

# Gen Trends

*Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!*

March 2007

## Young Managers and Older Professionals

A woman approached me after a seminar recently and said, "I'm 32 and have just been placed in charge of a department of veteran engineers who look at me like I'm something from another planet. Most of them are old enough to be my father. How do I manage them and gain their respect?"

"I would begin," I said, "by recognizing that this is not about managing as much as it is about supporting these senior professionals. You can take for granted that they all know what they're doing and have been doing it as a team for a long time. While they may have their differences, they probably operate as a pretty efficient team.

"Recognize that for most, your presence may be perceived as a defining moment in their career – the point at which they realize that they have reached the pinnacle of their working influence and that the leadership of the organization is in younger hands. This will trouble some more than others, but be prepared for at least a few difficult moments.

"It's best to begin by laying your cards on the table. You've got everything to gain by demonstrating your respect for their experience and desire to learn the nuances of what they know. Seek out their ideas as often as possible. Some will share more than others, but time will probably soften most hard feelings. Assure them that your job is to enable them to do their jobs.

"Mutual respect will develop over time with patience and reflection. Your consistency, honesty, and willingness to support them will reward you with the continuity and performance that will enable you to advance in your career."

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*Bob Wendover*

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## "GenTistics"

25% of students admit to being embarrassed by parents who are overly involved in their job search .

*Experience, Inc.*



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## To ponder . . .

Generation Me has the highest self-esteem of any generation, but also the most depression. We are more free and equal, but also more cynical. We expect to follow our dreams, but are anxious about making that happen. In a recent poll, 53% of high school seniors said that growing up is harder now than it was for their parents.

The first wave of GenMe faces a very different world from what we were led to expect as children. The messages of our youth were unflaggingly optimistic: You can be anything. Just be yourself. Always follow your dreams. To borrow Alan Greenspan's phrase, our upbringing was irrationally exuberant. Irrational, because when we reach adulthood we often find ourselves lonely, rejected by graduate schools, stuck in a boring job, and/or unable to afford a house. ("Your job's a joke, you're broke, your love life's DOA," goes the theme song of *Friends*, though many of us find no one is "there for" us either.)

Like the dot-com economy of the late 1990s, the bubble of high expectations bursts once GenMe hits adulthood. Older generations have also faced these struggles, but GenMe has been led to expect a bounty in a time of famine. In a 1980s Talking Heads song, a rich man wonders, "How did I get here?" and says, "This is not my beautiful house. This is not my beautiful wife!" as if he is unsure how he attained the riches around him. GenMe feels the opposite — "Where is my beautiful house? Where is my beautiful wife? (And "Where is my fulfilling job and my shot at fame?") The gap between expectations and reality has widened to a yawning gulf of disappointment.

*Jean M. Twenge, Ph.D.*

## To Read . . .

***Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled — and More Miserable Than Ever Before.*** Jean M. Twenge, Ph.D. Free Press, New York, 2006. ISBN 978-0-7432-7697-9.

## Case Study Corner

*I manage a large pharmacy with a staff of 60. A couple of months ago I hired a newly-minted pharmacist who had just graduated from a local university. On the first day of work, she showed up with her father in tow. She asked if it was okay for him to "hang around" for a while to see what she would be doing. I was so shocked, I said okay. He stayed for the morning, took her to lunch and then left. She's a good employee and we haven't seen him since. I just don't know what to think. Is this acceptable? Will this become the norm?*

This is another example, albeit a somewhat extreme one, of a so-called "helicopter parent." We've seen this kind of behavior in all manners of work environments. Thankfully, most are isolated incidents. These actions can be attributed to a number of factors from well-meaning parents who simply want the best for their kids to parents who are willing to manipulate situations to get what they believe they, or their kids, deserve. (Remember, sometimes this is more about the parents' desires than the kids'.)

I would be reluctant to be harsh or judgmental if it happens again with another new person. Kindly smile and say, "We generally frown on visitors due to workplace demands," and leave it there.

In some cases, employees might even be embarrassed by their parents' behavior but would rather just go along than to be at odds with them. They might even apologize at a later time. I would not bring it up again with the employee. There's no point in belaboring it. The relationship has to be between the two of you, without any interlopers.

Should this woman's father begin to interfere by calling to ask about her performance, scheduling, workload, or anything else, I would inform him politely that you are unable to provide any information about his daughter — firstly because of privacy laws and secondly because you are trying to develop a trustworthy working relationship, and you cannot have outsiders interfering in that relationship. Do this diplomatically, but do it. Hopefully it won't come to this.

## A Thoughtful Response

*Dr. Bill Stowe in Arlington, TX shared the following thoughts about last month's column on community:*

In today's corporate culture where profitable companies have a reduction in force because they fail to meet stock market expectations, is there a commitment to employees to generate community? In a world of mergers and acquisitions that makes big money for executives with golden parachutes and acquisition specialists, but treats everyday workers as merely expenses, is there the respect that leads to community?

While all generations crave a sense of community, have we already taught the younger generation that work is not the place to find it? If corporate America cannot change its culture, can there be the necessary respect and commitment to generate community?

Perhaps our time would be better spent finding solutions that meet the demands of today's realities. Since Millennials, in particular, value group activities, would community within a small team be more attainable than trying to establish connections throughout a large organization? Perhaps we should rotate new hires among project teams until they find a compatible one.

It is well documented that the Millennials want recognition. How about an individual lunch with the CEO or a seat on stage and an introduction at the next shareholders' meeting as recognition for outstanding work? Maybe the reward should be time off without having to worry about the work piling up upon return. Perhaps there should be more leniency in the work day allowing for exercise or community service on company time. Should there be a policy that allows for reimbursement of any type of education, not just work-related?

Consider if a sense of community with its demands for respect, commitment and dependability is possible in your workplace. If so, that is great. If not, move on and find a substitute that works. *To read Dr. Stowe's entire commentary, [click here](#).*