

Gen Trends

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

September 2006

Are We Developing Young Leaders?

"I was so excited to get the promotion," said Jodie when I met with her. After having been with the firm for four years, she was now a regional manager responsible for 12 restaurants. "But if truth be told," she continued, "I don't really know what I'm doing half the time. My VP keeps promising to spend some time with me, but after two months on the job, I'm just making it work my way."

How typical is Jodie's experience? Quite typical, I am finding. As more and more organizations try to do more with less, many find themselves promoting young performers without adequate development. While young people may embrace the new opportunity, they can find themselves struggling to develop the skills, insights, wisdom, and maturity to succeed. If they don't, they may be fired, with another performer sent in to replace them who lacks that same preparation. The result can be an expensive, never-ending cycle of promotions and failures. This, in turn, discourages young talent and helps spread the word that the organization is not a good place to work.

Those in younger generations have enabled this phenomenon with their impatience to succeed. After all, they argue, other people in their twenties or thirties are already running large organizations. Then they proceed to show you the latest phenom to be featured on the cover of *Fortune* magazine. Unfortunately, they miss the point and fail to realize that true development takes time.

If any organization is to thrive as these young generations emerge into management and leadership, then it must invest the time and money to

identify, train, and mentor young performers who have the potential to assume these responsibilities. The fact that some are bright, aggressive and well spoken at their present level does not mean that they will thrive when given authority to manage functions far in excess of what they manage today. They may tell you they're ready, but don't believe it.

The organizations that will thrive in the midst of this generational transition are the ones that begin by taking time to select the right people in the first place and then engaging them in development exercises from the get-go. This means training managers to do a better job of evaluating them, exposing them early-on to the rigors of the business, and encouraging them to meet with today's senior management.

Leadership, done right, is hard work born of experience, trial and error, failure and recovery and an unquenchable thirst for insights no matter how small. Put it all together and over time the organization develops a pool of young talent from which future leaders can be drawn. But without this investment of time, energy, money, reputation, patience, training, coaching and mentoring, that same organization might end up with a pool of Jodies, thrilled to be in the job and flying by the seat of their pants. What steps can you take this week to initiate the process of identifying and developing the emerging leaders where you work?

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"GenTistics"

76% of undergraduate college students started the 2004 school year with at least one credit card. The average outstanding balance was \$2,327.

Nellie Mae



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To ponder . . .

Let's face it. Quarterlifers—people in their teens, 20s and early 30s—are overwhelmed. I know, because I'm one of them. Once we leave the protection of home and school, we are suddenly faced with many questions: "What should I do for a living?" "Where can I find Mr. or Ms. Right?" "What is my purpose?" "Who am I?" "How can I make money?" and "What is the meaning of life?" We turn these questions over and over in our heads as we venture into the real world for the first time.

It's not only the questions that are difficult. It's also the sheer number of them. Think about it. You're looking for the perfect career, making new friends, choosing a place to live, searching for the right partner, contemplating a family, exploring your spirituality, questioning the meaning of it all and wondering if you can survive. Wow! The irony is that we all go through this, yet few of us talk about it openly.

Just a few years ago, at age 20, I remember tossing and turning in bed one night with thoughts running through my head. I wondered why I seemed to be the only one who didn't have it all figured out. I couldn't understand how friends could already be getting married, committing to mortgages, and having children. I wanted to know why I was here on earth, and if my life mattered.

To read . . .

Upload Experience: Quarterlife Solutions for Teens and Twentysomethings.

Jason Steinle. Nasoj Publications, Evergreen, 2005. ISBN 1-933246-03-0. Steinle provides some great insights into the stresses facing today's emerging generations. While some may dismiss young people's concerns as overwrought, this book enables the reader to reflect on how the challenges facing youth have changed from years past.

Case Study Corner

I run a small mechanical services firm in the air conditioning business. My staff is composed of mostly long-time employees in their 50s. But as these people retire, the young people I hire to replace them are a different breed. They come fresh out of school and think they know everything. They don't want the overtime if it means working into the evening and I can't keep them more than a year or so. What would you suggest?

No matter how you look at it, there is a sea of change taking place within your organization. While you've been blessed with loyal employees, most younger workers you hire are going to view the job as a contract rather than a career. This means you will have to adjust your mindset about selection, training, productivity, and retention. While your generation was brought up believing that a job is the dominant influence in life, many of today's young people see it as simply a means to an end. They do not derive the same pride from a job well done as you and your veteran employees. There are a variety of reasons for this, but you want solutions, not philosophy. So . . .

Begin by taking a closer look at the attributes your workers need for the job. Yes, they will all have the technical knowledge. But what about interest in the job? Why go into this line of work? What do they get out of it emotionally? If they can't answer those questions to your satisfaction, don't hire them even if they got straight A's.

Be clear up front about hours and expectations. You may scare some skilled people off, but that's okay. Their skills are worthless to you if they don't want to work hard. (Just be careful about sharing too many war stories in the process. No one's ever going to work as hard as you do. You're the owner.)

Today's young worker will also maintain a shorter tenure. The time of the 10- or even 20-year employee has passed. So rather than fighting it, make plans to compensate for this change in behavior. Consider how your expectations of employees must change to anticipate shorter cycles of training and tenure.

Leave It to the Millennials

A group of college students in Boulder, Colorado, frustrated with having to figure out where the best clubs are for happy hour each night, have constructed a complete on-line directory of all of the city's happy hour promotions.

The site (www.happyhourboulder.com) breaks down happy hours by different locales within the city. It also offers reviews and a place for readers to post their own reviews.

"Usually during the year, I'll pull up a few guys' names, and if there is anything derogatory on there, I'll just make a copy of it and send it to their mom."

University of Colorado football coach, Dan Hawkins on how he polices players' use of MySpace.com, Facebook.com and other social networking websites

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. 1-800-227-5510.

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