

Gen Trends

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

May 2009

Millennials and the Economy

A reader sent in several questions last month that we have been hearing from a number of individuals:

Is the economic downturn having some effect on the Millennials? In a word, yes. This is a group that has come of age in the midst of a twenty year expansion. One has to go back to the 70s to witness something comparable. So much of what they have experienced and have been told has now been dashed on the rocks and it's going to take some time for them to absorb and adjust to it.

Are they wondering about why they aren't being hired or promoted after their first week? I think they have the common sense to understand that things have changed, but they are not quite sure how to adapt to it. After all, they lack perspective simply due to age.

Do you think it will have any impact on their entitlement mentality? Yes. The economy is always cycling and that's something they will come to learn over time. Old habits die hard, but right now many of them are probably frozen in place and that is to your advantage. Now is the time to work at establishing relationships with them so they remember who cared when things get better again. It won't work for all but . . .

Will it change any of the things you suggest in dealing with them? I don't know that there is anything that I would change, per se. I would, however, increase communication about the state of the business. Help them understand, on their terms, what's happening to your organization, the overall industry, your customers, and the economy in general. Provide some perspective. I keep telling myself and others, for example, that yes we have 8.5% unemployment but yes, we also have 91.5% employment. The media believes that bad news sells and we have to do what we can to counteract that. Take the time to explain in clear and specific terms about how the economic climate may affect individual contracts within your firm. Some of your customers are struggling, others are doing okay. Find out why and share the good news with those involved.

In sales, make sure your people are practicing the basics and provide clear parameters on where the flexibility is for closing the deal and where it is not. I came across a salesperson who kept saying to her boss, "Five hundred bucks is five hundred bucks. Let's do the deal." He finally sat her down and showed her that \$500 in gross profits lost him money due to overhead. (He probably should have done that earlier.)

This is all about working smarter. You might provide incentives to those who find ways to minimize waste and mistakes. Talk up the idea that the little things can be an anchor on profits and, of course, on their wages over time. Make note of those who are working smarter than others. These are the people you want to keep long term. People show their true colors under stress.

"GenTistics"

Two-thirds of all Baby Boomers agree that personal digital assistants and mobile phones contribute to poor workplace etiquette, while less than half of Millennials agree.

-LexisNexis Technology Gap Survey, 2008

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



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To Ponder. . .

Back in woodshed times, American boys itching for a fight sometimes announced this fact by placing a chip on their shoulder, then daring someone to knock it off. Although fastidious contemporary ears like to think this was a sliver of wood, the chip in question was more likely to be dried cow dung. Hard as it is to picture any boy putting a piece of excrement on the shoulder of his Abercrombie & Fitch shirt, **having a chip on your shoulder** still suggests touchy belligerence.

Carnivals and circuses alike featured secondary events off to one side, usually in tents. At these *sideshows* one might find patent medicine being hawked, or bearded ladies to gawk at, or—most exciting of all—*cooch dancers*, undulating women in filmy harem outfits whom we acknowledge when using the term **hoochie coochie** for a wide range of risqué activity. Although what went on at sideshows was sometimes more exciting than what took place at the main event, today, **sideshow** suggests an activity of lesser magnitude.

Ralph Keys writing in ...*I Love It When You Talk Retro*.

To Read. . .

This delightful little compendium is the perfect read for all of us who tend to say “I remember when” too much. Filled with close to a thousand “retro terms,” this is a handy book to help settle disputes or simply relieve your curiosity about where “that” term came from. Don’t be a doofus. Buy this book. ***I Love It When You Talk Retro: Hoochie Coochie, Double Whammy, Drop a Dime and the Forgotten Origins of American Speech***. Ralph Keys. St. Martin’s Press, New York, 2009. ISBN-13 978-0-312-34005-6.

Case Study Corner

In last month’s column, I argued that “Too much training is still mired in classrooms and taught by talking heads.” I received a response from a reader that I found instructive. While his example is specific to utilities, any number of workplaces are facing similar challenges.

“At our facility, we teach all new employees the basics of what we do, and how to work safely. It is a seven week school. We have two instructors who are basically ‘talking heads.’ To remain employed, they have to pass this school. They are full-time employees during the school, with benefits. Those that pass turn out to be very good employees, and most advance quickly. But we lose about one third from failure. We want to improve our numbers of retained new employees, as long as we don’t lower our standards. Any thoughts?”

This is all about a balance of engagement, methodology, and learning environment. So allow me to address all three. First, engagement. We need to remember that these individuals are a product of a fast-paced, impatient, stimulation-oriented society. In entering any traditional classroom environment, they are having to put the brakes on and slow down their brains. I don’t know whether that is good or bad. It just is. One of the skills you are teaching them is critical thinking. The older one gets, the more he or she is likely to be measured in his or her problem solving. So you have a classic conflict—an older, more deliberative trainer teaching a group of young impatient learners. As much as they may not want to hear it at first, a discussion about the value of patience and deliberation before action is appropriate, especially in dangerous environments. Show them photos and videos of what can happen as a result of carelessness and impatience. Get them to interact about it. These learners have to understand that this is serious work.

To read the entire response, [click here](#).

Baby Boomlet?

Preliminary data from the National Center for Health Statistics confirms that the number of births in 2007 (4,317,119) is the highest number of births ever registered in the United States, and surpasses the peak of the postwar Baby Boom in 1957. Additionally, the birth rate rose slightly for two consecutive years. If the trend continues, it could result in a milder baby boom, or a boomlet.

Birth rate increases occurred for nearly all age groups, and within all race and ethnic groups. The rate for women aged 30-34 years increased the most among the differing age groups, and reached its highest since 1964. The number of births to unmarried women rose 3 to 5 percent, with the largest increase among unmarried women between the ages of 25 to 39.

Although the multi-year increase in the birth rate proves significant, the fertility rate for all women holds at slightly more than half of the rate in 1957. Demographers point out that in order to be considered a real boom, the birth rate increase would have to be much larger than the single-digit increases that we’ve experienced in the last few years.

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