

Gen Trends

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

April 2007

Rate My Professors

I serve as an adjunct professor at a local college. During office hours, a student named Dustin stopped by for a conversation. I happened to ask him how students chose professors and/or classes during the scheduling process.

"Ratemyprofessors.com," he replied. Intrigued, I asked how it worked.

"You just pull up the site, find the college, find the professor, and read up."

"Have a seat Dustin," I said.

"You can walk me through this." All of a sudden, he got that deer-in-the-headlights look. "Oh, I don't know . . ." he stammered. He clearly was uncomfortable with my request. Then it dawned on me. "Have you written something about me on the site?" I asked with a smile?

"Oh no way, Sally!" he replied quickly. But I could see he was trying to remember if that was really true.

Reluctantly, he sat down, and we pulled up the site. Dustin taught me how to create an account and log on. It soon was clear to me that the ease of this was the perfect illustration of how the connected experience of the internet has replaced the old "word-of-mouth" method that I used to find out about professors and classes.

Under my name on the site were half a dozen listings of students who — thankfully — had written glowing reviews of my teaching practices and my classes. As I happily read the comments, I noted that next to my name was a small, red symbol that I could not quite make out. When I asked Dustin what it was, he demurred. When I persisted, he replied it was a chili pepper.

I didn't make the connection. "What does it mean?" I asked.

"Well duh, Sally," Dustin replied. "It means you're HOT!"

"Hot?" I repeated? "Like in they think I'm hot?!"

He smiled at my innocence.

Well, go ahead, make MY day! Here I was surprised that this site exists in the first place. Then I was delighted that my classes had received high ratings. But hey! They think I'm HOT! Is that cool or what!

More than all of this, I've learned a great deal from Dustin and other students with whom I have subsequently talked.

One, the younger generations really want to find people they respect and learn from and who will positively influence and guide them in their lives. Two, they will go to places I never thought of to research and find the information they need. Three, they use technology that reaches many more people than word-of-mouth ever did.

Sites such as Ratemyprofessors.com combine these elements to allow the Millennials to come together and comfortably exchange information. They use what works best for them, all the way around. They also do so in a much shorter time than it ever took me to chase down the friend of a friend of a friend who took the class in question two years ago. So who says you can't teach an old dog new tricks? Especially a "hot" dog?

Sally Field

Note: Sally Field (really!) is the Center's newest Senior Consultant. [Click here](#) to learn more about her.

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"GenTistics"

87 percent of family businesses surveyed do not have a formal mentoring program for their next generation of leaders.

Kreischer Miller in partnership with Bryant University and the Delaware Valley Family Business Center



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To ponder . . .

Creativity is an area in which younger people have a tremendous advantage, since they have an enduring habit of always questioning past wisdom and authority. They say to themselves there must be a better way. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, they discover that the existing, traditional way is the best. But it is that one percent that counts. That is how progress is made.

*Bill Hewlett, Co-founder
Hewlett-Packard Corporation*

A Sign of the Times?

More than 100 students at top law schools have sent an e-mail to partners and recruiting coordinators at top firms asking them to sign on to principles espousing a saner work environment. This would include balanced hours policies such as reducing billable-hour expectations. In return, the students say they are willing to accept less pay. So far, no word from the law firms.

At What Point Do We Trust Our Kids?

American Family Insurance has begun placing free cameras in the cars of teenage drivers to record what happens when there is a sudden change in the vehicle's movement. Based on technology already used on fleet vehicles, the aim of the company is to reduce accidents and hopefully premiums. The camera records the 20 seconds immediately after the movement occurs both inside and outside the car. This clip is then forwarded via cellular technology to DriveCam, the company that offers the technology for analysis.

The company has tested the system in two high schools in Minnesota and Wisconsin. American Family will not view the clips unless there is an accident. Auto accidents are the leading cause of death among teens according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Case Study Corner

I'm wondering what suggestions you have to offer regarding how a manager who is trying to mentor or train a younger employee can deal with a know-it-all attitude. It is especially problematic when the mentor is attempting to teach a new skill or procedure -- especially a required procedure -- and the mentee refuses to follow the mentor's instructions because they "know-it-all" or believe their way is better. Your thoughts?

My first inclination is to ask the person to explain his or her approach in detail. Sometimes ignorance is masked by bravado. If you feel that might cause embarrassment, you might try a more diplomatic approach such as "How about if I explain my approach and then you explain your approach? Then we can compare notes."

If the person doesn't seem inclined to cooperate, I might say, "Tell me about your experience with your approach and why you're so sold on it." Then listen closely and look for the veracity in what the person says.

If the person just won't let you get a word in to establish a dialogue, there's probably not an opportunity for mentoring at that time. Sometimes there's a maturity issue involved.

If the procedure is required or regulated, this leaves you with more leverage and the young person with less latitude. I might say, "I understand your desire to leave your impression on what you do, but we're confined by the regulations involved. I applaud your creativity, but you need to follow the established procedures."

If he or she still fails to comply, this is no longer a mentoring issue as much as it is a supervision/discipline issue. If you see this situation is becoming commonplace, I might argue that this is also a selection issue. While you want to hire creative people into positions where creativity is possible, we need to look for people who will comply with the rules when that is the nature of the position.

"If you make people THINK they're thinking, they'll love you; But if you REALLY make them think, they'll hate you." ~ Don Marquis

Technology Natives and Productivity

Last month, my 12-year-old daughter and I bought a digital camera. She paid half and I paid half. That night, I sat down after she went to bed and spent about an hour reading the manual to figure out how the thing works. She got up the next morning and knew more about operating it after breakfast than I did, just by using her thumbs.

It is the nature of the Millennial generation to understand software architecture even if they can't define the term. Having been immersed in this technology since birth, most don't even realize that older individuals lack this innate ability. Sure, we can operate software, but our approach to it is generally more linear and less intuitive. Someone like me, learns new software programs with deliberation. Young people jump right in, the way we use to use a typewriter – you just begin.

All this said, it can be unsettling to observe the overdependence on technology that many young people exhibit. They seem unaware that there are wonders outside of the computer environment from which they can learn, explore, grow, and enjoy. But we technology immigrants come at the challenge of having the memory of manual process in our heads and therefore fall into the trap of comparing these means of getting things done with technological approaches. Rather than extinguishing these primitive thoughts and focusing on the present technology, we sometimes devolve into "I remember when" and slow our productivity. On the other hand, we older folks have a memory of manual processes that enable us to keep working when the server crashes, the battery dies, or the Blackberry falls in a puddle. RWW

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