

# Gen Trends

May 2006

*Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!*

## Let's Revisit Assessment Centers

An increasing number of managers are expressing frustration with their inability to successfully hire young workers. They complain of a lack of work ethic, a deficit of critical thinking skills, tardiness to interviews, and an overall lack in candidates' sense of urgency. "Here I am offering them the opportunity make a lot of money," says one thirty-something manager, "and I can't get them to return my calls."

When I ask these managers about their selection methods, most report the same litany of tactics: resume review, reference check, and a series of interviews. Is it any wonder that most of them feel like they're at the mercy of the applicants? But there is another way, one that while more time consuming, has proven its worth time and again.

Assessment centers were developed by the American military during the Second World War as a means for assessing the skills and attributes of rising young leaders. A number of corporations adopted this method after the war, but it has never really caught on. However, the reality is that what you invest in the selection process is what you tend to get out of it.

Assessment centers have been known to take on many forms. In-basket exercises are one of the most common. In this exercise, applicants are given a selection of tasks to complete within a given period of time. These tasks approximate the work they would be doing on the job. This might include writing letters, make sales calls, resolving a dispute between employees, or completing a research project and making a presentation. In some cases, current

employees are enlisted to play the role of customers, disgruntled workers, and so on. While these individuals are playing a part, they are also evaluating the applicants' performances. At the conclusion of the exercise, those making the selection can evaluate each candidate on time management, accuracy, communication skills, organization, persuasiveness, and a host of other attributes. But in-basket exercises are not the only option.

Toyota Motors, for example, assembles a group of applicants and provides them with the components to several hundred flashlights. The group is then asked to assemble the flashlights as quickly and as efficiently as possible. As the group goes about its task, the evaluators can observe the skills and attributes of each candidate. Who are the most organized? Who are the natural leaders? Who are the task masters? Who are the nurturers?

As one might imagine, the variations on assessment centers are endless. Once an exercise like this has been developed and normed, it can become the most accurate way to assess candidates for any job.

Some may argue that assessment centers, while effective, are simply too expensive and time consuming to implement in these busy and pressure-filled times. But ask yourself this. Does it make sense to spend the same amount of time selecting a \$50,000 professional as you do selecting a \$5000 copier? Of course not. Then why do we continue to do it?

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## "GenTistics"

The US Census Bureau estimates that 45% of children under the age of five are minorities.



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## A sign of the times ?

YouTube.com, the creation of twenty-somethings Steve Chen and Chad Hurley, has become one of the latest fascinations for several million people. The site features amateur video clips about everything under the sun, with some 20,000 new postings a day.

YouTube.com went live on May 5, 2005 and its usage has rocketed past competitor iFilm by a factor of nine. The site's content, described by one company executive as "raw and random," consists of video clips of dancing, pranks, spoofs, spankings, pratfalls and highlights of network TV shows. Most of the later are taken down due to copyright infringement. Four college interns from Stanford University serve as censors, evaluating clips flagged as objectionable by the site's users.

## Must be a Boomer . . .

"Thanks to cell phones, I saved \$30,000 today. Suffering from a mid-life crisis, I was hot to buy a new car. I went to two lots where I was ignored by salesmen on cell phones. Thanks guys. I'm over it now."

As quoted in the **Atlanta Journal Constitution's** Vent section

## 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.

## Case Study Corner

*Is it me or do young professionals lack the social graces to get a job? I'm 37 and a regional manager for a medical device firm. I hire salespeople on a regular basis. The applicants in their twenties will submit a resume and then fail to respond to my phone calls. They arrive late for interviews and dress casually. They do little, if any homework about my firm or the industry but seem surprised when I appear frustrated. I receive very few thank you notes and if they don't get an offer, they don't seem to care. I'm wasting time and energy on all this. What do I do?*

Let me begin by pointing out that not every young professional acts in this way. But I do hear a lot about this type of behavior. Here are some thoughts on the reasons and a couple of practical ideas for addressing the situation.

As you have read in this newsletter before, many young people don't feel a real sense of urgency about getting a professional job. In some cases, they've returned home after graduation and are living rent-free with parents. In other cases, they're taking society's advice about having fun after school. If a good offer comes up, they'll consider it, but not necessarily leap at it. Still others are facing the reality that now they're on their own and might be less than confident in handling professional expectations. After all, few colleges offer a class in business etiquette

Many have not learned or practiced the "social graces" you expect. If parents didn't teach *and* enforce this etiquette, it simply doesn't occur to these young people to write notes or respond in a timely manner. Sadly, there are no real consequences for this lack of professionalism other than not getting a job they're not sure they wanted in the first place.

Finally, there's the technological factor. Anyone can apply for hundreds of positions with the click of a button. When you contact them, they may not even remember that they submitted a resume.

Now for the practical solutions:

Begin by asking if these young professionals are the best match for the job.

As much as your firm might have an established practice of hiring new graduates, you might consider recruiting from other sources as well. Professionals with a few years under their belts will bring experience and generally a sense of professionalism to the job you are seeking. Might they expect more money? Probably. But they might be more than worth it if hiring them results in longer tenure and higher productivity.

If you are determined to recruit younger applicants, there are three suggestions I would make:

One, work to establish better relations with faculty and campus staff. No one better than they can refer you to the individuals they believe might be best suited for your openings.

Two, look outside the business school. It is far easier to train technique than is it to train etiquette and social graces. I dare say that those enrolled in the liberal arts might be better prepared in this way than those studying finance and accounting. Don't believe me? Check it out.

Three, continually evaluate the quality of candidates you receive from the schools you target. If you're clear with your expectations of candidates up front when meeting with faculty and staff, they should be able to pass along people with the attributes you seek. If not, cut your losses and approach other schools. Don't buy in to the idea that a school's reputation rubs off on the students. It comes down to individual departments, faculty, staff members, and the students themselves.

## In a related story . . .

*Fortune* magazine reports that new college graduates are paying career coaching firms \$3000 and more for classes on job search, interviewing, and resume development. Someone should let these people know these services are free at the college career center.

**Generations: Understanding Age Diversity in Today's Workplace**  
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