

GenTrends

December 2004

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

If It Doesn't Matter, Why Do It?

The 21-year-old son of a friend of mine provided an interesting insight into the Millennial mind last week. This senior engineering major was conversing with his mother and mentioned that he was not planning on taking the final in a particular course. When she asked why, he explained that since there was no way that he could raise his final grade from a B to an A, he preferred to focus on other exams where a good performance might make a difference. You see his grades are accessible on-line down to the one-hundredth of a point and he can calculate the best-case scenario for a final grade in each class. (One might wonder if he will take *any* finals if it doesn't.)

I grew up learning that you *always* took the test. It may, or may not, have had an impact on the final grade, but you always studied for the sake of studying. After all, "there's always room for improvement." But with the shift in emphasis from education to vocation within academia over the past decade, students are approaching the demands of learning from a different perspective. While this is not the only factor, are we not teaching this emerging generation to take the path of least resistance? While this may be acceptable in some situations, where are the thresholds?

If we extrapolate this point for instance, one has to wonder whether these young professionals, with technology at their fingertips, might some day decide to skip assignments, ignore projects and gloss over seemingly repetitive tasks in the workplace. Is this legitimate? If so, in what situations? How closely should

young professionals be supervised? As I overheard one 20-something say to another, "My boss is always telling me what to do."

While it would be nice to offer a pat solution to this phenomenon, the issue is more complicated. Is this about work ethic? Is it about expediency? Is it about life balance? Is it about impatience? Is it about the way we educate youth in today's technological society? You decide and let me know. wendover@gentrends.com. R.W.W.

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

The Four Stages of Life

1. You believe in Santa Claus
2. You don't believe in Santa Claus
3. You are Santa Claus
4. You look like Santa Claus

Deciphering "Dude!"

Scott Kiesling, a linguist from the University of Pittsburgh, has published a scholarly paper on the origins and meaning of the word "dude." In an article published in the fall issue of *American Speech*, Kiesling maintains that the word derives its power from something he calls "cool solidarity" defining it as an effortless kinship that's not too intimate. He maintains that cool solidarity is especially important to young men who are under social pressure to be close with other young men, but not enough to be suspected as gay.

Keisling explains that historically, dude meant "old rags"— a "dudesman" was a scarecrow. In the late 1800s a dude was akin to a "dandy," a meticulously dressed man. Dude entered the teenage lexicon with the 1981 movie "Fast Times at Ridgemont High."

"GenTistics"

55% of Generation X is interested in learning about family protection, compared with 44% of Baby Boomers. 47% of Xers want to learn more about transferring wealth to their children, compared to 38% of Boomers.

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To ponder . . .

Children have become the conduits from the consumer marketplace into the household, the link between advertisers and the family purse. Young people are repositories of consumer knowledge and awareness. They are the first adopters and avid users of many of the new technologies. They are the household members with the most passionate consumer desires, and are most closely tethered to products, brands and the latest trends. Children's social worlds are increasingly constructed around consuming, as brands and products have come to determine who is "in" and who is "out," who is hot or not, who deserves to have friends, or social status. In such a world, how many parents opt to downshift or simplify? It's a radical step many children don't welcome . . .

Plenty of evidence now confirms how far-reaching this process of commercialization has become. Contemporary American tweens and teens have emerged as the most brand-oriented, consumer-involved, and materialistic generations in history. And they top the list globally. A survey of youth from 70 cities in 15 countries finds that 75 percent of U.S. tweens want to be rich, a higher percentage than anywhere else in the world except India, where the results were identical. Sixty-one percent want to be famous. More children here than anywhere else believe that their clothes and brands describe who they are and define their social status. American kids display more brand affinity than their counterparts anywhere else in the world; indeed, experts describe them as increasingly "bonded to brands."

Juliet B. Schor writing in Born to Buy

To Read: *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture*. Juliet B. Schor. Scribner, New York, 2004. ISBN 0-684-87055-X

The Year is 1904

The average life expectancy in the US is 47 years.

Fourteen percent of homes have a bathtub.

Eight percent of homes have a telephone.

The average wage in the US is 22 cents per hour.

The tallest structure in the world is the Eiffel Tower.

The average US worker makes between \$200 and \$400 per year.

There are no income or social security taxes.

The population of Las Vegas is 30.

Most women wash their hair once per month using Borax or egg yolks for shampoo.

Only six percent of Americans have graduated from high school.

Have You "Facebooked" Someone?

A group of Harvard University roommates has developed www.thefacebook.com, a new on-line, interactive directory that allows students to research classmates on the same campus. Want to connect with those who enjoy video games? Want to get a copy of the class notes you missed? Want to know if the good-looking guy in physics is single? Facebook him!

Only available to those who have a university e-mail account, there are 293 schools using the site and more than one million members. By logging in, members can search for any other connected student at their school. They can connect to another college only if they're invited by someone at that institution.

Case Study Corner

I supervise 45 student employees at a university's help desk. They support faculty, staff and students in answering technical questions over the phone and in person. How do I motivate them and improve their work ethic? Many times, I have to call and wake them up. They show up late for work and feel it's no big deal. They don't take responsibility for working their shifts either. They post their shift for coverage. But if no one takes it, they don't show up anyway.

First of all, you can't improve someone else's work ethic. That's a result of attitude. But you can persuade people to alter their behavior. When they do so, hopefully their attitude toward work will change as well.

Let's begin by considering what they might be learning from *your* behavior. At least some of them have learned that you're willing to serve as their alarm clock. They also know that it's okay to change shifts at will and that there seems to be no consequence for missing work. Please don't take this the wrong way, but you are also allowing them to develop poor work habits which I, as an employer, might have to battle when they graduate and enter the workforce.

You might respond by saying that there's nothing that can be done. There aren't enough qualified students. None of them have good work habits. If you discipline them they will quit.

To all of this, I would say, "Get over it." Put each and every one of them on notice that future shift changes are subject to your approval one week in advance. They are expected to arrive for work on time, with no exceptions. Introduce clearly defined performance expectations and enforce them consistently. Finally, reward good performance and those who model your expectations.

Release those who fail to meet these expectations within the first week. I have fired work-studies. You can too. Post a help desk opening immediately, because chances are at least a couple of your people will not improve to the level of your new expectations.