

Gen Trends

January 2006

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

"GenTistics"

33%

the percentage of high school seniors with a credit card.

Source: Alloy Media & Marketing

Let's Live Vicariously!

Vicarious (v ī-kâr' -i-əs) *shared in or experienced by imagined participation in another's experience.*

Over the past ten years, so-called reality shows have consumed an increasingly large part of the daily television schedule. Americans tune in nightly to the travails of those renovating houses, serving as police officers, and young singles hoping to be picked by Mr./Ms. Right and win a million dollars along the way. While some rail against these shows as the devil incarnate, I have no personal beef with this genre. But I do wonder what impact it's having on those coming of age.

Viewers in their fifties may choose to watch *Survivor* as a form of escapism. But when the show is over, they return to reality. It was fun. It was entertaining. But it is certainly not a situation to which someone rationally aspires. After all, people of this age are subconsciously comparing the events the show portrays against their own life experiences.

Teenagers, on the other hand, do not possess the same life experiences. Many are coming of age immersed in a culture of reality television. But what are the consequences when the *real* reality raises its ugly head? After all, a person cannot go through life living vicariously. Unfortunately, some of our young people can relate more about the contestants on *Survivor* than they can about their own life story.

I might argue that reality shows are just one more variation on soap operas and that is certainly true. But as these young people enter the adult world, what conclusions might they have drawn about building lasting relationships, dealing with obstacles, and the overall price of attaining success?

Are reality shows solely to blame for the degradation of work ethic and the maturity of critical thinking that educators and employers report? Of course not. We could fill a page with the conflicting influences impacting a youngsters' waking hours. It just troubles me that when faced with tough decisions, some of those in the emerging generation are asking, "What would Nick and Jessica do?" RWW

Have You Met Wally Yet?

Wally, that intrepid young director of the Weather Customer Satisfaction Bureau has been "on cloud nine" since his new book came out. People have been raving about the insights he discovers as he continues to learn from Mama Chom, Jerome Numberman, Chiesel Gordon and all the clouds.

Of course, we're talking about *On Cloud Nine: Weathering the Challenge of Many Generations in the Workplace*. This fanciful new book illustrates the obstacles facing most workplaces today as they cope with the age diversity within their ranks. Claire Raines, co-author of the bestseller, *Generations at Work* says, "This clever, well-written book is fun to read and offers valuable insights about the generations working together. It will be an excellent tool for starting rich dialogues."

Co-authored by the Center's director, Robert Wendover and master storyteller, Terrence Garguilo, *On Cloud Nine* is the perfect vehicle for teaching your people about generational differences in a fun and stimulating way. Buy a copy for everyone, for instance, and discuss it over lunch. Take on the roles of Wally, Jerome, and Chiesel and act them out in a training session. Whatever you do, the insights in this book are sure to resonate with those around the workplace. Go to www.oncloudnine.org and click on "Buy the Book." It's a steal at \$13.57.

Upcoming Center audiences include:

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Can You See Me Now?

In a sign of the times, Microsoft has introduced the Comfort Optical Mouse 3000. Clicking a small button on the left side of the mouse opens a window on your screen – wherever you place the cursor – that serves as a magnifying glass. Moving the mouse to the left extends the window. Moving it to the right shrinks it. Rolling the scroll wheel up or down while holding the button down increases or decreases the magnification. It retails for \$27. Now what was that about the Baby Boomers turning 60?

Skills or Maturity?

A study recently released by the Economic Policy Institute appears to refute the widely held belief that there is a growing gap between workers' skills and employers' needs. In 1964, for example, 31% of workers had not completed high school compared with just 13% today.

Michael Handel, author of the study, cites a recent poll by Yankelovich Partners in which 66% of employers say that public school students lack the basic cognitive skills to succeed. But in this same poll 33% say the issue is that young workers have problems with punctuality and attitude. Handel maintains that complaints about skill levels may be a cover for employer dissatisfaction with the maturity levels.

Check out the answers in next month's issue of GenTrends.

The Answers to Last Month's Quiz

What was the name of the actor who left the show ER in 1999 after pulling in 36 million viewers? **George Clooney**

What music sharing software was named after its creator's out of control hair? **Napster**

Which of the following is not a Teletubbie? **Dinky**

In a computer-edited commercial, Fred Astaire dances with what kind of vacuum cleaner? **Dirt Devil**

What beverage brand was pitched by two lizards named Louie and Frank? **Budweiser**

To Ponder

Okay, so we've made the case that in your power years you'll have more time for fun, friends, family, learning, and anything else that rings your bell. We've shown you ways to fund these dreams and pleasures. Here's the catch: you'll have to decide if you'll gear all this free time and capacity to self-indulgence — or whether you've got the spirit to take some portion of yourself and your future and share it with others.

Will you be up to the task of playing your part to help improve our world? We hope so. Our generation's longer and healthier life, our unprecedented level of talent, and our drive to stay in the game years longer set the stage for a transformational revolution in which we can marshal our talents and resources and put them to good use like no generation before us.

Although we were branded the "youth generation," it may turn out that our brightest period is our maturity.

We're not asking you to give up all the fun and pleasures you're anticipating, but rather that you take some part of you and do something good for others with it. This doesn't have to be a high-pressure assignment. Volunteering an hour a month is better than nothing at all—but an hour a week might even be more satisfying. And you don't have to follow the pack; you can pick and choose whatever you'd feel good doing.

Ken Dychtwald and Daniel J. Kadlec
in *The Power Years*

To Read . . .

The Power Years: A User's Guide to the Rest of Your Life. Ken Dychtwald, Ph.D. and Daniel J. Kadlec. John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, 2005. ISBN 0-471-67494-X. Dychtwald, author of the best-sellers *Age Wave* and *Age Power* has produced a manifesto for the Baby Boomer generation. While he and Kadlec fail to address the challenges of those living paycheck to paycheck, they have succeeded in writing an accessible planning manual for those in the middle class and up. Full of examples and suggestions, this book is a helpful read.

Case Study Corner

I hire a continuing stream of work-study students in my position as a supervisor within a university's student affairs division. Over the past couple of years, it's become apparent that some students have misinterpreted the term "work-study." They show up for work with papers to write and other assignments to complete on the job. When I've explained to them that they have to complete the tasks we need to earn their financial aid funds, many of them are shocked. "After all," they say, "Doesn't 'work-study' mean you get to study on the job?" Most comply once informed, although they aren't happy about it. A few simply abandon the job. What do I do?

The solution to this problem begins with communication, but further up the line than yourself. The financial aid office needs to more clearly explain the concept of work-study to those seeking financial assistance. While they may tell you that it's explained in the catalog and brochures and on the university's website, you can no longer assume that students have read this information. One suggestion I would have to address this is to create a box on the application that students need to check acknowledging the responsibilities of being a work-study.

In your office, I would train all of those employing work-studies to set clear expectations with these students up front and *always* have plenty for them to do. If these young learners develop an expectation that the hours they work in your office are a time for homework and surfing the web, it will be tough to turn that situation around. After all, they're there to learn about the work environment and help out at the same time.

I'm sure there are a few students who are simply trying to game the system. When you discover them, terminate them. Financial aid is an opportunity, not a right. I suspect, however, that most simply assume that work-study simply means bring your homework to the office. In this age of entitlement that's unfortunately not too surprising.