

Gen Trends

February 2008

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

What Does Work Look Like?

One of the questions that arises constantly during my seminars is "Why don't these kids know how to work?" Most of the time, the questioner continues with a rant about how "they" have no work ethic, no self-initiative, no common sense, and so on. When this happens I try to remind the frustrated manager that today's emerging generation has come of age with a different perception of what work actually is. There are several reasons for this.

Firstly, the exposure that the Millennial generation has had to work environments is considerably different than those in previous generations. As a group, they have come of age on a diet of distractions – iPods, cell phones, texting, Googling, instant answers – all delivered as menu-driven options. Asked to describe the world of work and many will respond with a blank stare. Other than "take your child to work day," most have never spent any meaningful time in a real work environment other than restaurants and retail.

Secondly, the media portrays skewed views of work environments. Examples include *Scrubs*, *the Office*, *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, *the George Lopez Show* and a host of others. Daily tasks always seem to be entertaining. The coworkers are goofy, funny, sometimes even bizarre. The environment is stimulating, interesting, and almost always in pristine office settings. There are no repetitive things to do. There are no plain looking everyday people. If you had grown up on a diet of this for years, what would you conclude?

Finally, society's emphasis on convenience has convinced many that manual labor is beneath them. Some say that it starts at home. Lawn

services, rather than kids, mow the grass. Parents shovel in the winter while their kids stay hooked to the computer. Children seem to be so busy with their own activities that they don't have time to do the chores older generations grew up with. When I ask parents about this, their typical response is, "I don't want to deprive my kids of opportunities." (Mind you, my wife and I are no role models in this either.) Eventually the children reach a point where they want or need to get a job. Other than looking across the counter at a fast food restaurant and chatting with the occasional retail clerk, most have not received any instruction or indoctrination about day-to-day life on the job. Has anyone taught them how interview, how to dress, how to complete an application? For a small percentage, this has taken place at home or even perhaps in school. But for the majority of the population, it is a baptism by fire. Don't believe me? Ask a few local retailers to tell you stories about the applications they receive and the interviews they conduct. So what's the solution? Here are a couple of suggestions:

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[Ask About the Generations.com](http://www.gentrends.com)

Got a burning question about managing others of diverse ages? Check out our new monthly tele-seminar offering: [Ask About the Generations.com](http://www.gentrends.com).

The next session airs March 18th at 2:00PM EST and is hosted by the Center's own Jeff Vankooten. Get timely solutions ideas and resources that work.

Previews on the Web

After many requests, we are now posting video previews of the Center's programs on our website www.gentrends.com. Currently, previews are available for [Hey Dude!](#), [Managing Age Diversity in Today's Workplace](#) as well as [Leadership and the Emerging Generations](#). Look for us to add others in the coming months.

"GenTistics"

40% of companies polled in Atlanta, Boston, San Francisco and Washington are actively targeting retirees as a part of their recruiting efforts.

On-line job site Jobfox

Check out Bob's new blog.

[Click Here](#)



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Seniors on YouTube

The March/April issue of AARP, the monthly magazine focused on seniors, recommends that their readers check out the hundreds of videos produced and posted by those over fifty. With titles like, “Wassup Grannies” and Grandma’s Breakdance,” we have clear proof that the internet is not just for kids.

Succession Planning at the Top a Big Worry

More than three quarters of executives surveyed by the Society for Human Resources Management say that equipping would-be top leaders is a primary concern. Close to 70% are also concerned about the recruiting and retention of top talent in most areas.

But What About Those Doing the Work?

While most of the attention paid to succession planning is focused on top management, the bigger issue is those retiring from middle management. Yes, the firm will have to replace one aging CEO, but it will have to replace *hundreds* of aging middle managers. Want to learn the rudiments of making this transition successful? Order a copy of the Center’s audio program [Succession Planning and the Emerging Generations](#). Better still, ask us to work with your team on organizing and implementing the process. Call 1-800-227-5510 and ask for Deborah Bonner. She can get you started.

Looking for a Better Way to Interview?

Check out the February 21st posting on Bob Wendover’s new blog. Go to [generationsblog.com](#) and discover why the traditional way of sitting across the table from candidates has lost its effectiveness.

Case Study Corner

I oversee the property management division of a large development firm. I am amazed at the appearance of many of the young graduates who apply for our jobs as property managers. Wouldn’t they understand by age 22 that they need to dress in a professional way? How can I ensure that this practice will not continue once they’re hired?

This situation demonstrates once again that we need to be prepared for a wider range of challenges during selection. That said, we also need to reflect on how informal the world of work has become.

From a practical standpoint, you appear to have two choices when faced with candidates who dress in what you consider inappropriate ways. Option one is to simply end the interview and assume that if they lack the common sense to dress properly, they will not perform professionally on the job.

Option two is to continue the interview on the hunch that looks may be deceiving. Granted, candidates dressed like this will not be given the same benefit of the doubt, but I’d hate to think that you’re turning away someone good over one indiscretion. (In some ways, I can’t believe I am taking this position at age 52. My visceral response to this question was to say, “Throw them out on their ear.” But our times are more complex.)

One manager with whom I have discussed this situation suggested that continuing the interview is the best strategy. But she also said that promising candidates need to be informed in no uncertain terms that the way they are dressed is not acceptable once on the job.

Most Famous List is Changing

In a nationwide survey of 2000 high school juniors and seniors, a Stanford University professor has found that our perception of America’s most famous has turned a page. Topping the survey were the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Harriet Tubman, and Rosa Parks. In fact three of the top five are women. While US presidents were excepted from the list, the first founder mentioned is Benjamin Franklin at number five. Others in the top ten include Thomas Edison and Albert Einstein.

What Work Looks Like

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Sit new employees down on the first day and take a few minutes to explain work in your environment. Give them a brief overview of how the place makes money. Explain how their position fits into the big picture. Discuss the value of mastering something and the pride people feel when they finally “get it.” Not all of this will sink in of course, but it opens the door to allow their curiosity to engage.

Check in with new people every couple of days, and simply ask, “How are you feeling about this?” Then wait for an answer. You may not get one other than a patronizing smile and a “Fine.” On the other hand you might see some interest in their eyes that tells you they’re not only catching on but also understanding the value of what they do.

Set the stage yourself. Pitch in on the “scut” work occasionally. Show them how it’s really done. Let them see you sweat. Think of the impact you have on new employees when you spend some quality time working and talking with them.

Celebrate their successes and the successes of the others around them. Tony’s mastered the fryer in the kitchen. Annette went thru an entire shift without a register mistake. Allie has got the hang of assembling orders during a rush. Be careful about dismissing these as meaningless examples. Remember, young people in their first job need some reinforcement that they belong and are thriving. Give them a feel for what work looks and feels like and you’ll be building retention, productivity, confidence, and a reputation as a good place for a first job.

Got Seminar?

Think of us when planning your next conference. Our speakers are entertaining, thought-provoking and results-oriented. Check out the [programs](#) we offer or watch the [video previews](#) we’ve posted. Make your next meeting memorable, productive, with one of our solutions-based topics.