

by Cheryl Crumb

Managing Gen Y

Last weekend was a wonderful gathering of friends who celebrated the wedding of a colleague. At my table was a fellow Baby Boomer, a single woman, who had been enjoying a new managerial role at a consulting company. For the past 20 years, she had known nothing but success and awards, but as we toasted the bride and groom, she revealed that her latest performance appraisal had cited her as "Gen Y Insensitive". Asking what that meant, she shared a project she had just led. Apparently all the Gen Y team members (basically those born in the 1980's) had revolted and singly or en masse approached the HR Department saying they would never work with her again, and if they had to, they would quit.

So, how could this talented, previously successful, lady be seen as the Captain Bligh of the New Business World? She shared her strategy: with a project whose target date accomplishment was unbreakable, she shored up all formal authority and dictated task accomplishment by barking orders. Vacations were cancelled, weekends became an oxymoron, and pep talks were the only commercial in a constant, barrage of work. Dangling monetary bribes and a celebration dinner, the project prevailed because of or in spite of her Boomer tactics. Her favourite encouragement was "suck it up". So, why the revolt?

Let's begin by getting clarity on Who's Who in the Generational Zoo. The timeframes are not precise and overlap but will give an idea of the differences of all who cohabit the planet and are vying for jobs in this Second Millennium:

Veterans Traditionalists Silent Ones	1919-1949	War Time and Depression
Baby Boomers	1945-1964	Post War
Generation X	1961-1979	Latch Key Kids
Generation Y	1976-2000	Internet and Technology

The problem is that the generation gap can be as huge a chasm in the working world as two cultures colliding geographically. Let's take a closer look at my friend, our Female Baby Boomer. Stereotypically, her generation is characterized by workaholic and company loyalty. Although rebellious in youth, the Boomers grew conservative over time. Job status is important and they are motivated by job success, appreciation, security and respect. They focus on process and output rather than the implications and the outcome. The oldest of the bunch are getting ready to retire, but the majority form the bosses of today's businesses.

Enter the latest entrants into the job market....the oldest of the Gen Y's. Their upbringing was vastly different from their parents. For them TV was never black-and-white, nor remote control-less. They suckled on cell phones and a computer mouse. The largest generation to be raised by divorced parents, they're the most tolerant of diversity. They've often been labeled the "sad generation" because they're the most medicated and world-aware. Raised by "helicopter" parents (protective, nurturing and pampered), they're said to be both high performance and high maintenance. They have high expectations for themselves and are financially astute and tech savvy. As a collective, they're optimistic, confident, and sociable with a strong civic and social responsibility. Dr. Carolyn Martin of Rainmaker Thinking, who is an American authority on youth in the workplace, says that this collective is the most parent-oriented of all generations, citing their parents as their heroes. For those who might shake their heads at youth today because of their green-purple hair or tattoo and piercing festooned bodies, note that compared to previous generations, violent crime is down, casual sex is down, school shootings are down, volunteerism is

up, religious affiliation is up and trust of parents, teachers and police is up. They were given considerable financial responsibility by dual income families, and were raised in the "speak your mind" vs. "children are seen and not heard" philosophy. More than any other generation they were heavily involved in family purchases and needed calendar management skills to track the variety of Scouts, hockey, music, dance, and soccer activities.

What's the effect of all of this now that they're entering the employment office? In contrast to their loyal, dedicated, hard-working parents, they don't want work to be their life. It's predicted they will have 10-12 careers in their lifetime, plus all the jobs that will flow from those careers. Gen Y's anticipate periodic unemployment whether from layoffs or educational upgrading. They don't react well to obedience as they spent their early lives questioning parents and getting answers. They're challenging the status quo and pushing boundaries more than their forefathers and mothers. They ridicule oldsters who are proud of their 35-year gold watch and believe that tenure leads to workplace vulnerability. One mantra is "knowledge is power" so they value continuous learning as the way to guarantee their future.

My fellow female Boomer friend has to attend Gen Y training if she has any hope of again leading a team of Y's. Here's what she needs to learn as she glimpses into this massive pool of job entrants:

- Be more coach-like than boss-like. In no other generation has the phrase "Bosses are the #1 reason why people enjoy their jobs, and the #1 reason why people quit", been so highly proven. While Boomers are loyal to companies, Gen Y's are loyal only to bosses. Ask yourself, "Would I work for me?"
- Money is not the grand motivator. Gen Y's are idealistic, outspoken and have a strong social consciousness. Personal fulfillment is what drives their crank. They want to enjoy their jobs and will willingly wander until

Continued on page 22