

Gen Trends

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

March 2006

What Are Computers Teaching Today's Kids About Permanence?

Escape, control-tab, the undo button, back space, control-Z. It dawned on me the other day that much of life is becoming a continual series of "do-overs." Kids have always grown up learning that if you don't get it right the first time, you can yell "Do-Over!" and play will stop so you can try again.

But as we reach adulthood, decisions become increasingly more permanent. One discovers that mistakes can be both final and expensive in more ways than one. Most of us over the age of 30 have developed a set of strategic thinking skills honed by the mistakes of the past. We clearly remember, for instance, planning out what to write in a term paper before turning on the IBM Selectric. One wrong press of a key could result in retyping the page or at least fumbling with the "white-out."

In today's computer environment, any one of the actions listed above will help you escape from errors large and small. If worse comes to worse, you can press Control-Alt-Delete and start over, no harm, no foul.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that we should return to days of ribbon and correction fluid. But we must keep in mind that those entering the workforce have no where near the experience needed for dealing with the consequences of little mistakes that, over time, teaches them how to deal with big mistakes. Is it any wonder that they sometimes struggle with decisions where menu driven options are not available and the choice is final. Think I'm wrong? Send me an e-mail.

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Real Tools for Managing 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 Deborah Bonner at 1-877-229-5501 Or e-mail her right now at deb.bonner@gentrends.com.

The Veracity of What We Say

I was conducting a faculty seminar on Kodiak Island, AK and made the off-hand comment that one can order from Pizza Hut on-line and have it delivered. Less than a minute later, someone in the back of the room raised his hand to tell me that he had checked and it that was not true for the Pizza Hut in Kodiak.

While we all got a laugh out of it, it struck me how easy it is to have those around us check the veracity of what we say instantaneously. The veteran teacher, leader, manager or supervisor needs to remember that the authority with which we speak is more dependant on the accuracy of what we say than ever before.

Upcoming Center audiences include:

Georgia Society of Association Executives
Municipality of Anchorage
Material Handling Equipment Dealers Assn.
Phoenix Police Department
Sioux Valley Regional Health Services
National Petro-chemical Refiners Association

"GenTistics"

More than half of all students graduating from four-year schools in the US lack the literacy skills to handle complex, real-life tasks such as understanding credit card offers.

Source: American Institutes for Research



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A Common Question

Is there a resource which truly defines the age ranges associated with the different generations (i.e. Baby Boomers - 1946-64)?

Sorry, but one doesn't exist. At one point, we took all the writers and theorists on this subject and laid out their definitions on a matrix. Nobody agreed with anybody. We simply use the US Census birth curves and dissuade people from placing too much importance on the actual dates. After all, a person doesn't develop enough of a memory to remember society's teaching until he or she reaches age five or so. That, by itself, juxtaposes the whole birth date argument by five years. Rather than looking at exact birth dates, we look at the macro trends in behaviors, attitudes, and use of language and assimilation to the technology of that era. We ask, "What impacts did these influences have on the generation as it came of age?" This means up thru age 20 or so. I hope that helps. For additional insights, ask us for an article called *A Generation's Outlook on Life*.

Cue-Dependent Children

Kimberly-Clark has introduced a new line of toilet tissue for children. Each sheet of Cottonelle Kids has been printed with puppy paws. The children un-roll paws until they reach a puppy. Then they tear off just the right amount of tissue. But what do three-year-olds do in the public restroom? They could be traumatized.

This may be a short-term fix for parents. But in my mind, it is just one more small step in making today's kids dependent on external cues rather than learning to think for themselves. Today, toilet-tissue. Tomorrow, who knows? If you disagree, send an e-mail and tell me what you think.

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Case Study Corner

I am a 41 year old woman managing ten men primarily in their 50's and 60's. This poses some unique challenges. Some do an excellent job; some are coasting into retirement. A few have significant difficulty taking suggestions for improvement. When people have been doing the job for 30 years, how does one get them to change for the last five? Money, competition among peers, advancement opportunities do not seem to be working as motivators. I had one success with demonstrating to an employee how his results impacted my performance evaluation--it did not seem to matter to him how he fared, but he worked harder so that I would succeed! Of course, that does not work for everyone . . . what ideas do you have for me?

You're right; it's hard to change the habits and attitudes of those who have been with the same organization for 30 years. That said, they still have an obligation to perform according to expectations. If you confront it that way, of course, some will turn it into a war.

The gender issue may be a factor and you know that already. There also may be the issue of tenure. If these individuals are somewhat typical of the Mature and early Boomer generations, they've been with the organization for a considerable part, if not their whole career. It has probably begun to dawn on them that they have reached the pinnacle of where they can go and now someone their daughter's age is in charge. This can be a rude emotional awakening. Different people handle it different ways, but I would try to stay attuned to that through what they say, especially if it's "off the record." Without being soupy about it, let them know that you, and the organization, appreciate their on-going contributions. You might diplomatically tie this into their sense of duty.

I think your strategy of getting them to work harder to impact your performance evaluation is spot on. Of course, this only works on some people.

As for those having difficulty with suggestions for improvement, you might try the "sandwich technique."

Begin by complimenting the person on what he's accomplishing. Then ask, "Would you mind if I gave you a little constructive feedback?" He'd be a fool to say "no." Then you might continue with a phrase like, "I've noticed that . . ." and identify the behavior that concerns you.

Then ask, "Do you mind if I make a suggestion?" While this may seem a little overly gentle or sappy, I have found that it tends to open people up to direction or constructive criticism. No one's kidding anyone, of course. You're the boss, so he knows it's more than a suggestion. I'd be careful of saying anything that might be interpreted as, "I know you're old, so you may have trouble getting this." (Not that you would do this intentionally.) Finally, you might close with a little more encouragement and ask for his thoughts. Pay special attention to the non-verbals.

Your comment that "money, competition among peers, advancement opportunities do not seem to be working as motivators" is accurate. This is about relationships and work environment. You've got to find that balance between allowing them to continue to work in ways that make them feel comfortable and, at the same time, meet expectations. If I were in your shoes, I might bring it up collaboratively. Say, "here's the situation. The organization is asking us to perform this way with these expectations. Rather than me trying to force something down your throats, I'd rather bring it to you. How do we work this out?" Then watch what happens. It goes without saying that you're giving them the opportunity to determine their way of doing things, but if they don't choose to do so, then it's going to be incumbent upon you to take a more direct role. They're bright people and will hopefully make the most of the situation. Will there be some grouching? Sure. But let the group handle that internally.

Generations: Understanding Age Diversity in Today's Workplace