

Gen Trends

November 2003

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

Listening to the Underground

I was recently discussing the difference in communication styles between Boomers and Xers with a 50-something manager. He mentioned that the organization's leadership had accidentally discovered a group of 20- and 30-somethings who were meeting at a local restaurant to discuss the work environment, their perception of organizational strategy, and a host of related issues. I suggested to him that if he looked on the company's e-mail system, he would probably find a running conversation that supports these meetings such as scheduling, location, topics, background information, and so on. His eyes got wide. "What do you think we should do?" he asked. "Nothing," I replied, "except learn from the discovery." What does it teach you? What are the implications? What can you learn from it?

As a new generation of leaders emerges in the workforce, they are bringing with them their own interpretations of management, motivation, and bureaucracy. Coupled with this is their own way of communicating. The members of Generation X appear to communicate with many more people in a given week than their older counterparts. Much of this is accomplished by e-mails, rather than by phone, in short 5- to 10-word messages going back and forth throughout the day. The reasons for these communiqués may be of a business nature, a social contact, or simply for fun. It's not unheard of in our offices, for instance, to have an Xer sending an invitation at two in the afternoon to meet at a local watering hole at five. But he won't send it to five friends. He'll

send it to 50. Ten may respond positively and 20 may actually attend. Instant party!

The key here is to understand that supervisors have a choice of either resisting or embracing this kind of practice. We, at the Center, choose to embrace it. We will ask our Xers, for instance, to send an article we've written to 50 of their closest friends for input and editorial comment. Within two hours, we might receive 10 or more responses containing ideas, supportive comments, critical insights, and, in a few cases, wise-ass remarks. What a powerful medium! How can you embrace the electronic underground within your organization?

R.W.W

Leadership & Succession

A large study of CEOs by the Conference Board provides a glimpse at workforce management in 2008. Right now, for example, only 9 percent of the senior executives surveyed say that succession planning is a top priority; 27 percent say it will be in five years. Similarly, only 23.8% of companies say that developing leaders is a top priority; 35 percent say it will be in five years.

As quoted in Workforce.com

Of the Center's programs in 2002, 98% resulted from repeat or referral business!

Upcoming audiences include

National Electric Contractors Association
Nat. Assn. for the Specialty Food Trade
Department of Veterans Affairs
Associated Generation Contractors
U.S. Animal & Plant Inspection Service
Texas District & County Attorneys Assn.
Leadership Network, Inc.

"GenTistics"

What 7-12-year-olds say they do on-line:

Play games 87%

Listen to music 63%

Do schoolwork 60%

Watch videos, movies, cartoons 36%

Learn about celebrities 27%

Source: America Online's Digital Marketing Services

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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 . . .

Consider this paradox: young people today grow up faster, but also slower, than did their grandparents. They grow up faster in the sense that the onset of puberty now occurs earlier. Improvements in health care and nutrition are generally credited with bringing about earlier sexual maturity. But young people also grow up slower, remaining dependent much longer on parents now than was true in the past. This is obvious financially, in noting how many young people return to live with their parents after a period of having left home—the so-called boomerang effect. This return movement came about not as a matter of choice in most instances, but rather as a result of major structural changes in our society forcing young people to adapt to them. Changing job opportunities and upgrading of professions, thereby requiring a high level of education, have greatly altered life circumstances for younger generations. What we have, in effect, is what sociologists James E. Cote and Anton L. Allaha describe as “an enforced and prolonged dependency,” unlike anything experienced by previous generations.

Jackson W. Carroll &
Wade Clark Roof

To Read:

Bridging Divided Worlds:

Generational Cultures in Congregations. Jackson W. Carroll & Wade Clark Roof. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2002. ISBN 0-7879-4990-6.

This work is a fascinating exploration of the changing generational demographics within America’s churches and its impact on beliefs, volunteerism, leadership and contributions. While their overall subject is religion, the authors do an admirable job of connecting these impacts to the wider society.

Case Study Corner

Our young workers spend more time than necessary on the Internet, playing games, shopping and sending each other jokes. While I would love to simply block the access, they do need it for legitimate research. There’s even a joke in the office that each one of them has a so-called “boss button” to push when they see their supervisor rounding the corner. It’s obviously having an impact on productivity. What would you suggest?

I’ll begin by asking how you know for certain that it is harming productivity. Provided that the work they are assigned is completed correctly and in a timely fashion, are they really being unproductive? The members of Generation X, in particular, tend to be focused on outcome rather than task. Perhaps you’re assuming that they need more time for the assignments because it took you that amount of time. While you may feel they have a moral obligation to tell you if they finish early, they may not have interpreted your directions the same way. You might begin by more closely monitoring how they accomplish what is assigned and then bring the team together to discuss your concerns about productivity and Internet usage.

If some of them truly are gaming the system, you need to sit down with each one individually and establish some clear expectations about Internet usage and his or her individual productivity. I would probably try a more developmental approach to help build some investment in the employee’s minds about the company. If that does not work however, you will need to be more direct. Being a wizard on the computer does not excuse poor performance.

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

The Grandparent Trend

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are now about 5.8 million grandparents who have their grandchildren living with them and, of these, 2.4 million of them (about 42%) are also the children’s primary caregivers. About 39% of these grandparent caregivers have taken care of their grandchildren for five years or more.

While there are a number of ways the impact of this phenomenon can be interpreted, it is important to recognize first and foremost the dramatic diversity within which young children are now maturing.

They’re Back . . . Again

According to a recent survey of 1,831 recent college grads by the job-search web site MonsterTRAK, nearly 40% say they intend to live with their parents for at least seven months. To what can this phenomenon be attributed? Several factors are responsible say sociologists:

1. An effort to save money due to uncomfortably high student loan and consumer debt payments.
2. Encouragement on the part of empty nesters who aren’t ready to say good-bye.
3. A lack of well-paid career options in the present economy.

Menu Driven Thinking

The Center is in the development stages of a book on what we’ve termed *Menu Driven Thinking*, that is, an impairment of critical problem-solving skills because of an over-reliance on computer technology to provide options and answers to every-day challenges. Retailers report seeing it in some young associates who seem unable to cope successfully with customer demands. We hear from educators who say some students rely totally on the Internet to research papers and assignments. Manufacturers complain about employees’ hesitation about going the extra mile for lack of confidence in solving problems.

We would love to hear your stories about this phenomenon and the impact it’s having on your business. Please e-mail us at research@gentrends.com and put “Menu Driven Thinking” in the subject line. Thanks.