

Gen Trends

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

January 2007

What Kind of Legacy?

Last month I had a conversation with a manager in his fifties about the wealth of experience he has accumulated over the past 30 years. While acknowledging that he possesses an understanding of his particular discipline that few in his industry can match, he downplayed it by saying, "None of these young professionals really care. They think they can get everything they need off the Internet. They don't want to listen to my stories, but most of what I know can be explained only through stories. I've tried a couple of times and they treated me politely, but I could see their minds were elsewhere."

This exchange brought to mind once again the conundrum our society is facing as the wisdom of older generations competes with technology that appears to have all the answers. This is not to say that all this experience contains wisdom, although one generally learns more from failure than success. But if those in younger generations don't learn from this history, they will be bound to repeat it. I don't, however, expect them to come rushing forward to collect these insights. This responsibility rests on the shoulders of those possessing this knowledge.

Some might ask themselves, "Who's got the time to share insights with people who don't care? I've barely got enough time to get my work done as it is." But in spite of this, ask yourself "What kind of a legacy do I want to leave?" If you've spent decades building something you can be proud of, isn't it worth that extra effort to engage those who will take your place over time? While many may dismiss what you have to say out of hand, the smart ones

recognize that all knowledge and wisdom do not reside on a server somewhere. They realize that lifelong success is something that comes out of the relationships with those who have walked before them.

So if you're lamenting that no one really cares about the wealth of insights you've gained, don't give up hope. Ignore the young upstarts who have already "arrived" and look for those who do take time to engage. Chances are they'll be in charge of your legacy. Send your ideas and let me know what you think. I'm at wendover@gentrends.com.

"Ms. Speaker:

The President of the United States"

In perhaps a sign of the times, a radio station in Denver broadcast a "pre-game" and "post-game" show before and after the President's State of the Union address. They analyzed the dress the First Lady wore and the color of the tie adorning Mr. Bush along with all its possible meanings. They dissected Speaker Pelosi's hairstyle along with the attire of various members of Congress. After the speech, they invited bloggers from across the U.S. to evaluate the finer points of the speech before Mr. Bush had even left the rostrum.

How are we to interpret this phenomenon? How can our elected officials expect to get anything accomplished when their words and actions are judged in miniscule detail without benefit of patience or perspective? More to the point, how can we expect emerging generations to show respect for our nation's leaders, regardless of political persuasion, when we allow this drivel to dominate the discourse?

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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

When the Electronic Toys Don't Work . . .

About 10 years ago, our neighborhood was hit with a tornado – lots of damage, but no one was hurt, thank God. But in the week that it took to get electricity re-connected, I watched our 4 children (ages 9, 11, 13, and 15 and two neighborhood kids (ages 12 and 15) struggle to find something to do. I finally stepped in and suggested good old charades. They were all a bit distrusting that anything from the ‘dark ages’ could be fun, but after a little coaching and encouraging they were willing to try.

During that week, they played a lot of charades. . . . But each time, they each came to me to get ideas of what they could act out. “My God,” I thought, “They need a drop down menu to play charades!” No imagination whatsoever. As the week wore on, they still needed my ideas, but the laughter and teasing and joyfulness in our home grew. They learned to enjoy each other and their confidence grew.

When the electricity came back on, the charades went away. But my husband and I started parenting in a new way. Instead of offering choices and suggestions for solutions, we encouraged them to develop their own “drop down menu” so they could decide which solution was the best for them. We told them we had faith in them and would support whatever they decided. (We weren’t very popular when this started. And it was very hard to watch them struggle.)

Several years later, an ice storm hit. Again, no electricity for five days and nights. Without my prompting, our kids got the kids next door and they started playing charades again. This time they were all older, but the imaginations had developed. They came up with their own ideas and brought back some of the highlights from the first round of charades.

Jeanne Colleluori

Case Study Corner

I am a long-time supervisor in an insurance claims department. Is it me or is there a difference in the care taken in work between those over forty and those under thirty? It seems like this new generation of workers have less in terms of organizational skills and don't seem to care that they don't. With all the paperwork around here, it is critical that we be able to put our hands on every document.

Given the opportunity, we could probably blame all the woes of the world on the youngest generation. Instead, we should consider that those coming of age in the past 15 years take a different approach to work due to their experience with technology. That said, I would look upon their familiarity with computers as a strength, not a weakness when it comes to organization.

If I were in your shoes, I would probably begin to address this concern by reflecting on my own expectations. The key is whether these individuals can retrieve specific documents in a timely manner. That begs the questions: “Are the documents in paper or electronic format?” and “What is considered timely?” Then I might audit the process and see if my perceptions reflect reality. Make sure, however, you measure what really counts. A disorganized desk is not necessarily a sign of a disorganized mind. It’s the outcome that counts.

I would also include some assessment of organizational skills in the selection process if you don’t do so already. Try dumping a pile of papers in front of applicants with a list of priorities and a deadline and watch what happens. How do they approach the task? What do they do when they get stuck? How well do they follow directions? Can they work within the time frame without stressing out? Compare all this to an electronic version of the same task and see what happens. Do they organize computer files better than paper files? What does that tell you?

On the job provide clear parameters. Don’t assume that they think like you. Trust me, they don’t. Help them understand the reasoning for each parameter. Who knows? They might end up organizing circles around you, given time.

A Thoughtful Response to Last Month's Case Study

A reader took issue with some of the suggestions for resolving last month’s case study that we thought were worth reprinting. If you would like to review the study itself, [click here](#).

“I was a 33-yr old who worked in an office with Baby Boomers. I was the only Xer on the staff. There were times when office practices created by the older generations were barriers to getting a job done. They can hold these practices as sacred cows.

“If a practice is inefficient this can be very frustrating. I was very vocal and straightforward regarding practices that hindered my ability to work efficiently. I understand how Xers’ attitudes can be frustrating to Baby Boomers who want to follow a step-by-step process. But if an Xer can eliminate some steps yet obtain the same outcome, s/he should be allowed that freedom. It took me several years to convince my supervisor as well as co-workers to change a long-held practice that could be condensed with the use of available technology.

“I question the way the individual in this case study was approached. If the 34-year-old was approached with the attitude that she was in the wrong and must change, most people would take offense. It took time for those in my office to understand that I would tell it like it was. Over time, they came to appreciate my straightforward approach. You do not have to wonder if there is a hidden agenda. We had to work together to develop a communication style that we both understood. They learned to be more straightforward when communicating with me and I learned to express myself more diplomatically.

“I hate to see an Xer targeted for reproach when it may be a perception based on challenges to wasteful practices. Thank you for taking the time to listen to my feedback.”

*Crystal Kaufman
A Proud Xer!*