

Gen Trends

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

June 2009

Channel Surfing Through Life

I have the opportunity to speak with countless managers every year in the course of researching generational trends. Once in a while, one of these individuals frames an issue in just the right way. That happened this month. "Why," asked one manager, "does it seem that those in their teens and twenties seem to channel surf through life?"

A lot of this has to do with the environment in which they have come of age. In the past twenty years, society has become inundated with the speed and pervasiveness of technology. Those of us over thirty have noticed the difference because we came of age prior to the proliferation of computers in everyday life. Those born in the past thirty years have been immersed in technology since birth. (Think baby monitors, for instance.)

Some have hailed these young people as the multi-tasking generation. Anyone with kids knows that they can Instant Message™, surf the Web, talk on the phone, eat a sandwich and do their homework all at the same time.

This phenomenon, coupled with a decade of extraordinarily low unemployment has taught these young workers to think that a new job, friend, family, food, spouse, TV show, game, belief system or even life is just "a click away." Is it no wonder, then, that they appear to be "channel surfing" their way through each day, showing impatience any time the present task fails to stimulate them?

The problem is that most of life is *not* a series of clicks, regardless of what the techies say. While there is nothing wrong with automating that which is "automatable," critical thinking and common sense do not fall within this category.

Employers faced with the expectation that repetition and the unknown can be clicked away, will need to set clear expectations up front and develop a balance over time between enforcing essential practices and allowing for the creativity that is dying to emerge from these over-stimulated souls.

Unfortunately, society is teaching youngsters that nothing is worth doing unless it is stimulating all the time, every time. We have, in certain ways, set them up for failure due to unrealistic expectations.

How will this all turn out? Not as bad as one might think. The reality is that over time, this new generation of workers will find themselves adapting to the demands that any organization places on them while finding ways to create an environment that is both pleasant and rewarding. This will not excuse the curmudgeon who continues to insist on "my way or the highway." But as with any transition, the outcome will produce a more productive, but impersonal workplace.

Upcoming Center audiences include:

Oral Roberts University
Longmont Chamber of Commerce
Mechanical Contractors Association
Providence Alaska Learning Institute
Assn for Manufacturing Technology
National Society of Prof. Engineers
Nat'l Institute of Standards and Technology
National Assn of Oil Heating Service Mgrs.

"GenTistics"

Teens believe they'll be earning an average salary of \$145,000 based on their current career interests.

-Charles Schwab, *Teens & Money* survey

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



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Google Yourself?

Self-Googleing, a trend engaging many search-engine users, has caught Google's attention. Due to the invasion of social networking sites that produce searchable results on a person's identity, this act is an attempt to view one's personal online brand. If you haven't yet "ego-surfed," be aware that the results may not be what you expected. Until recently, search results would produce a multitude of information, some self-published through social networks, directories and the like, but the bulk is information placed on the internet by web-savvy acquaintances.

Personally, a self-Googleing of my name produces a first page of innocuous results all created by me: work info, Facebook and LinkedIn profiles, and a listing of directories in which I willingly participate. The most surprising was that a simple search of my first and last name alone produced enough info to contact me, my spouse and closest friends. Page through and the results associated me with several young nieces and nephews, high school classmates and former coworkers. Anyone motivated enough would have information to write a short unauthorized biography.

To give individuals more control of what information comes up at the top of its search results, Google introduced a profile feature which users create. When searched, the profile produces a thumbnail that includes the target's name, picture, location and occupation. Clicking on the link takes you to a profile page similar to MySpace and Facebook. Have you Googled or profiled yourself lately? Google would like you to – just Google "create a Google profile" for directions.

Marji Middleton
is the Center's Project Manager

Case Study Corner

I manage a claims department for a large insurer. I seem to be spending more and more time answering questions my young subordinates should be answering for themselves. My older colleagues face the same challenge. We don't mind helping out on tricky issues, but this generation seems to be afraid to use their own judgment. What would you suggest?

Those in their mid twenties and younger have come of age having most of life's day-to-day challenges delivered to them with options from which to choose an answer. In the process, they have come to rely on this menu-driven environment. When faced with a question for which there is no right answer, they can be fearful of making a mistake from which they cannot recover. The end result is a lack of both skill and confidence in their own critical thinking. Rather than assuming responsibility for a possible blunder, they come to you so that any negative consequences will be your fault rather than theirs, at least that's the perception. I would offer three solutions.

Number one, take more time in assessing applicants' abilities and willingness to make decisions requiring judgment. Simply placing them in an hour-long simulation where they have to make judgments on questions for which there are no correct answers, will provide you with insights into how they approach problem solving and their courage to make decisions based on the best information available.

Number two, look for patterns in the questions these employees ask. If there are common issues that keep coming up, outline specific methods for dealing with them. You might also hold periodic meetings where the common issues can be discussed and resolved. It is not unusual to think that you're the only one facing a particular issue when it is common among many people. A meeting like this will allow everyone to confer and settle on a consistent way of handling common questions.

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Number three, set and enforce an expectation that anyone bringing a question to you should also come with three possible solutions. This will force them to think for themselves. In many cases, the solution will become apparent as they think of alternatives. If they still come to you for assurance that their choice is the best answer, resist the inclination to give it your blessing. Simply say, "Use your best judgment." This will unnerve some for a while, but will go away as they gain confidence.

Next-Gen Hotels

Millennial consumers are changing the way we travel. [Aloft](#), [NYLO](#) and [Hotel Indigo](#) are three new lines of hotels designed to cater to the tastes of travelers under the age of 35.

What kind of experience do these young travelers desire? Multi-use lobbies will address Millennials' need for socialization. Outfitted with free wi-fi, Nintendo Wii, and chairs that hang from the ceiling, they promote fun and provide an opportunity for travelers to hang out with the locals. Circular welcome desks located in the center of the lobby replace the long, granite counter. They feature self-service check-in kiosks because young travelers feel that doing it themselves is faster and more convenient than waiting in line.

Bedrooms are fluid and seamless with a focus on casual furnishings and minimalist design. Custom mattresses, spa-like bathrooms, and flat-screen TVs where guests can hook their laptops and iPods, replace the traditional armoires, desks and bureaus. High ceilings and oversized windows, along with brick walls and concrete floors, give the rooms a spacious, urban, loft feel desired by people of this generation. Beds mostly face the windows for an optimum view.