

Gen Trends

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

April 2009

Skills for Now – Skills for Later

One of the most distinct workplace differences I have observed in the past several years is the contrast between the learning expectations of older and younger workers. Traditionally, employees accepted the training they were given at face value as a part of the employment contract. If your manager said go to this class, you went. But not any more. Young workers are a lot more concerned about what they are learning and why.

I started reflecting on this after a conversation with a 30-something technology manager. He mentioned that he saw a distinct difference in the ways those he supported took to learning new software. “My older colleagues look at training as something the organization provides to further the organization’s goals,” he said. “They assume that this is pretty much the place where they will use the skills acquired.”

“My younger colleagues draw a distinction between organizationally-specific content and that which is transferable to other situations. For example,” he said, “learning an application that is proprietary to our firm is something they will only do on the clock. But give them a task they know will enhance a resume and they will spend the weekend mastering it.”

Since that conversation, I have informally surveyed managers and

found their perceptions to be similar. So what can be learned from this little piece of unscientific research?

First, we might conclude that emerging professionals understand the value of transferable skills and are more strategic in their approach to acquiring them. Offered the choice between instruction on learning specific to the organization and taking a class that broadens their overall versatility, they will take the latter. This means that managers will need to do a better job of explaining the value of training on proprietary content. An incentive might also be appropriate, such as access to a mentoring program or additional training on something they might find more useful career-wise.

Secondly, we should consider how we provide training, especially if that training is for organizationally-specific purposes. Too much training is still mired in classrooms and taught by talking heads. Making the training interactive, entertaining, and stimulating encourages them to embrace the content with more verve.

Thirdly, we need to consider the learner’s motivations. I would be the last person to deny instruction to someone eager to learn it. That said, I might also be suspicious of someone who seems to take every class possible but does not appear to be all that devoted to the firm long term. If it appears that this individual looks upon the firm as simply a training ground from which to move, I would probably challenge the veracity of his or her intent.

Training and skill acquisition is changing not only in delivery but also in perception of value and application. For this reason alone, we all need to stay ahead of the curve.

“GenTistics”

Adults under 30 are divided on whether they prefer capitalism or socialism:

37% prefer capitalism
33% prefer socialism
30% are undecided

-Ramussen Reports 2009

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



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Online in '09

There are distinct differences how the four generational groups use the Internet. New findings released by the Pew Research Center show that contrary to what most would believe, all of the generational groups use the Internet, but each group uses it primarily for different reasons.

Millennials are most likely to engage in a variety of online activities: communication, ecommerce, and entertainment. Their use of e-mail has dropped nearly 16% over the last four years. Only 7% of Millennials are not online, primarily due to lack of Web access.

Those within Generation X use the Internet to handle business transactions. Almost 67% of their group bank online, and 80% buy products online, more so than Millennials.

Younger Boomers, 49% of them, tend to watch more videos than their older Boomer brethren. Conversely, 89% of older Boomers are most likely to seek health information than the younger Boomers.

Surprisingly, the age group with the biggest increase in Internet use in the last four years is Matures, specifically those between the ages of 70-75, whose Internet use almost doubled to 45%. Close to 74% of those in the Mature group primarily go online to send and receive email messages.

Not surprisingly, the most prominent online activity for young Millennials, ages 12-17 is playing games.

Case Study Corner

As a vice president of sales, I supervise 6 regional managers who, in turn, supervise 44 sales people. The average tenure of the managers is 24 years, with the longest being 39. Last year the manager with this 39-year tenure announced that he was going to retire this year and made quite a thing about it. This week he approached me and said that he wants to remain on the job for another two years because of losses in his retirement savings. His team has ranked in the bottom third of performers for the past several years and I don't see it getting better. I would prefer that he retire as planned, but I'm also afraid that he might make trouble if I don't handle this delicately. Your thoughts?

You present a situation that I suspect is occurring in other workplaces as well. The fact that this individual has announced that he is going to retire does not obligate him to leave voluntarily at a particular time. Challenging him on this would only engender hard feelings and perhaps legal action. That said, you can still visit with him about his performance and the performance of his team. Just choose your words carefully. You do not want to create in him an impression that you are clamping down in retribution for his decision to stay on the job.

Any conversation of this nature should focus on the measurement of his performance. I am assuming you can produce a track record of how his team has performed and why you have concerns. I am also assuming that you have a history of regularly discussing his performance. If this is the case, he may still question why you are "suddenly" becoming stricter with your expectations, so you need to be prepared.

If you have not provided regular evaluations on his performance, be

prepared for him to ask why you are choosing to do so now. This does not mean you cannot do so at this point.

Just understand that you will need to overcome this challenge without making the relationship adversarial. I might suggest you draw a line in the sand and say, "From this point forward, I will expect your team to meet the following expectations and I will be enforcing them in this manner." Be sure to inform all sales managers of the same thing so you cannot be accused of singling him and his team out. Take time to think all this through and make sure to leave all of your emotions out of it.

Upcoming Center audiences include:

Colorado Parks and Recreation
Community Assoc. Inst. of Denver
Institute of Mgmt Accountants
Oral Roberts University
Fort Dodge Animal Health
CO Intergovernmental Risk
Sharing Agency
National Association of Oil Heating
Service Managers
Arapahoe County
Longmont Chamber of Commerce

March Gentistics

We would like to clarify the statistics given in last month's newsletter. The age differentiation represented a sampling of all adult internet users, not just those who have created an online profile. The stats should read: 75% of adult internet users 18-24 years old have an online profile. The stats for all other age groups should read accordingly.

continued in next column...