

Gen Trends

March 2003

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

How Consequences Have Changed!

Are consequences really consequences anymore? Every generation responds differently to life's challenges and tribulations.

The Matures came of age in an environment that reflected many of the Puritan values upon which this nation was founded. Matures learned as children that the teacher locked the door if you were late to class, that you had one chance to take a test, and "No" really meant "No." They passed these beliefs on to their children.

The Baby Boomers interpreted these beliefs in a different way. As they came of age in the 50's and 60's, many tended to embrace the enlightened ideas of individualism so prevalent at that time and rebelled against traditional authority. They have carried this individualism into the present day; yet now seem to seek a return to the traditional values they rejected as youth.

In the 60's and 70's, Boomers gave birth to their first wave of children, the so-called Generation X. These children came of age during an era of social and economic chaos. Many of the institutions in which they had been taught to believe no longer maintained their integrity. Xers learned to challenge authority in order to accomplish an objective, that it was okay to break the rules, and that "No" didn't always mean "No."

Both the Boomers and Xers have given birth to the so-called Millennial generation and the attitudes about consequences have changed once again. As this generation has come of age, they have discovered how to "work the system" using technology, inconsistent policies, and parental guilt to avoid undesirable outcomes.

Parents feel as if they are competing with the rest of the world to teach their children values and consequences. But as with others, this generation is simply using the tools available to make their world liveable.

While it is easy to lament the loss of consequences in our society, we must remember that each of us is a product of the era in which we were taught and tested those beliefs. If we are to regain the acceptance of traditional consequences in our surroundings, the task begins with each of us.

Robert Wendover

Cell Phone Redux

New Yorker Sandra Gluck shares a novel idea with *The New York Times* on how to silence cell phone loudmouths: "While traveling on a bus in Queens, my Aunt Bella had the misfortune of sitting beside a young woman who was carrying on a rather loud and long conversation on her cell phone. After quite a few minutes, my aunt began to read her book aloud. She was several sentences into the book when the woman turned to her and said, 'Do you have to do that?' My aunt replied, 'Yes, I do, it's sort of like talking on a cell phone.' The phone conversation stopped."

Age-Old Problem

Over the next three decades, the proportion of the U.S. population aged 65 and older will jump to 20% from 12%. As a result, there will be just 2.7 working-age people for every person aged 65 and older, compared with the current ratio of 4.7 to 1.

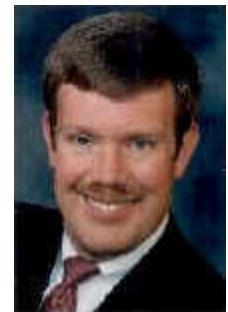
"I've been saving like crazy," says Robert Arnott, a money manager in Pasadena, CA. "I'm expecting when I'm 80 and needing part-time nursing care that I'm going to be bidding against a lot of people for that."

Jonathan Clements writing in
The Wall Street Journal

"GenTistics"

Thirty six percent of college freshman women and 18% of college freshman men say they have felt overwhelmed by all they had to do at least once in the past year.

*UCLA Higher Education
Research Institute, 2000*



Robert W. Wendover
Editorial Director



15200 E. Girard Ave.
Suite 4000
Aurora, CO 80014
Phone: 303-617-7207
Fax: 303-617-7209
Toll Free: 800-227-5510
www.gentrends.com

To ponder . . .

Education started at an earlier age for N-Gens (Millennials) than for any other cohort. A large number were in preschool by the time they were three. After graduating from high school, 65% are expected to go to college, compared to just over half in 1986. Because of increasing college costs and tighter rules on student grants and loans, however, this cohort is expected to have one of the highest student debt ratios of all time. As a result, getting a good-paying job right out of college will be a top priority. This is doubly true because N-Gens have been raised with generally privileged lifestyles—few of them have had to go without up to this point. Unlike many of the Xers however, they don't necessarily have the expectation of "easy money"—they are willing to work very hard to get it. As a result, they don't show the apathy toward being financially successful that we observed just a few short years ago with some segments of Gen-X.

Despite this interest in getting degrees, some educators have said that N-Gens are more interested in obtaining the "credentials"—the diploma—than in learning. This cohort sees higher education as a means to a good job, rather than as an end in and of itself. As a result, some of them can be a bit disengaged from the learning process.

*Geoffrey E. Meredith &
Charles D. Schewe, Ph.D. with
Janice Karlovich*

To Read:

Defining Markets Defining

Moments: America's 7 Generational Cohorts, Their Shared Experiences, and Why Businesses Should Care. Geoffrey E. Meredith & Charles D. Schewe, Ph.D. with Janice Karlovich. Hungry Minds, New York, 2002. ISBN 0-7645-5394-1. This comprehensive work explores the differences in how seven different cohorts differ in their values with regard to marketing and how businesses can use these insights to better reach these individual groups.

Case Study Corner

"I manage a multi-generational team of 10 salespeople who deal with a multi-generational client base across the U.S. While I would love to match up people of the same age, salesperson to customer, it is simply not geographically possible. At the same time, I know that some of my people are just not connecting well with customers older or younger than themselves. What would you advise?"

I would begin by providing your team with an in-depth orientation on the differences in generational values and expectations, especially as it relates to the team members themselves. From there, I would help them explore the expectations and assumptions about purchasing that other generations possess. Resources for this can be found on the Center's website, <http://www.gentrends.com/>. Then you can make this information more specific to your sales environment. Type of product? Sales cycle? Customer history? Customer relationship? And so on.

Once they have developed a working knowledge of other generations' tendencies about purchasing your products, I would continue by introducing a selection of case studies for discussion. You can elicit the ideas for these from the salespeople themselves. Finally, I would include these case studies in regular sales meetings. A couple of cases studies every now and then should do the trick. As the workforce ages, generational differences will continue to transform, and we must recognize these trends.

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.

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

Keeping Us Fresh

A seafood restaurant on the East Coast was renowned for its cod. People from all over the country traveled there to savor the delicious fish. The management decided it should start selling cod to other parts of the United States. Since freshness was a high value, this restaurant shipped the cod live in specially designed trucks with water tanks.

Once delivered to participating restaurants, however, the fresh cod was stale and had a rancid flavor. The management on the East Coast conducted an investigation and discovered that though the fish were shipped live, they became stale because of the confines of the truck and their lack of mobility. So they introduced a natural predator of the cod into the tank. The fish improved in flavor and the cod quickly became renowned for its freshness and flavor. The natural predator kept the fish moving and therefore kept them fresh.

Perhaps Generation X can be characterized as the predator in the fish tank. They have a unique knack for keeping other generations from going stale. Their skepticism towards life is really their way of keeping us all fresh. This slant on life should not be interpreted as offensive but rather as a strategy to keep the rest of us on our toes. As an older Xer myself, I have been culturally conditioned to be skeptical with the way things are.

This propensity to keep other generations fresh can sometimes lead to clashes and misunderstanding among them. The most pronounced for me has come in the area of worship in local churches. The older generations value tradition and hymns while the younger generations value experience and contemporary music. This has led to what some call worship wars. As a pastor, I often had to mediate between parties to point out that we all need each other to keep the worship from becoming stale. It was a blending of generational styles and not a one size fits all approach that kept my church and its worship fresh and interesting.

Jeff VanKooten is a Senior Consultant with the Center for Generational Studies