

# GenTrends

*Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!*

February 2007

## The Evolving Corporate Community

After talking with a number of managers this month, I have found myself considering the present state of community within organizations throughout the U.S. Those with whom I have spoken have expressed frustration and uncertainty over what they consider a lack of stability and trust between colleagues. "At what point," one asked, "will we begin to re-establish a sense of community inside of organizations?"

While I would not paint as bleak a picture, the composition of organizational community has certainly evolved. This can be attributed to a number of factors including shorter job tenure, the depersonalizing effects of electronic communication, media influence, threat of litigation, pressures to do more with less, and less of a desire among young people to depend on co-workers as a primary source of friendships. Add these together and one can understand why older workers might sense a loss of trust and sense of community where they work.

Younger workers, especially the Millennials, have a far different perception of this environment. For them, job tenure has always been shorter and the media has always exposed corporate wrong-doing regardless of accuracy or context. The pressure to do more with less has always produced stress in the work environment. Threat of litigation has always been the primary way to keep employers honest and e-mails, text messaging, and cell phones have always been the only way to communicate. Why waste time meeting in person?

One might suggest that we teach those in younger generations about

*continued on page two*

## Attention Subscribers!

To better protect you, our subscribers, we will be changing the way in which we send this newsletter every month. For this reason you will receive an e-mail in the next week asking you to "opt-in" as a subscriber. The subject line will read "GenTrends newsletter – Please opt-in." **Should you not respond** or delete this e-mail, you will be removed automatically from our subscriber list. Our apologies for any inconvenience this may cause. Thanks again for your interest in our work.

*Bob Wendover*

## The Younger/Older Elder Gap

The Associated Press reports that retirement communities are beginning to see evidence of a division between older residents and so-called "younger-olders." Those on the leading edge of the Baby Boom who are choosing to join these communities are demanding more comfortable accommodations and amenities than those who are twenty-or-more years their senior. Being products of the Great Depression, those in their 80s are used to a more Spartan lifestyle. Community managers report that squabbles are arising over everything from food and dining room attire to monthly fees for computer access and spa services.

Call 1-800-227-5510 to  
book us for your next  
meeting.

Upcoming Center audiences include:

NMPP Energy  
Midwest Conference of Community Bankers  
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers  
Western Association of Food Chains  
IGA – SuperValu  
Rio Salado College  
KPMG, LLP  
Modular Building Institute

## "GenTistics"

42% of Internet users ages 10 - 17 say they have seen on-line pornography in the past year. Of those, 66% said they did not want to view the images and had not sought them out.

*University of New Hampshire*



Robert W. Wendover  
Editorial Director



15200 E. Girard Ave.  
Suite 3000  
Aurora, CO 80014  
Phone: 303-617-7207  
Fax: 303-617-7209  
Toll Free: 800-227-5510  
[www.gentrends.com](http://www.gentrends.com)

## To ponder . . .

As modernity evolved into its “post” phase, childhood was bound to change. Those changes have been widely interpreted in the language of a disappearance of childhood because postmodernity has been characterized by more porous boundaries between adult and child worlds. Neil Postman, the original proponent of the disappearance thesis, blames the replacement of print culture by television, which requires no training to master and exposes children indiscriminately to adult themes. Cultural trends have further undermined modern childhood. Parenting norms have shifted to become more egalitarian, and the media typically depicts highly empowered children and childlike adults. Kay Hymowitz has discussed this cultural shift as a “new realism,” arguing that “far more than in other cultures and regardless of age, American children are treated as autonomous, self-directing actors.” Social conservatives are highly critical of these developments and blame liberal ideologies of permissiveness, moral relativism, and the breakdown of patriarchal authority. Liberals are ambivalent, torn between the view that children should be respected and that they need more protection . . .

Some years ago, cultural critic Stephen Kline observed that “the merchants and marketers of children’s goods have always paid more diligent attention than educationists to children’s active imaginations and incidental cultural interests . . . The marketers didn’t have to assume that children’s daydreams, hero worship, absurdist humor and keen sense of group identity were meaningless distractions or artifacts of immaturity. Rather, they recognized that these attributes were the deep roots of children’s culture, which could be employed as effective tools for communicating with them.” This willingness to accept children on their own terms, without judgment, is surely one of the secrets to marketers’ success.

*Juliet B. Schor in **Born to Buy***

## Case Study Corner

*I would value your input on how to provide a "cafeteria plan" of benefits and perks (other than basic health, 401(k), etc.) for employees that takes into account generational differences and preferences while still maintaining some level of equity among the various groups. Have other companies tried to incorporate this? If so, what has been the outcome?*

You pose an interesting question, but one that might be unanswerable. We developed a program a couple of years ago entitled **Been There -- Done That: Best Practices in Managing Age Diversity** with the specific purpose of exploring who provides incentives, benefits, perks, and so on that work best. (For more information on this program, [click here](#).) This turned out to be easier said than done for a few of reasons. 1) Pretty much any program provided might be adopted by people of any age, should they wish to do so. 2) Obviously there are inherent dangers in promoting a program or benefit specifically targeted at one age group due to potential discrimination. 3) The organizations to which we talked had a variety of benefits in place. But most were created by some ambitious soul simply because it seemed like a good idea. Then she or he sold it to the decision makers. Only after this happened did it occur to the organization that the idea was more popular with one age group than another.

My suggestion is to keep your eye out for what others are doing and consider how it might apply to different aged workers. To help you with this, I’ve listed a few of the ideas we’ve come across:

Citizens Bank - Providence, RI - Offers \$5000, 0% loans toward purchasing a house. For every year the employee stays with the company, \$1000 of the loan is forgiven.

JetBlue Airlines – New York, NY – Reservations agents work out of their homes anywhere in the country. This also saves the company \$10 per employee hour.

Cognex Corp. - Natick, MA -- CEO sends letters to award winning employees’ parents informing them of what their children have accomplished.

## Corporate Community *continued*

the value of community, but that’s not the point. Instead we need to develop solutions that will encourage a sense of belonging among those of all ages. That, of course, is easier said than done. But here are a few ideas:

Dr. Mark Goldstein, President of the San Diego Humane Society, held periodic after-work gatherings for all staff to provide a time for idea sharing and a little bit of fun. But the younger staff just wouldn’t stay. “So we moved the gatherings to the last hour of work. Now everyone stays, and we’ve been able to promote better communication between functions. While it costs us some staff time, we feel our sense of community is critical to our success as an organization.”

The owner of Dearden’s Furniture in Los Angeles periodically demonstrates to employees where the revenue in a \$1000 sale goes by gathering them in the warehouse, bringing in 1000 one-dollar bills, and graphically distributing them to the appropriate departments according to expense. What a way to encourage those of all ages to collaborate, to communicate better, and look for ways to save money!

Merkle Direct Marketing in Lanham, MD requires all its employees to take and teach classes in its Merkle Institute of Technology (MIT). All workers must earn a certain number of credits per year to be eligible for salary increases. Consider the sense of community that grows when everyone is sharing with and learning from each other.

Minyard Food Stores in Texas runs a buddy system for new employees. If the new person doesn’t show for work he or she is contacted by the buddy to find out what assistance can be provided.

Developing and maintaining community in any organization these days is a bigger challenge than ever before. But the rewards for doing so are innumerable. Remember, you don’t have to change the world, just your little corner of it. Send your ideas for encouraging community by [clicking here](#).