

Gen Trends

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Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

Atoms and Bits

by Jeff Vankooten

I had a crush on Judy in the third grade. To express my affection, I wrote "Do you like me?" on notebook paper with the multiple-choice answers of "yes", "no" or "maybe". I folded it and began a covert operation to transport the message to Judy at the back of class.

Today in class, Johnny has a crush on Suzie and is expressing the same sentiments I did. But he isn't conveying them on notebook paper. He is taking out his cell phone or other digital device, texting in the message and pushing "send." The note is then transported through the atmosphere to be received on Suzie's device.

Where the older generations passed atoms in the classroom, the youngest generation is passing bits. Communication requires a sender, a receiver, and a channel. Increasingly sophisticated technology has revolutionized that simple process. The net effects are a faster flow of information, and a decreased amount of time that information spends in the communication channel, creating challenges for all ages in the workplace.

The difference? Atoms and bits. The problem of communicating has, is and always will be with us. That's a constant. It's the tools that change. The proliferation of these communication channels have caught many of us off-guard. Managers will need to become aware of the technological tools available and situationally savvy of when they should be utilized for maximum clarity.

I have a theory that the more situationally crucial a communication is, the simpler the technological tools in which to channel it. Conversely, the less critical the message is to a situation, the more complex the technology to communicate it. It's an inverse formula.

For instance, a situation as significant as a job review would invite the human voice as a tool and/or a written communiqué. Messages with less situational consequences—like simple feedback—communicate effectively through the more technologically sophisticated channels such as email or text messaging.

Atoms or bits. Both are crucial but each require an awareness as to when they are most effective in today's wildly fluctuating communication environment.



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Inside of every old person is a young person wondering "What happened?"

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Institute of Management Accountants
Longmont, CO Chamber of Commerce
Dare Mighty Things
Alhambra School District
National Tractor Parts Association
Dole Corporation
Millikin-Decatur Business Association
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"GenTistics"

60% of companies say that their business performance is suffering due to a failure to prepare workers for leadership.

-Aon Consulting survey, 2008

Check out [Bob's blog](#).



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To Ponder...

Many millennials, in fact, aren't ready to grapple with complex business problems alone. Once they move into the workplace, they still want a lot of hand holding. They flounder without precise guidelines but thrive in structured situations that provide clearly defined rules and the order that they crave. They like a straightforward road map and timeline of what their job responsibilities are and how they will pay off in terms of career advancement. That way, they figure, there will be no mistaking what they're expecting to accomplish. In short, they want a clearly scripted work life. Of course, that's impossible in today's volatile business environment, but try telling that to a millennial.

So what's a manager to do with these checklist kids? At times, bosses may feel like overworked babysitters. After all, who has time to keep making lists and shepherding millennials so that they stay on task? But managers had better get used to it. They will have to spend many hours explaining their expectations as clearly as possible. Those expectations can be quite high; they just can't be vague.

Ron Alsop writing in
The Trophy Kids Grow Up

To Read...

The Trophy Kids Grow Up: How The Millennial Generation Is Shaking Up The Workplace. Alsop, Ron. Jossey-Bass, 2008. ISBN 978-0-470-22954-5. An enlightening read about the impact that emerging professionals are having as organizations adapt to their expectations. While Alsop focuses on elite graduates entering large corporations, he provides insights from which we can all learn.

Case Study Corner

I manage an underwriting department for an insurance carrier. These days, everybody is being asked to do more with less. As people leave for other jobs or retirement, they are not being replaced. Those I supervise are responding to the increased pressure in different ways. The people who have been around for a long time simply grumble and seem to find ways to absorb it. But my younger workers let me know in no uncertain terms that they are not prepared to work longer hours to cover the slack. The veteran workers hear this and grumble even more thinking that they're going to end up with the overload. The young underwriters find a way to fit their work in from 8 to 5, but they also commit more errors. On top of this, I am losing about one of these young people a quarter, which adds to the pressure. What do I do?

You have a couple of tough decisions to make: 1) How to argue for restored staffing levels. 2) How to find a way to foster cross-generational understanding about how the work will get done. As much as it means challenging those further up the food chain, the first effort is probably easier to accomplish.

Begin by gathering data. How many people have you lost in the past 24 months? (Calculate the turnover cost of each position and multiply.) How much has the workload increased? (Quantify this with as many numbers as you can.) Quantify the number of mistakes made and calculate the potential liability from these mistakes. You get the idea. Then build a case, based on numbers, that you can bring to your boss. The more specific numbers, the better. Chances are, he or she will appreciate the effort and begin to plot with you on how your department's situation can be brought to the attention of those who can restore the positions and funding. (If your boss does not support you, begin looking for another job. It's probably not going to get any better.)

[Click here](#) to read the remainder of this case study or go to [generationsblog.com](#).

By The Time I Got To Woodstock...

The Woodstock experience has become a museum. Located on the site of the dairy farm where nearly 7% of an entire generation gathered for the three-day festival in 1969, The Museum at Bethel Woods is gaining popularity among all ages.

The museum provides an engaging tour of the event as well as the cultural climate and the tumultuous decade that led up to it. It features big screen performances by Jimi Hendrix, a replica of the "Merry Prankster" psychedelic bus, and many audio-visual exhibits that make the experience interactive. A section is devoted to a review of the impact and interpretations of Woodstock by those of various generations.

Although nostalgic and appealing to many who attended the event and lived through the era, the museum offers much more to those who were too young to have experienced the times. It provides a platform for discussion about the civil rights movement, the cold war, the Vietnam war, and many other pivotal moments of the Boomer generation.

Rock the Vote?

Did Millennials truly affect the outcome of the national election? Here are the stats about voters under 30 from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. You be the judge!

- Millennials accounted for 18% of the vote (total of 23 million).
- Turnout rate rose to at least 52%.
- There were 3.4 million more young voters than in 2004.
- Youth accounted for at least 60% of the overall increase in voters.
- This group favored the winner of this election by more than 2-1.