly, you are damaging the trusting relationship essential between you and those you supervise. For more on this, go to [www.gentrends.com/articles/Avoiding the Parent Trap](http://www.gentrends.com/articles/Avoiding_the_Parent_Trap).

Set clear expectations and enforce them consistently. Many of today's young people think that they can "work the system" as they have in school and at home. Employment is a new environment for them. Set the record straight up front. You'll be doing them, yourself and future employers a favor. If they don't perform, show them the door.

Robert Wendover

Less Homework, More Surfing, Better Grades, Hmmm . . .

Freshmen are spending less time studying or doing homework and more time using the Internet in the year prior to entering college, according to the results of UCLA's annual survey of the nation's students entering undergraduate classes. Despite the continued decline in time devoted to schoolwork, students' high school grade average continues to climb.

The fall 2002 survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA finds a record low (33.4%) of today's entering freshmen report studying or doing homework six or more hours per week during their senior year in high school. This figure is down from a high of 47.0% in 1987 when the question was first asked. The percent of students studying less than one hour per week has nearly doubled (from 8.5% to 15.9%) over the past 15 years.

"GenTistics"

Sixty-nine percent of children 8-18 think their fathers manage parenting "very successfully."

Seventy-one percent of children think their mothers manage parenting "very successfully."

Ask the Children

by Ellen Galinsky, 1999



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To ponder . . .

As is every other generation of Americans, Millennials are defined by their numbers. And like the large baby boom before them, this generation's entrance is making waves. Public schools are straining with enrollment numbers not seen since Boomers filled classrooms. Colleges and universities that had been competing for scarce Gen Xers now enjoy picking and choosing from among the best as applications soar. In time the housing and labor markets also will be shaped by the large generation embarking on career and family life.

Each generation of Americans is unique, shaped not only by its numbers but also by the historical moment. Millennials are no exception. Already, three distinct characteristics are emerging, characteristics that will reshape American society as Millennials mature. 1) Millennials are racially and ethnically—so diverse, in fact, that in many parts of the country the term “minority” no longer has meaning for their peer group. 2) They are fiercely independent thanks to divorce, day care, single parenthood, latchkey lifestyles, and the technological revolution that has put the joy stick squarely in their hands. 3) Millennials feel powerful. Raised by indulgent parents, they have a sense of security not shared by Gen Xers. Optimistic about the future, Millennials see opportunity where others see problems.

from The Millennials

To Read:

The Millennials: Americans Under Age 25 (1st Edition). The New Strategist Editors. New Strategist Publications, Ithaca, 2001. ISBN 1-885070-40-3. This book is a treasure of insights gleaned from government statistics and other research.

Case Study Corner

Crystal, a new young hire in customer service, parties with her friends every Friday night 'til early the next morning. She has been late, however, three of the five Saturdays she has been asked to work. This morning, she showed up at 9:30AM for an 8:00AM shift. When you approached her about the issue, she said, “What’s the big deal? If someone else were late, I’d cover for them. We get the work done and you’ve told me you like what I do. It’s not like I’m coming in drunk or something.” What is the most effective way for handling this situation?

I would begin by asking myself if Crystal understands how the organization makes money. Then I would consider if Crystal truly understands the critical role she plays in customer service. If she is not absolutely clear on both of those points, then that's the place to start. Most hourly workers look at their jobs as a daily purgatory required for existence. As long as that outlook is prevalent, Crystal will never put in the extra effort to be punctual. Take the time to help your people understand that only a small percentage of every dollar turns into profit. Do it in an entertaining and hands-on way. You might even ask them to put on a skit or other entertainment that demonstrates how the process works. Hokey? Maybe. Entertaining? Perhaps. Effective? To be sure! Secondly, I'd set some clear parameters around covering shifts. Switching once in a while or in an emergency is acceptable. But a chaotic schedule due to last night's revelry can really undo any focus you've achieved on the job.

Finally, enforce the rules. If Crystal doesn't improve to meet your expectations in a timely fashion, don't be afraid to terminate her.

Send your questions to wendover@gentrends.com. If we address your issue in the Case Study Corner, we'll send you a free CD or tape from the Center's library of resources .

The Branding of Babies

The business section of the *Sunday New York Times* recently highlighted a book entitled, ***Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers*** by Alissa Quart. The review emphasized the book's important contribution to parenting especially among Baby Boomers and mentioned the author's broadsided attack on the way consumer goods companies relentlessly pursue the Millennial generation (1981-1999).

Madison Avenue has committed more than two billion dollars to branding children two years and younger. Psychologists tell us that children under two recognize symbols, and more importantly to consumer goods companies - brands. From the "swoosh" of Nike to the "M" of the Golden Arches, youngsters are being lured into a corporate relationship while still in the crib.

This necessarily isn't a good thing for our children and makes parenting an increasingly difficult venture; yet the parents of Millennials are really buying and why. It isn't easy.

As I presented these statistics to a group of senior managers, for example, an executive with a fast-food chain was beaming with satisfaction at the sheer effectiveness of these branding efforts. I remember thinking how ironic it all was. I was making a point that I hoped would disturb and provoke; yet it only motivated this executive to applaud the marketing snares aimed towards the youngest of our society. The ones who have the major responsibility to understand what their children are.

It is hard to make broad sweeping criticisms of marketing practices, but it is important to be aware of the ways the youth among us are being influenced. Those who are charged with raising the next generation have the responsibility to help them grow up and contribute to this society, however crassly materialistic it may be.

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