

# Gen Trends

October 2007

*Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!*

## In-Basket Exercises

Having researched and written about recruitment, selection and retention for close to 20 years, I get a lot of questions about how to look for the best people. A number of the inquiries revolve around revealing the true personality traits of someone you might hire. In my mind, it comes down to common sense more than anything else. Sure you can administer one or more of the battery of assessment tools on the market. Each one will provide scores and predictors about how a person might/will perform on the job. But when push comes to shove, we still look to our gut before making the decision.

Most people who apply for a job can DO what's required. If you suspect they can't, that's easy enough to determine. This is about the match of personality, along with the energy and focus the person brings to the job. Before posting a position, ask yourself what kind of human attributes you would like to see in the best matched person. Then develop a means for assessing the presence of these attributes.

A while back for instance, I spent some time with the managers of a social service agency. These are those devoted souls who place foster children; deal with parents who fail to pay child support and a host of other heart-wrenching human conditions. While compassion is an expected part of the job, so is good detail orientation. Since most of these cases are in the hands of the courts, it is essential that the filings be letter-perfect. One missing signature can delay the process by months.

I asked these managers if they looked for detail orientation during the screening process. "Yes," they

said. "We ask about it in every interview."

"And every applicant claims to have it," I responded. "But how much time is lost cleaning up the messes of those who turn out not to have it?" I asked. "After all, someone's child support is dependent upon a case worker's accuracy."

I suggested creating an "in-basket" exercise to assess applicants. Doing so can be quite easy. All it would take in their particular situation is to make a list of five to seven of the common forms and tasks that the average case worker completes in a typical day. Next, create a set of brief instructions for completing each task or form. Then develop a short scenario that addresses each of these challenges. Finally, estimate how much time would be necessary for a novice case worker to complete each task and your assumptions by asking a couple of detail-oriented people outside the agency to complete the exercise. Once this simple norming process has taken place, the exercise is ready to administer to applicants.

Any organization can create a practical exercise like this to address the challenge of assessing human attributes. It's easy. It's valid. And it can yield all kinds of insights. So why don't more organizations do it?

## I Remember When

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## "GenTistics"

About 150,000 homeowners, aged 62 and older will apply for reverse mortgages this year, twice the number from 2006.

*National Reverse Mortgage Lenders Association*



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## Mommy Blogs

ABC News reports that there are more than 15,000 mothers across the US who are blogging about their day-to-day challenges of parenting and running a household. One, Megan Crowley, is getting as many as 30,000 hits per day.

Leave it to the techno-savvy Xer generation to move the at-home coffee klatch on-line and expand it into a national forum. Society discovered the impact of soccer moms during the last presidential election cycle. With today's technology, these same soccer/blogger moms have an exponentially larger potential impact on everything from politics to consumer product rollouts. All it takes is one mommy blogger to write about a bad experience she's had with a new diaper or cooking product and the item might very well be doomed. Of course, this same mom might materially contribute to the successful launch of a product she likes.

While young parents in past decades relied upon celebrity spokesmen and a few good friends for information about the best way to clean a carpet or control a child, today's young moms can conduct an instant consumer survey and receive hundreds of responses within a few hours.

The marketing community has also discovered this phenomenon and is pouring dollars into it in the form of paid advertisements on these sites. Even Hollywood producers have asked Ms. Crowley to develop a sit-com based on her family's misadventures.

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## Unrealistic Expectations?

Roughly 50% of high school seniors in 2000 were planning to continue their education after college with an advanced degree compared with only 20% in 1976. Meanwhile the number of seniors who actually earned advanced degrees remained the same.

*World Future Society*

## Case Study Corner

*I am an audit manager for a large accounting firm. As young associates have come to work for us in the past few years, I've seen phone calls that resolve everyday questions give way to a pronounced preference for e-mail and texting. The problem is that little misunderstandings now take on a life of their own. Rather than making a quick phone call to a client, we end up with an endless set of exchanges that are easily misinterpreted and, in some cases, blown out of proportion. Then I end up stepping in, sometimes having to apologize to a client for an issue that we created. This, in turn, makes us look foolish to those we serve. What would you suggest?*

You're dealing with one of the impacts of an ultra-connected generation who turns to hand-held devices rather than taking time to call for clarification. In some cases, calling simply doesn't occur to them. For others, it may be a strategy for covering butts should a mistake be made because of the electronic trail created. Still others may be using it simply because they believe it saves time. What-ever the reason, this practice is probably having an impact on your profit and credibility as an organization. Here are a couple of suggestions.

You might begin by conducting a post-mortem on a few of these mini-crises. Ask those involved on your team to recollect what happened step by step. Be careful to do this in a nurturing way. You don't want them getting defensive. You want just the facts. If the issue involved a client, call that individual as well and ask him or her to supply his or her version of what happened. If you've been in the loop on these electronic exchanges, review the chain of events and look for points at which the communication broke down and why. If you haven't been in the loop, ask one of those involved to forward the trail of these exchanges to you.

Once you understand the evolution of what happened and can demonstrate that it appears to be the result of miscommunication due to texting, lay the details of one of these situations out on PowerPoint slides. Then gather your team and take them through the process message by message and ask them to

*continued in the next column*

## Leadership and the Emerging Generations

This newly-released video program is based on the popular presentation of the same name that's been conducted for associations and corporations across the US. Discover how aspiring leaders are going to change the way we all do business. Learn how to anticipate these upcoming impacts. For more information, [CLICK HERE](#) or call our offices at 1-800-227-5510.

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*continued from the middle column*  
identify where the communication may have broken down. Resist the temptation to simply show them. Their discovery will be worth the wait. Hopefully a couple of the post-mortems during a staff meeting will send the message that voice contact with someone can prevent a host of misunderstandings. If this does not work within a reasonable period, it's probably best to bring them together once again and develop a set of informal parameters for resolving these issues, especially if they involve clients directly.

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## The Silver Tsunami

On October fifteenth, Kathleen Casey-Kirschling, a Baby Boomer born one second after midnight on January 1, 1946, applied for Social Security benefits. She is the first of some 80 million that will make this passage in the next 18 years. At the end of World War II, there were 44 workers paying social security taxes for every retiree receiving benefits. The current ratio is three workers for every recipient. With some \$15 trillion in wealth projected to be inherited by the Boomer generation, one might think that this is no big deal. But this inheritance will not be distributed evenly. In 2005, an AARP study of Federal Reserve data found that the *median* Baby Boomer born between 1946 and 1955 had a net worth of just \$114,600 including home equity. Stay tuned.