

# Gen Trends

June 2004

## *Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!*

### “When you were negative two . . .”

As one ages, it becomes increasingly common to use past experience as a reference for present and future. While there is certainly nothing wrong with that, one must also be mindful of the context in which these memories are shared.

In the preparation of a seminar this month, I interviewed a young engineer who reported working with a half-dozen colleagues, 30 years her senior. While she was very generous in her comments about learning from them, she also related a story which brings one aspect of the generation gap into clear focus.

It seems that they have taken to relating their stories with the preface, “When you were \_\_\_\_ years old, I was . . .” Then they proceed to make reference to a project from an earlier era. Since she has just turned 24, the age in this reference can sometimes be a negative number. (eg. “When you were negative-two, I was designing the such-n-such widget.”)

“It was amusing the first 10 times,” she said. “After that, it got old real fast.” When I asked her how aware she thought they were of its impact, she responded, “Not a clue.” When I asked her if she had said anything to them, she asked, “Would you?”

While one might argue that these veteran engineers mean no harm, one can also imagine the uncomfortable place in which they have placed her.

I’d like to think that the illustration above is an isolated instance. My experience tells me it’s not. Sometimes closing the generation gap does not require a strategy. It’s simply being mindful of a co-worker’s feelings.

### Is It Any Wonder . . .

When I was ten, I began the five-year journey of having my teeth straightened (braces!). While it was painful and tedious, I endured it. The one thing it was *not*, was entertaining. As my daughter climbs into the orthodontist’s chair this month, there will be a television installed in the ceiling and a remote at the ready. There will be video games in the waiting room and music to suit her taste. And when her braces are installed, she’ll be able to choose from Hillary Duff, Frankie Muniz, or SpongeBob SquarePants stick-ons for her teeth. It makes my head spin.

Are today’s kids learning that every aspect of life comes with entertainment? Will they not expect that education, work and all adult functions contain an amusement component as they mature?

Is it any wonder that employers have trouble maintaining the attention of their young workers when there’s no outside stimulation? With the enormous number of entertaining choices provided to kids these days, it’s hard to sell them on stocking shelves, scanning groceries, cleaning bathrooms, and filing papers.

But one wonders about the consequences of “teaching” our future busboys . . . and executives, that all the world’s a theme park.

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## “GenTistics”

Percent of people who think “other people try to be fair:”

Matures 59%

Boomers 55%

Generation X 45%

Millennials 34%

National Opinion Research Center



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## To ponder . . .

Conventional politics is an unending argument about Haves and Have-Nots. Are the Haves getting more? Is it too much? Why isn't there more sharing with the Have-Nots? The Have/Have-Nots argument works to completely obscure another discussion: the Nows and the Laters. We're the Nows; our children and grandchildren are the Laters. Decade after decade, the Nows have taken from the Laters. Unfortunately, this fiscal child abuse, like the psychological kind, is hard to spot. But measure it we can, and measure it we will using a relatively new method, called generational accounting. Doing so leads to the following bottom line: *Unless we adults make very large sacrifices very quickly, our kids will face lifetime net tax rates that are twice those we face!*

Yes, you read that right. On each dollar earned, our kids will be faced with taxes, net of the benefits they receive, that are nearly twice what we currently pay. If you think Uncle Sam is ripping you off, imagine how your children will feel?

Another way to characterize the findings is to calculate the immediate and permanent federal and personal corporate income tax hike needed to achieve *generational balance* – the equalization of lifetime tax rates facing current and future generations. Brace yourself. *The requisite tax hike is a whopping 69 percent!*

*Kotlikoff and Burns*

## To Read: *The Coming*

***Generational Storm: What You Need to Know About America's Economic Future.*** Laurence J. Kotlikoff and Scott Burns. MIT Press, Cambridge, 2003. ISBN 0-262-11286-8. Kotlikoff and Burns quantify in sobering terms the myriad factors challenging our economic future. While one must overlook their satirical sense of humor, their arguments beg reasoned examination.

## The Results of a New Boomer Survey

Despite what you may have seen on the streets, the following combinations do not go together:

- A nose ring and bifocals
- Spiked hair and bald spots
- A pierced tongue and dentures
- Miniskirts and support hose
- Ankle bracelets and corn pads
- Speedos and cellulite
- A belly button ring and a gall bladder surgery scar
- Unbuttoned disco shirts and a heart monitor
- Bikinis and liver spots
- Short shorts and varicose veins
- In-line skates and a walker

Please pass these results along.

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## Comcast Plans a Network for Toddlers

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, Comcast Corporation is in negotiations with the Public Broadcasting System, Sesame Street Workshop and HIT Entertainment to launch a 24-hour network dedicated to pre-school kids.

While one wonders how many pre-schoolers will be tuning in at 3AM, it also remains to be seen what impact the opportunity for non-stop programming may have on children in their most critical years of development.

As reported in the April issue of *GenTrends*, research indicates that there appears to be a correlation between toddler television time and the incidence of attention-deficit disorder by age seven.

## Case Study Corner

*I supervise a staff of 21 in the coronary care unit of a large hospital. While we all work our tails off nightly, our new aides just don't seem to have the same presence of mind as us veterans. I know a lot of it comes with experience, but they seem to freeze when confronted with ambiguous situations. I can't afford to help them with every little decision. What do I do?*

A few questions and a few strategies:

1) Is there a pattern to the decisions they can't seem to make? If so, this is not a generational, but a training issue. A little time invested on the most common situations might clear up a number of these confusions.

2) Do they know where else they can turn besides you? This may be their first professional job out of school. Naturally, they will look to the person in charge for all the answers. Encourage them to seek out the veteran nurses on the floor for suggestions. At the same time, encourage these nurses to take a few seconds to shepherd those who are less than decisive as they encounter ambiguity on the job. Yes, everyone is busy, but the teamwork will bring new people up to speed faster.

3) Have you considered providing some training on critical thinking? While these young people have learned the technical end of their jobs, they've also grown up learning to make decisions based on a menu of options (i.e. menu-driven-thinking). They may be simply struggling with the responsibility of creating, analyzing and making choices in an unfamiliar environment with no computer to coach them.

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“When many of today's teachers entered the field, it was a popular career choice for women and minorities. Now, the most talented women and minorities often enter the business world.”

Michael Allen  
Director for Teacher Quality  
Education Commission of the States