

# Gen Trends

January 2008

## *Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!*

### The F-7 Solution

(or is it?)

As a writer, I subconsciously correct the mistakes in everything I read. One might call it an occupational hazard. When spell-checker debuted a number of years ago, I welcomed it as a way to make my job easier. While it does to some degree, it can also produce maddening moments when the software suggests corrections that are downright nonsensical. When this happens, I ignore them and move on.

What about the young people, however, who are coming of age surrounded by technology that not only offers to correct their mistakes but sometimes does so without their even knowing it. As you can see from the nearby GenTistic, employers are frustrated by the lack of reading and writing skills among the emerging generation. That's no secret. But rather than add my rants to others, let's talk solutions.

Too many of these Millennials have concluded that simply pressing the F7 button on the keyboard, will take care of all their spelling and grammar issues. (For the uninitiated, F7 launches Spell- and Grammar-Check in Microsoft Office.) I'm not here to pillory Microsoft. It is only human nature to take the easy way out. Thus the conundrum.

So what can an employer do to ensure that employees can read and write to a productive standard?

Begin by establishing what that standard should be. While reading anything other than safety instructions might be a luxury for front-liners on a construction site, it may be *the* critical skill for those in some professional environments.

Continue by developing a method for assessing the reading and writing skills of all serious applicants. There

is no alternative here. This assessment should be designed in accordance with the reading and writing performed on the job. In fact, using samples from the job protects the firm from possible litigation. For a contractor, this might be the instructions on a can of WD-40. For a software firm, it might be reading and reviewing a passage from a manual or an industry journal. Remember, this is not just about literacy. It is about the employee's ability to write and comprehend at the level required.

Next, decide the level at which the firm will enforce this. While it might be ideal to have all employees reading and writing at a 12<sup>th</sup> grade level, it's probably unrealistic if you are to hire enough people who possess the other qualifications required. Hiring someone who meets all the other requirements, but struggles with the reading/writing assessment leaves you with a choice. But at least you are aware of this limitation and can work with the person to improve, should you choose.

The process does not stop with selection, however. Establish clear expectations for written communication within the organization. With the emergence of a texting lexicon and the explosion of abbreviations, this becomes especially critical. Young people, in particular, need to practice a balance between communicating efficiently and effectively depending on whether they are texting, e-mailing, or drafting a letter on paper.

Finally, these expectations need to be enforced at all levels. In the haste of today's business environment, it can be tempting for employees of all ages to rationalize sloppy writing. But with the competition in most industries, leaving a poor impression because of less-than-perfect communication can materially impact the bottom line over time.

If the firm's productivity and reputation are to be maintained, the reading and writing that goes on inside is of paramount importance.

### I Remember When

The Center's electronic game for understanding generational differences.

[Click here for more.](#)

## "GenTistics"

Thirty-eight percent of employers consider high school students deficient as readers.

*National Endowment for the Arts*

Check out Bob's new blog.

[Click Here](#)



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## Are We Discouraging Mastery in Children?

In 1991, George Leonard published a book entitled *Mastery*, which was an exploration of why a few individuals accomplish great things in any field of endeavor, and most of us don't. After years of research on why this happens, he wrote in part, "It resists definition yet can be instantly recognized. It comes in many varieties, yet follows certain unchanging laws. It brings rich rewards, yet is not really a goal or a destination but rather a process, a journey. We call this journey *mastery* and tend to assume that it requires a special ticket available to only those born with exceptional abilities. But mastery isn't reserved for the supertalented or even for those who are fortunate enough to have gotten an early start. It's available to anyone who is willing to get on the path and stay on it—regardless of age, sex, or previous experience.

"The trouble is that we have few, if any, maps to guide us on the journey or even to show us how to find the path. The modern world, in fact, can be viewed as a prodigious conspiracy against mastery. We are continually bombarded with promises of immediate gratification, instant success, and fast, temporary relief, all of which lead in exactly the wrong direction."

Today's emerging generation is the first to come of age in a society where convenience dominates mastery even at the most elementary levels. Mastery of any kind begins with an understanding and acceptance that the journey will at times be hard, unpleasant, sacrificial, disappointing. Yet it is the mastery of everyday adversity in childhood that ensures success upon entering the workforce, long-term relationships, and any adult endeavor. We can't have it both ways—protect our children from the trials and tribulations of learning and yet expect them to enter adulthood with confidence, critical thinking skills, and a healthy worldview. *RWW*

## Case Study Corner

*Our workforce consists of many older workers and an increasing number of those in their twenties. The organization has always operated on shifts that begin at 8 AM and end at 5PM. The young workers complain that they would be more productive if they could begin later in the day, say Noon, and work into the evening since their lifestyle tends to be more active late into the night. What's the best way to handle this dilemma?*

Modifying a well-established schedule is always a challenge since the hours people work tends to influence the rest of their daily activities. Do not make the assumption, however, that this is simply something driven by young workers. There may be a number of veteran workers who would prefer a later start as well.

Many firms have made a successful transition to "flextime" schedules by melding work requirements with employee desires. I might begin by surveying the workforce to establish how accurate your assumptions are about this issue. If you find that a considerable number are interested in the concept, I would form a committee of employees from all ages and tenures to develop a plan for making the transition.

As you know there are many considerations including work flow, staffing schedules, productivity, concerns among supervisors about accountability, resistance from some workers, and a host of other details. The most common form of flextime generally centers around a set of core hours, such as 10AM to 2PM, when all employees are required to be present for meetings and other tasks and necessities.

Firms have found a number of benefits to flextime and other staffing concepts. These include reductions in commuting time, increased productivity, and improved retention of workers. Be careful not to allow one group of workers, Millennials for instance, to drive the process. If this happens, the result can be resentment throughout the ranks. Take the time to do it right, and it may result in a substantial increase in productivity and harmony all the way around.

## [GenerationsBlog.com](http://GenerationsBlog.com)

This month, I have embarked on writing a blog to address the many age diversity issues that come across my desk weekly. Look for it to be solutions-oriented and full of ideas. Philosophy is nice, but in this busy world, our readers are focused on what gets the problem fixed.

Go to [www.generationsblog.com](http://www.generationsblog.com) for a taste of what's in store. Write to me, argue with me, ask me questions, even flame me, but let's get the dialogue going.

*Robert Wendover, Editor*

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## Previews on the Web

After many requests, we are now posting video previews of the Center's programs on our website, [www.gentrends.com](http://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.

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## Teenage Zombies

"The warlords of the gaming industry tout research on the positive attributes of gaming—and admittedly there are some. One study published this year in *Psychological Science* finds that gaming improves eyesight. A famous 2004 study by researchers at Beth Israel Medical Center in NY, found that video games improve manual dexterity and hand-eye coordination: 'Doctors who spend at least three hours a week playing video games,' the researchers reported, 'made about 37% fewer mistakes in laparoscopic surgery.' Fine. I'll give my sons the joysticks back when they become orthopedic surgeons."

*Stephen Moore writing in  
The Wall Street Journal*

**Ask About the Generations**  
debuting at the end of this month!