

Gen Trends

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

December 2006

Bowling On-Line

Eleven years ago sociologist Robert Putman published his book, *Bowling Alone*, in which he lamented the demise of community within the US. It has become apparent over time, however, that much of community has not died, but migrated onto an electronic platform. But this on-line community is far different than simply sitting with neighbors on the front porch.

Firstly, there is a lack of interdependence. The oldest living generation came of age learning the value of community because of their dependence upon each other for everyday support. This interdependence has evolved, however, into independence as succeeding generations have learned to use government agencies and other institutions for their basic needs rather than relying on the person next door. With the coming of the digital age, those seeking assistance can conduct this business without even talking to a live person. This increase in anonymity not only increases one's sense of privacy but also suspicion of the guy next door.

Secondly, the number of relationships most people maintain has expanded exponentially. But this is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it has opened our minds to people and possibilities we never dreamed of even a decade ago. On the other, recent research indicates that the number of close friends most people have has declined significantly. As we've seen with websites like MySpace.com, FaceBook.com, and YouTube.com, one can have thousands of "friends" and yet remain isolated and anonymous. I have to ask what impact this phenomenon will have on social skills and self-esteem over time.

Thirdly, there is a gap between those who do and those who don't. I've written before about digital immigrants and digital natives. Digital immigrants, like

me, have migrated into the computer age with some trepidation. While we can and do use this wizardry, the first urge for many is to still reach for the phone rather than the keyboard. The opposite is true for the digital natives. Having matured with the computer age, they reflexively turn to digital applications when wanting to communicate. If you have a telephoning 50-something working with an e-mailing 20-something, it's a recipe for miscommunication and distrust. Inject this into the entire environment and you have loss of community.

Finally, there is impatience. Technology has programmed us to expect instantaneous results, regardless of the situation. Where I might once have taken time to visit with the person behind the counter, I increasingly feel a pressure to simply transact business and move on, especially if there is someone behind me. How will our sense of community evolve if it becomes dominated by transactional communication with little or no time for sharing with strangers or even friends? How will the emerging generations be socialized to think about trust, community, and sense of self and others?

So what's the bottom line? Take the initiative to foster the sense of community around you. Take the time to include those of other generations. (They won't bite.) Strike up a conversation with the teenager behind the counter. "Waste" a minute or two making friends with the person next door. Turn off your cell phone, Blackberry, Bluetooth, and PDA and actually talk to someone. You might find it refreshing.

Send your ideas and let me know what you think. I'm at wendover@gentrends.com.

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The average console game player is 26 years old.

Yankee Group Research



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Do You Have a Case of PCAST?

Brandies University and women's research firm Catalyst have coined a new term for those who worry about what their pre-teen or teenage kids are doing on weekday afternoons. PCAST or Parental Concern over After School Time is a major concern for working parents at top US companies according to a report released this month.

These worries transcend race, gender, and income with parents most concerned about unsupervised daughters as opposed to unsupervised sons. According to the study, five percent of working parents experience extreme stress over caring for their school-age kids.

Hmmmm . . .

According to an eToys Direct consumer survey, 64% of those responding said that "naughty or nice" is not a factor in deciding what or how much their children will get for Christmas. Perhaps a sign of our permissive times?

Don't Forget . . .

The Center's curriculum on managing *age diversity* is the perfect solution for improving results in your workplace. From the novice presenter to a seasoned veteran, the package includes easy-to-use instructions and materials that eliminate the hassle of research and development. Deliver the material in a live session. Make it available on-line. Hand someone the self-directed course on a disc. Then watch productivity grow as employees incorporate what they learn into the workplace. Contact Deb Bonner for more information. 800-227-5510.

My nephew the high school freshman would sooner show up for class in wingtip shoes than be caught watching old-fashioned television.

Diane Carman,
writing in the *Denver Post*

Case Study Corner

Patricia is a 34-year-old part-time professional who joined our office full of Baby Boomers about six months ago. While she is perfectly competent, her communication style is both bossy and demanding. This includes both condescending e-mails and demeaning comments about certain practices in the office. Most of us are aghast at her behavior, but when I've approached her about it, as a colleague, she's gotten defensive and doesn't appear to understand that she's doing anything wrong. Your thoughts?

I'm not sure this is a generational issue as much as it is an individual who has not been taught the tenets of communication and etiquette. While many Xer professionals tend to be more assertive in their dealings with colleagues, this woman's behavior is simply unprofessional. Since you are not her supervisor, it can be difficult to help her understand why what she says and does might be considered offensive. If she's condescending in her communication style, chances are she's placing herself in a superior place to those around her, at least subconsciously.

In my mind, you have several options: 1) Avoid communication with her as much as possible, although this is probably an impossible task. 2) Approach your supervisor about her behavior and express your concern by giving specific examples. If your supervisor was responsible for hiring this individual however, s/he may not want to own up to this woman's behavior. 3) When you can, approach this woman about the behavior that occurs. In response to an e-mail, you might write, "I was troubled by the tone in your last message. It sounded so demanding. I know how e-mail can sometimes be impersonal. What is it that you were really trying to say?" While she may be defensive, perhaps she will begin to reflect on whether she is doing herself a disservice by communicating this way, especially if she hears this feedback consistently.

You can also hope that others in your office, seeing the way you provide feedback, will take your lead. After all, they can't really complain if they don't attempt to resolve the situation too.

It's a Two Way Street

Last month, a reader took me to task for the way I characterized the younger generations in the past couple of issues. As one might imagine, I walk a fine line as I attempt to interpret the behaviors and values of the age groups and provide workable solutions to dealing with and making the most of these differences.

I develop the insights I share based on the research the Center conducts; the research of others; and the anecdotes readers, clients, and colleagues relate to me. When someone tells me a story or complains about a particular behavior, my first inclination is to ask others if they have seen that behavior as well. As you can see from the case study to the left, sometimes the problem has little to do with age. I am a big fan of patterns to verify the stories I am told and the research I see.

I also write and speak with the purpose of stirring discussion. Adults learn best in conversation and discourse. That's why it's so healthy to get concerns out on the table quickly and consistently. But this is a two-way street. In order to learn, one must participate by asking questions, telling stories and challenging assumptions. Being 51, I make it a practice of searching out the young people in my audiences to gather their feedback and suggestions. There is no better way to research than to immerse yourself in the group you are studying.

I always welcome comments. In fact, I wish I saw more coming from the information we provide in both print and on the platform. Keep that feedback coming! I promise to respond to every message. [Bob Wendover](#)

Have a Situation?

We're always looking for interesting situations around which we can build case studies. E-mail one that we can use and we'll send a book to you from the Center's library of resources.

Happy Holidays!