

GenTrends

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

February 2006

A Lack of Civility?

As I spend a portion of my time reading and writing e-mails every day, I have begun to notice a difference in style between the generations. It may be subtle and not even an issue to many. But to some, it is a lack of civility or even rudeness that they interpret as a frustrating sign of the times.

I am speaking of salutations. The Baby Boomers, for the most part, grew up learning the proper formatting of written communication. They begin letters and notes with "Dear" and end them with "Sincerely, Cordially" or even "Affectionately." They learned all this from their parents, the Matures. The Matures had it hammered into them from birth. I've seen 75-year-old high school dropouts writing letters using the King's English.

As technology has evolved, however, greater emphasis has been placed on efficiency and less on form and style. This has resulted in a sense of discomfort and frustration among some workforce veterans who receive mails they interpret as rude or disrespectful.

Where a Mature might write an e-mail that begins with, "Dear Mr. Harris," the Baby Boomer might begin with "Dear Phil." The Xer might begin with, "Phil" and the Millennial might simply start writing what's on his or her mind. After all, we all know to whom it is addressed. That's displayed in the address line.

Of course this is not all encompassing. I received an e-mail yesterday from a 50-something, that simply began with what was on his mind. But we need to be careful about assigning the traits of rudeness or discourtesy to individuals simply because they have learned to communicate in a different era.

Solutions?

You Want Solutions?

I was speaking to a group in California a while back and someone in the front row said, "These are great insights, but give us the solutions. Tell us exactly what to do."

While I would love to provide a set of written instructions for managing the four generations, no one in their right mind would attempt such a feat. When it comes to supervision, we learn from our own successes and failures and those of others. We offer a program, for instance, entitled **Been There, Done That: Best Practices for Managing Age Diversity**. It is packed solid with examples of how employers throughout the US have learned to engage, retain, and motivate those within a diverse workforce. You can also consult the back issues of this newsletter for strategies that have been illustrated in the many case studies we've published. But the bottom line is execution. It is tempting to think of the many reasons why these strategies won't work . . . too busy, too expensive, too many politics, lack of support from above, and so on. But if you don't try, you'll never know. Even if the strategy fails, those involved know you're trying. The least you can do is ask. Don't be afraid to open the door to other generations. The gap in perceptions is not as wide as you think. But the "rank and file" will not attempt to bridge that gap until you do. Just begin!

While We're on the Subject ...

Don't forget! There are more than 60 back issues of *GenTrends* packed with ideas, resources, strategies and solutions. Check them out. Pass them around. Spread the word. www.gentrends.com/newsletter.html

Upcoming Center audiences include:

Georgia Society of Association Executives
Municipality of Anchorage
Material Handling Equipment Dealers Assn.
Phoenix Police Department

"GenTistics"

43%

of the US workforce will become eligible for retirement in the next ten years.

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics



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Yeppies?

If you haven't heard, researchers have discovered another category of 20-somethings. Yeppies, or Young Experimenting Perfection Seekers are described as "life shopping" by Kate Fox and her colleagues at the Oxford University's Social Issues Research Centre. Fox observes that today's graduates are increasingly adopting a "browsing" approach to jobs, relationships, and lifestyles. In perhaps a rejection of their parents' Yuppie desires of the 1980s, these young people are hesitant to commit unless they can be assured that their decisions will result in enduring happiness.

The report, commissioned by the online auction firm eBay, predicts that this group may make thirty the new twenty as they postpone life's big decisions until all options have been exhausted.

This may, for instance, explain the increased frequency of young adults who live at home longer than previous generations. It may also explain why so many are comfortable moving from job to job with apparent impunity. While some employers complain about the laziness and lack of initiative among young workers, the evidence seems to point more toward confusion about self-efficacy and the ability to deal with an overwhelming universe of options and opportunities.

As we've seen reported in other studies, this demographic segment tends to socialize with a group of peers rather than pairing off into one-on-one relationships. This provides flexibility to move from one social circle to another without the emotional consequences of a break-up.

As Yeppies continue to search for the ideal existence, many also will have something that makes this "life shopping" a lot easier: the financial backing of their Baby Boomer parents.

Real Tools for Age Diversity

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.

Liven up your training with meaningful practical tools and solutions for improving productivity, morale, and retention.

For more information, contact Barrett Travis at 1-877-229-5501 or e-mail him right now at btravis@gentrends.com.

Let My Children Play

Rescue kids from the grips of a hurried society, urges child psychologist Kathryn Hirsh-Pasek, Director of Temple University's Infant Language Laboratory.

The over-scheduling of children is having a profound effect on the development of imagination, maintains Hirsh-Pasek. Play equals learning, she says, and encouraging them through asking questions about their play can help build a rich imagination. "Faster is not better for young kids," she told a recent audience. "Every moment doesn't have to count. Do one less activity per week and spend time with your kids."

After all, she maintains, the next class of creative people will come from the college of arts and sciences and not the business school.

Case Study Corner

I run a firm representing manufacturers who sell to the construction industry. We've always employed long time salespeople who, once they've learned the product lines, enjoy a comfortable income and a secure job. For the past few years though, I can't seem to find anyone willing to stay more than two or three years. Even if they're doing well, they up and leave just about the time they've learned the lines and the customers. The turnover costs me a fortune and hurts customer relations. What's the solution?

This is a problem facing many sales organizations and it's a reality that won't be going away. As I have maintained for a long time, younger professionals look at a job as a contract. Just because they are working for you doesn't mean they're not looking for a different/better opportunity from the day they start. Veteran salespeople have learned from this and are now emulating this behavior. The upshot is that locating effective salespeople who are willing to settle down is becoming an increasingly futile effort.

The solution to this dilemma is three-fold:

Firstly, your training cycle needs to shorten dramatically. This can be accomplished through technology, more intensive instruction up front, and evaluating whether new salespeople really need to know as much before you cut them loose with customers.

Secondly, you need to maintain an on-going recruiting effort. Examine your firm's cycle of employment. If your average salesperson leaves at three years, you should assume that the same will be true in the future and plan accordingly. Always keep your eyes open for good people.

Lastly, examine the way you do business. What services and offerings can be moved to the Internet? How can you provide better service with less of a personal touch? Remember that just as younger technologically astute people are working for you, the same is true of your customers. In fact, many prefer the more detached relationship.