

Gen Trends

August 2004

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

Spectatorship

Part Two

In last month's issue, I discussed the impact of so-called "spectatorship" on the productivity within the workplace. I noted that the typical investment that's taken for granted in older generations is not as evident in those now entering the labor force.

As I mentioned in last month's issue, the key to overcoming this lack of investment is active engagement. Remember, these days' employers are competing with the rest of society to ensure that workers put in their best effort while "on the clock." While we may bemoan that we can't seem to get these "kids" motivated, there are organizations out there that are doing just that. Here are a few examples:

One of the keys to engagement is learning and that's where Merkle Direct Marketing has invested its energy. The "Merkle Institute of Technology" or MIT offers courses in everything from pumpkin carving to yoga. These courses, taught primarily by employees, enable workers to connect in ways they may not on the job. In the process, this 700-person company fosters teamwork and communication that helps on the job. Every employee in this Lanham, MD-based firm earns one credit for every class hour attended. Senior managers are required to earn 150 credits per year, lower level workers 25, to be eligible for annual salary increases.

Then there's balance of life. Grey Worldwide a New York-based advertising agency encourages its employees to use its computers and other tools to help them manage their personal lives. Some employers may

balk at this. But allowing employees to bank on-line rather than running to the bank, for instance, saves time and stress. As I've said before, focus on the outcome.

Then there's sharing the story. Once a year Hy-Vee Supermarkets invites several hundred of its young, part-time employees to its West Des Moines, IA headquarters for a daylong career event where the company's senior managers share their personal stories. These executives connect directly with young people to demonstrate that they too can be successful within the organization. Even Ron Pearson, Hy-Vee's CEO gets into the act by telling how he began his career with the company as a part-time grocery clerk.

Next, there's selection. Hilton Hotels has recently developed one of the best reputations for service of any organization in the lodging industry. How'd they do it? One tactic has been to "clone" their employees. Really! Last year, the firm's Hilton Garden Inns division, surveyed its top-rated performers. Each was given a written test to assess their attitudes and preferences. The answers were used to produce a snapshot of *the* model employee. By specifically targeting the behaviors displayed by top performers you, or any manager, will be able to better select the young employees you want on your team. While we hear so much about so-called "slackers," there are thousands of hardworking young people out there. But you have to take the time to find them.

Finally, there's the memorable. Yum Brands – the parent company to fast-food chains Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, A&W and Long John Silvers – pours hours into their recognition efforts including a band called "Random Acts of Recognition" and a "Customer Maniac of the Month" award. Others include a seat belt on a plaque symbolizing the rollercoaster-nature of the business and a chef's hat for cooking up great results. Engage your young people and they'll return the favor with productivity.

"GenTistics"

44% of all workers age 55+ check their e-mail or voice mail while on vacation. Only 26% of 18- to 34- year-olds do.

Expedia Home Interactive



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\$47,909

The median size of an inheritance received by Baby Boomers from their parents, to date.

AARP Public Policy Institute

To ponder . . .

Why are the latest fashions so important to teenagers? To gain status in any group you have to conform to their norms. But this means that insiders, and especially those with high status, have an interest in making conformity difficult for outsiders. Hence, they frequently elaborate and complicate the norms. The elaborate social rituals and dress styles of aristocracies and upper classes are obvious examples. In pre-modern societies, copying your social superiors was often forbidden. Woe to the commoner who tried to dress like a king or the untouchable who donned the sacred thread of the Brahman. But in contemporary societies most formal constraints on copying superiors have been removed. Hence those at the top must constantly change and complicate the norms. Among teenagers, this results in rapidly changing fashions in clothes, music and the “in” words and phrases. This obsessive concern to have “the latest” is not irrationality, but a very reasonable response to the power structure within which they must live.

Murray Milner, Jr.

To Read: *Freaks, Geeks and Cool Kids: American Teenagers, Schools and the Culture of Consumption.* Murray Milner, Jr. Routledge, New York, 2004. ISBN 0-415-94830-4. Milner, who has been studying the social systems of teenagers for decades, provides the reader with a thoughtful, well-researched work on the conundrums of America’s youth.

Who’s in the Lead?

Ninety-four percent of human resources professionals polled by DBM, a New York-based human resources consulting firm, believe that businesses are not preparing younger workers to take on leadership roles and will suffer from a lack of leaders as the Baby Boom generation begins to retire over the next 15 years.

as reported in *Industry Week*

Teensploitation

The editors at Merriam-Webster have included the term “teensploitation” in the latest edition of their Collegiate Dictionary. Defined as the exploitation of teenagers by the producers of teen-oriented films comes 22 years after the word first appeared in show business publications. The word is an offshoot of “blaxploitation,” coined in the 1970s to refer to the exploitation of blacks by film producers. Over the past two decades, the word has moved from entertainment magazines into mainstream publications. It typically takes a word 20 years to become prominent enough to merit a place in an abridged dictionary according to John Moore, president and publisher of the dictionary.

We Want Your Money, But . . .

Simon Property Group has agreed to fund a new program that will pay parents – selected by an organizing committee – to patrol Aurora Mall in Colorado and aid in supervising youths unattended by adults. Simon joins a number of owners who are responding to customer concerns about unsupervised youth who have made malls their choice for congregating after school, in the evening and on weekends.

Generations:
Understanding Age Diversity
in Today’s Workplace
Coming this September!

Case Study Corner

I am 25 and new to a department. A couple of months ago I was assigned a space management project. This entails re-organizing storage and moving people to different stations. But I’ve been told confidentially that a number of people within the department have made comments like, “Who does she think she is? She’s only been here 6 months and she thinks she can tell us what to do.”

It’s difficult to handle this kind of a situation. People associate maturity and intellect with age, when it should be associated with life experience. While it’s true that I have only been here six months, I don’t think I should be respected less. How should I act in similar situations? It’s hard to act in a professional manner and not take these comments personally.

You’re facing one of the eternal challenges posed to young people in the workplace. You’re right. It’s not fair to have them judging you based on age rather than capability. But handling it with professionalism and ignoring the comments is the best way to go. After all, the older one gets the more resistance to change one develops.

Having said that, consider that you might also have been “set up” by a supervisor who did not take the time to introduce what you are doing to those affected. Imagine being uprooted with no warning after having worked in the same exact setting for several years. If this is the case, I would suggest you ask your supervisor to reestablish the purposes of these moves and *your* authority to make the changes. This must be done diplomatically, but firmly.

Once your supervisor has done so, then it is still going to require some diplomacy and tact on your part to make these moves successfully. No matter what your approach, you will face resistance from some individuals. Rather than running back to your supervisor for moral support, find a way to make it work.

Think of this situation as an opportunity for professional growth. Every successful manager has had to overcome challenges such as this.