

Gen Trends

April 2004

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

Will Our Children Have Time to Think?

Maybe I'm strange, but I like nothing better than a little time to think every day. I'm not talking about reviewing the daily to-do list, but an opportunity for simple reflection. Between the "parade" in my office and the chaos of running a business, even riding alone in the elevator can be a welcome respite. But now that sanctuary is being sacrificed on the altar of commerce.

What brought about this tirade was an article announcing that a new firm named Captivate Network has launched a new sales channel in, you guessed it, elevators. For a mere \$125,000 a month you can force ascending and descending patrons to endure one more version of the endless cacophony which seems to fill every waking moment. (Several years from now, I predict a flurry of firms who will be advertising quiet elevators, airport lounges without televisions and, heavens to Betsy, malls without music.)

While I applaud this firm's initiative, I grieve the loss of one more place for momentary reflection. I also wonder about the effect of all this on our youth. The world is increasingly packed with data, yet it has not made society a better place. We marvel at our children's ability to multi-channel and multi-task, but we lament their loss of time for simple imagination. As widely reported not long ago, there appears to be a connection between audio and video stimulation of children under two and their ability to concentrate.

At what point do we begin again to encourage the emerging generation to think for itself and take time for unadulterated dreaming?

Toddlers Television and Attention Span

A study published this month in the journal *Pediatrics*, reports that very young children who watch television face an increased risk of attention-deficit problems by the time they reach school age. The research, based on 1345 children in two groups of ages one and three, indicated that for every hour watched, subjects faced a 10% increased risk of having attention problems at age seven.

The study was conducted at Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center in Seattle. Parents were questioned about their children's viewing habits and rated their behavior at age seven using a scale similar to that used for diagnosing attention-deficit disorders. Symptoms included difficulty concentrating, restlessness, impulsivity and confusion.

The parents were not asked which shows their children watched, but researchers discounted content as a determining factor. Dr. Dimitri Christakis, lead author of the article blamed the impact on the unrealistically fast-paced visual images typical of most television programming which may alter normal brain development.

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"GenTistics"

In the 2000 election 36% of 18- to 24-year-olds voted. In the 1972 election 50% of 18- to 24-year-olds voted (the first year 18-year-olds were allowed to vote.

US Census Bureau



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 . . .

Today Americans tell pollsters that the country is going downhill; that their parents had it better; that they feel unbearably stressed out; that their children face a declining future – and Americans were telling pollsters this even during the unprecedented boom that preceded the tragedy of September 11, 2001. The percentage of Americans who describe themselves as “happy” has not budged since the 1950s, though the typical person’s real income has more than doubled through that period. Happiness has not increased in Japan or Western Europe in the past half-century, either, though daily life in both those places has grown fantastically better, incorporating all the advances noted above plus the end of dictatorships and recovery from general war. On the first day of the twenty-first century, President Bill Clinton declared that Western society had “never before enjoyed, at once, so much prosperity combined with so much social progress.” This statement was not just politics; objectively, it is true. Nevertheless the citizens of the United States and the European Union, almost all of whom live better than almost all of the men and women of history, entertain considerable discontent.

Far from feeling better about their lives, many are feeling worse. Throughout the US and European Union, incidence of clinical melancholy has been rising in eerie synchronization with rising prosperity.

Gregg Easterbrook

To Read: *The Progress*

Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse. Gregg Easterbrook. Random House, New York, 2003. ISBN 0-679-46303-8.

While not specifically targeted toward generational relations, this book reveals one of the troubling ironies facing those coming of age – increasing stress and depression in the face of prosperity and convenience.

My Body is My Canvas

I don’t know if it’s just me, but there appear to be a significant number of waiters and waitresses sporting tongue studs. For the past several years, I have made a point of asking each one, “Why?” Their responses have generally varied from, “All my friends were getting one,” to “Well, I was out with my friends . . .”

But last week, I met a server who provided me with the most succinct answer yet. When I asked about the small silver orb clacking around in his mouth, he looked at me matter-of-factly and said, “My body is my canvas.” I was so taken aback by his somewhat thoughtful answer, I didn’t think to ask him what he meant.

Workers Harbor Unrealistic Hopes for Retirement

An annual snapshot of workers’ plans for retirement finds that many Americans are overly optimistic about their retirement prospects, reflecting unrealistic expectations about pension and health benefits, as well as a continued lack of understanding about future financial needs.

The report – the Retirement Confidence Survey, released by the Employee Benefit Research Institute and others – also finds that workers expect to stay on the job longer to make up for any savings shortfall. Those plans, however, don’t match the experience of current retirees.

Rather than increasing their retirement savings, many workers simply count on staying on the job longer, with 54% expecting to wait until at least age 65 to retire. An even higher percentage of workers, 68%, expect to work for pay in some capacity after they retire.

Those expectations don’t reflect the experience of many current retirees. The average retirement age is 62, and the survey – done 14 years in a row – consistently has found that about two in five retirees have left the workforce before they planned, mainly because of health problems or layoffs.

*Kelly Greene writing in
The Wall Street Journal*

Case Study Corner

I direct the conference services department for a mid-western college. While I am in my late 40s, my staff of five consists of individuals in their late twenties. These individuals are professional and hardworking, but they are forever challenging the decisions I make. If they disagree with my approach on a particular issue, they will bring it up ad nauseum, attempting to change my mind. This has quite an effect on my confidence as a manager and certainly absorbs a good deal of productive time. How would you resolve this situation?

You’re right. There is a difference between healthy debate and carping. But there are several factors to consider here. Begin by reflecting on how clearly you’ve explained your decisions about the issues in question. Yes, you are the ultimate decision-maker, but these days, younger workers expect managers to share the reasoning for the choices made.

That said, we need to remember that those in their late twenties grew up learning resourcefulness as latch-key kids. When Mom and Dad aren’t around, one learns to ask for what is needed and challenge authority to overcome obstacles. Once these skills are developed, they become inherent.

I also suspect that there might be some gamesmanship being played here. After all, there are five of them and one of you. In my mind, the best way to handle this is to make sure you’ve gathered all the relevant facts and asked for their input on the issue. Then make a decision and clearly explain your reasoning. If one or more of them have a concern, they’re welcome to express it -- but only once. And you should not be hearing the same complaint five separate times. If the carping continues, you are perfectly within your rights to demand that they stop. Besides, if they don’t like your style, maybe they should hire on somewhere else.

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