

# Gen Trends

June 2006

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

### Redefining Work Ethic (and what to do about it)

A few weeks ago, a manager in his thirties complained to me about the “lack of work ethic” among the young people he supervises. I found that rather ironic since those in older generations were saying the same thing about his age group ten years ago. While every generation seems to perceive the one behind them as “slackers,” it’s more about perspective. Every emerging cohort simply grows up to understand the attributes of work differently.

There are several factors affecting the development of every generation’s perception of work. The first is familial modeling, or the way parents, older siblings, and extended family members model the way they do a job. The second is societal influences. These include media, advertising, and economic cycles, to name a few. The third is technology. With the supposed advantages that computers provide these days, it’s easy to understand why young workers would think that work should be easy and entertaining. Finally, there’s the evolution of work. Baby Boomers came of age in the manufacturing era where most work was accomplished manually. Generation X grew up with the knowledge era and emergence of computers. Millennials are taking what the Xers developed with computers and adding their special spin to it. Add to that the emphasis American commerce places on service and convenience and it’s easy to understand why Millennials might think the work should do itself.

With each iteration, the complexion of work in general changes. Is it any wonder that young workers might be perceived as slackers when they don’t appear to be breaking a sweat?

“That’s a nice history lesson,” you might say, “but I still have these slackers working for me. What do I do?”

Several strategies come to mind:

First, communicate clear and specific expectations to everyone. “Well, duh!” you might say. “Everyone knows to do that.” But ask yourself, “How well do I really do it?” Remember, many young people have a perception of work being fun and entertaining. It’s that way on TV. Right? You’ve got to establish these expectations on the way in the door and then enforce them consistently. Get over your fears of confrontation and deal with those who fail to perform. After all, you’re the manager. Right?

“What do I do with those already on the job?” You might ask. Pull everyone together and explain your concerns about performance, tardiness or whatever the issue. Then wipe the slate clean and announce that from that point forward you will establish and enforce expectations consistently. Will this strategy cause some friction? Probably. Is there any way to avoid it? Not really.

Finally, re-evaluate your organization’s current practices and expectations about how work is done. Maybe there’s room for compromise. Maybe the organization can learn something about work/life balance from these young people. Maybe more focus on the outcome rather than the task will increase productivity and job tenure among young folks. Work ethic evolves. Organizations need to do so as well.

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### “GenTistics”

**Fifty-nine percent of high school seniors surveyed think a company pension is called Social Security.**

US Federal Reserve



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## Religion Crucial to Collegians

According a poll released by Harvard University's Institute of Politics, a majority of US college students say religion is important in their lives and that they're concerned about the moral direction of the country.

In a telephone survey of 1200 students, 70% said religion was somewhat or very important in their lives. Approximately 25% said they had become more spiritual since entering college.

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## Teens' Views on Credit and Spending

In a recently released survey, only 10.3% of teens indicate they own credit cards. But while 5% of those 13-14 report ownership, that incidence rises consistently thru the teen years with 19.6% of those 18 or older owning them.

The survey, conducted by Junior Achievement and the Allstate Foundation, also found that 83% reported paying the balance in full each month. Results indicated that 59.3% have made online purchases with their credit card.

Nearly three-fourths charge less than \$100 dollars per month. Included in this percentage is the 44.8% who charge less than \$50. Clothing purchases top the list at 67% with music and CDs being second at 43%.

Seventy-two percent of teens surveyed also report that they influence what their parents purchase. Thirty-nine percent say they receive an allowance and 82% say they work for it.

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## Question . . .

When was the last time you asked a co-worker twenty-years younger or older how he or she perceives the role of work in his or her life? What might you learn?

## Case Study Corner

*I've spent the past three years preparing one of my young managers to take over the transportation department within my firm. Last week he announced that he's decided to leave and purchase a franchise totally unrelated to what we do. When I asked why, he replied that he'd simply lost interest in what he was doing and needed a new challenge. I feel totally betrayed, but how can I stop it from happening again.*

Yours is a situation that is happening with increasing frequency. Younger generations' view of a job as a contract rather than a calling lets them look at any position or opportunity from a different perspective. But just as this young manager has strived to keep his options open, you should as well.

Be careful about placing all of your eggs in one basket. A tenet of successful succession planning is to develop and maintain a *pool* of candidates for leadership positions. Whether your organization is large or small, avoid "anointing" someone as the heir to a position. Too many things can go wrong.

Be forthright in your communications with emerging leaders. Meet regularly with each to air any concerns on both sides. The more you communicate, the less likely it is that you will be surprised by someone's choice to leave.

Always be on the lookout for good talent. Don't feel overly obligated to those you are developing in house. They don't feel obligated to you. If a good match for an opening comes along, interview the person if only to provide a different perspective. I realize this may conflict with long-held feelings of loyalty. But this is a business and not a fraternity. More and more, employment is becoming a transactional relationship for many.

Assume that a percentage of those you identify as emerging leaders will leave the organization before reaching their potential. That said, you will still need to train and develop them, which is an expense to be incurred, like it or not.

Finally, don't take it personally. This is not about you. It's about the pursuit of the best opportunity, lifestyle, or challenge these young people can attain.

## Who Said They'll Retire?

As the Baby Boom generation edges closer to the traditional age of retirement, it is becoming increasingly clear that many will not choose to go fishing full-time. According to a recent study conducted by AARP, an advocacy group for older Americans, 68% of workers age 50 to 70 said they planned to work full-time after the median retirement age of 62.

Among the most popular reasons mentioned were the continuing need for income and benefits and a desire to remain mentally active. But sacrifices may have to be made. The US Labor Department found in 2005 that annual earnings per worker peaked at \$39,156 between ages 45 and 54 and then declined to \$31,096 for workers 65 and older.

Older workers who either voluntarily or involuntarily leave their present positions will be faced with a job market unwilling to pay them the salary to which many have grown accustomed. Factors influencing this include automated screening processes, the proliferation of job search web sites, and corporate emphasis on efficiency.

For veteran workers who are used to the traditional relationship-oriented application process, this will prove to be a rude awakening. But Boomers will hang in there for a variety of reasons. They don't appear ready for the rocking chair just yet.

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## Don't Forget . . .

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