

Gen Trends

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

November 2007

Lisa's Dilemma

Lisa manages a clothing store in a Denver area mall. She's 45 and employs 39 individuals ranging in age from 18-27. Like most retailers, she's been working with the leading edge of Millennial employees for close to a decade. She's told me that she sometimes feels like a football coach stalking the sidelines with a laminated card full of offenses and defenses.

In her case though, the card contains some 50 tasks that need to be done to keep the store well maintained. "My job," she says, "is not to perform any of these tasks, but to make sure everyone has something to do. I live in fear of looking around and seeing some of my staff texting, talking, surfing, or gaming."

"How can you develop a sense of responsibility and common sense within these young people," I challenged, "if you feed them every single step they need to complete?"

"I am a pragmatist," Lisa responded. "The mother in me wants to nurture them and help them mature into the critical thinkers they will someday become. In some cases, I take the time with those who seem to have the potential. But then there's Gavin who looked me in the eye the other day and said, 'You know, when I came to work here, I never thought you were gonna make me like work the whole time.' You have to choose your battles."

Where might you, the reader, be on the scale from idealist to pragmatist? While some deride this emerging generation as selfish and directionless, there are tens of thousands who are proving them wrong. Send your strategies to wendover@gentrends.com and we'll publish as many as we can in the next issue.

Is the Digital Generation Losing Its Heritage?

Sociologist Jos de Haan of Erasmus University in Rotterdam believes that the generation of young people born into the digital era are less connected to their cultural heritage because of their focus on connecting electronically. He maintains that they are chatting and playing more and reading, researching, and learning less.

De Han argues that while adept at navigating through the virtual world, these emerging youths are not finding their ways to institutions that connect them with the cultural riches of their past. The Internet is perceived to be a rival to traditional culture, but it could become an ally, he maintains. De Han encourages museums, libraries, archives, and other institutions to connect with this young generation in other ways than simply digitizing their collections.

I Remember When

The Center's electronic game for understanding generational differences.
[Click here for more information.](#)

Upcoming Center audiences include:

Purdue University
Mechanical Contractors of America
Otter Tail Power Company
APQC
American Supply Association
American Veterinary Distributors Association
Nebraska Municipal Power Pool
Air Conditioning Contractors of America
Des Moines Area Community College
Visiting Nurses Association of America

76% of parents say they deserve at least "a fair amount" of blame if their child uses drugs.

Public Agenda research

"GenTistics"

Nearly 60% of consumers ages 18 to 25 use credit and debit cards as their primary payment method.

Visa USA, Inc.



Robert W. Wendover
Editorial Director



15200 E. Girard Ave.
Suite 2500
Aurora, CO 80014
Phone: 303-617-7207
Fax: 303-617-7209
Toll Free: 800-227-5510
www.gentrends.com

Are You a Blackhawk Parent or Just Toxic?

It seems to be a phenomenon that is sweeping the nation. Educators and employers alike are increasingly expressing concern about the so-called “helicopter parents” who are inserting themselves into every aspect of their children’s lives. We hear stories in our seminars weekly about the time it takes to deal with these interlopers and the toll it must be taking on youthful problem solving development.

Columnist for *The Wall Street Journal*, Sue Shellenbarger, a parent herself, has identified five distinct variations on this theme in her interviews with others:

Blackhawk Parents swoop in with guns blazing, demanding action if they feel their child has been wronged. They start at the college president’s office, regardless of the issue, for instance.

Toxic Parents meddle in intrusive ways and will go so far as impersonating their children on-line to check out potential roommates or monitor grades. If nothing else, this implies that their children are ill-equipped or untrustworthy to those around them.

Consumer Advocates regard education as a transaction and expect complete access to grades and other records since they are paying the bill. While parents can assist effectively in isolated situations, educators report constant headaches with keeping them mollified.

Safety Experts focus on the security and lockdown plans in case of conflagration on campus. Some ask for fire inspection records and emergency operations manuals. While well-intentioned, complying with many of these requests places an undue burden on resources.

Traffic and Rescue Helicopters are the most benign. They are always ready with advice, supplies, and TLC but tend to leave decisions to their children. For more information, go to <http://www.utexas.edu/features/2007/helicopter/index.html>

Case Study Corner

I recently became the co-manager of a fast food restaurant. This is the first time that I'm managing young adults, most of whom are 18 and under. The biggest issue seems to be an excessive amount of gossip and innuendo that causes all kinds of issues. I'm not quite sure how to handle this. In my previous management positions, I served in the military and worked for a corporation where the guidelines were pretty cut and dry. What should I do to bring all this to a manageable level, or more preferably, to a halt?

My first reaction is -- "They're kids!" This is not so much about a difference in the generations as much as it is about age-old adolescent immaturity. It might be argued that today’s young people are meaner or more devious in their gossiping and innuendo because of the modeling they see in the media. But I’m not convinced that’s true. In any case, that does not solve your problem.

You might begin by determining whether this is impacting productivity, sales and customer service, or simply irritating you personally. Without dismissing your concern, I have to wonder if some of your annoyance is derived from the structured environments in which you have managed before. I would be surprised if there wasn’t at least a bit of this because of the adjustment to a considerably different work environment and workforce.

If this is the case, you might discreetly determine which employees seem to be the most involved and take these employees aside individually and let them kindly know that their behavior is becoming a nuisance. Chances are they’ll back off, although you may have to repeat this process periodically.

Consider too, the impact the behavior of a few might be having on the rest of your workforce. Who wants to work in an environment where associates are “slicing and dicing” each other. Fast-food jobs are too prevalent not to walk across the street and sign on somewhere else. The last thing you need is employees chasing other employees away. If it appears in any way to be race-, ethnicity- or gender-related, you need to keep a close eye on it to avoid accusations of allowing a hostile work

environment.

If, in your opinion, these behaviors are interfering with the business, then a more formal approach is in order. Examples of this interference might be employees who gossip in front of customers or who avoid each other on the job, thereby impacting productivity on a shift. If this, or something like it, is the case, you might begin by adding this issue to the agenda for the next store meeting and letting everyone know that these types of behavior are interfering with operations. Be sure to provide some explicit examples without identifying the parties involved. I would avoid getting preachy. Saying things like, “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything,” will probably fall on deaf ears. If they did not develop these beliefs as a child, you’re certainly not going to teach them in this environment.

If this approach doesn’t work, it’s time to take individuals aside and let them know more formally that their behavior will not be tolerated. But keep it behavior-oriented. Simply saying, “I don’t like your attitude,” is not enough. You need to be specific. If the behaviors continue, it’s time for some progressive discipline.

Sacrificing Accuracy for Entertainment

On November 11th, *60 Minutes* broadcast a segment entitled “The Millennials are Coming” which once again reinforced the myth that these young people should be given everything they demand or they will up and leave for another job in a heartbeat. I, and others, have spent the past decade helping managers understand that enabling these individuals out of fear that will they will abandon their jobs forthwith is unfounded. Yes, there is a small percentage who find fun more important than work, but the majority remain on the job and are simply seeking ways to contribute meaningfully in a progressive work environment. It’s our job to help them do that. That means creativity and flexibility on *both* sides. Maybe Morley Safer should attend a seminar.