

TREND/Bring on da boom.

Generation Why

By Haidee E. Allerton

They promise to be the biggest influence since the baby boomers.

Into the American workplace, hot upon the heels of Generation X, comes the Millennial Generation, Echo Boomers, a.k.a. Generation Y, born in a period pinpointed by demographers as 1979 to 1994. What's different about them from previous generations? What's similar? What do they bring to the future of work, and how will they help shape it?

The Prankster Scholarship

You've heard of a Fulbright Scholarship. Well, this is different. Howard Lerman is financing his college education at Duke University by turning a prank—calling classmates to say he was authorized from Body Odor Problems Anonymous to tell them they stank—into a Website business, Justatip.com, with his friend Tom Dixon and a few others. Visitors can send customized tips anonymously—such as, “You have body odor” and “You're bad in bed” or sardonic messages such as, “You know when to leave a party” and “You have an undetectable toupee.”

In a little more than a year, Justatip.com sent 2 million tips, and New York-based Traffix, an online marketing and database-management firm, bought the dot.com for a low six figures. Traffix is funding the next Lerman-Dixon-and-friends venture

<4> www.ratensee.com where you'll be able to rate your pals on various traits.

<4> Source/*the Washingtonian*, www.washingtonian.com

2001 78.5% of U.S. college freshmen say they used a PC frequently in their senior year in high school

1999 68.4% used a PC in their senior year

Conventional theory is that every fourth generation repeats itself, so Gen Y may most resemble what some people refer to as the GI Generation (1901-1924): active voters who make a great leap in education and consider themselves to be in the happiest age bracket. At least, that was until September 11, 2001, just a week ago at this writing. Now, subsequent events will no doubt dramatically influence how Gen Y operates in the world and how they view work, and they may be even more like the GI Generation in that they will live in a time of war.

They have already seen schoolyard violence, the Oklahoma bombing, and a wide-scale terrorist attack in America. They've witnessed the peculiar phenomenon of reality TV. They communicate by pagers and cell phones. They say *kewl* instead of *cool*. They're into extreme sports. Companies regard them as a hot market for new products and a source of insight into emerging trends, but haven't quite figured out how to market to these sophisticated, no b.s. consumers.

They number 60 million, more than three times the population of Gen X and just short of the 70 million baby boomers. They're as young as seven and as old as 22, most of them yet to go through adolescence. One in three is not Caucasian. One in four lives in a single-parent household. Three in four have working mothers. They have been using computers since pre-kindergarten.

They are e-learners: The number of U.S. college students enrolled in online courses will reach 2.2 million in 2002, according to International Data Corporation—up from 710,000 in 1998; 84 percent of four-year U.S. colleges will offer online courses in 2002, up from 62 percent in 1998.

The Herman Group <4> www.hermangroup.com predicts that recruiters will soon set up shop on high school campuses rather than wait for impending college graduation. In fact, the early effort has already begun to contact students in their junior and senior years of high school.

Once in the workforce, what's the best way to manage Gen Y? Mary Claire Toohey, HR director of Hanover Hospital in Hanover, Pennsylvania, suggests these strategies:

- Show them authoritative expertise.
- Invest in their outcomes, and celebrate their victories.
- Let them “get it done.” Gen Yers don't like to waste time.

Work-Life Benefits  www.wlb.com recommends these ways to manage Generation Y effectively:

Provide challenging work that truly matters. Eighty-five percent of Gen Yers define themselves as loyal and hardworking when they see value in what they are doing. Eighty-eight percent have specific goals for the next five years; 78 percent believe they will achieve their life goals.

Build personal relationships. Know these employees, listen to them, and show that you genuinely care about their success and them as individuals.

Be technically savvy. They've grown up in the digital revolution, and technology is an interwoven, important part of their lives. Give them the technological tools they need, and encourage technology solutions in your organization.

Show them the money. Generation Y is used to making and spending money. American teenagers were responsible for US\$125 billion in sales in 1999, according to Gartner research group.

Recognize and reward. Generation Y has grown up under pressure to succeed in academics and sports, and that attitude is likely to continue into their working lives. They expect constant feedback, lofty goals, and significant rewards. A pat on the back and good performance appraisals won't do it.

 Front Page, page 6, in this issue to read about Chris Newton, CEO of Work-Life Benefits.

What's goin' on?

A lot is going on with regard to Gen Y and is so variegated that categorization is almost impossible. So here's a sampling:

- The University of South Dakota says it will be the first institution to provide a handheld computer to each incoming freshman and to first-year medical and law students. The handhelds will be configured to meet academic requirements. The cost is expected to be about US\$750,000, with students paying only a portion. The handhelds are theirs to keep.
- Forsyth Country Day School outside of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, became the first K-12 school in the United States to require the use of Palm handheld computers in its high school and to pilot their use among students as early as first grade. Students in ninth through 12th grades returning to school last fall received a Palm IIIc, a portable keyboard, and a suite of software applications in their registration packets. Long-range plans include integrating the handhelds into the school's

Chris and Luke's Excellent Adventure

Chris and Luke were a couple of high school seniors in New Jersey looking to fund college educations in California. They hit upon the idea of finding a corporate sponsor, set up a Website, and before you could say "full ride," had a number of offers to choose from. They picked the bank company First USA because, they say, it wanted them to be "spokesguys" to help college students across America learn about the importance of financial responsibility and money management. College is often the first time that students have their own credit cards and checking accounts.

"We sat down with some of our new friends at FUSA and developed some cool guidelines for students," say Chris and Luke. *Kew!*

Chris is at Pepperdine, Luke is at University of Southern California. You can follow the First Corporate Sponsored College Students in the United States at

 www.chrisandluke.com.

45 Percentage of high school seniors pursuing higher education in 1960

65 Percentage today

A Look See

According to "What's Really in Their Backpacks" by Jenn Shreve at *Wired.com*

◀️ www.wired.com

here's what a typical high schooler's backpack might hold:

- two-way pager
- cell phone
- CD player (for personally burned CDs)
- glitter makeup
- black paper and gel ink pens
- textbooks rather than ebooks
- digital camera.

Carrying around a laptop is considered "dorky"; using one is not. Palm Pilots are still rare despite some schools starting to require their use. Health studies show that backpacks, even those of elementary school children, are weighing as much as 25 pounds fully loaded and causing back pain and even injuries. Health practitioners advise that a full backpack should weigh no more than 15 pounds.

56 Percentage of college graduates who say they plan to live with their parents for some time after graduation

66 Percentage who believe they'll be more successful than their parents

intranet to use for sending email, synching assignments, and connecting to school and individual Websites. Assistant headmaster Eric Peterson says the school will be a "living laboratory" for exploring the range of use of handheld technology. This year, the students (most from affluent families) paid for the handhelds. Next year, the cost will be incorporated into the school's yearly tuition of US\$10,700.

- Student boycotts of standardized tests in New York, Michigan, and Massachusetts protest the time away from in-depth instruction to prepare for such tests, which many students claim don't measure intelligence or knowledge effectively.

- The Board of Education of New York has launched its first online technology training program through Enterprise Training Solutions

◀️ www.enterprisetraining.com of Ardsley, New York.

All high school districts city-wide, with the exception of the Bronx, will participate. The aim is to make PC literacy and technical training programs available on demand.

Clearly, the trend is to start earlier in life than ever before to prepare students to enter the workplace highly proficient in technology. The groundwork has been laid. Toddlers need no instruction on computers; they just start playing with the one at home and in the process learn how to use it—as previous generations turned on the TV and broiled cheese bread in the toaster oven.

It's ironic that the devastating blow on America's people, economy, and security on September 11 was so low-tech, so crude. On the other hand, the country's resources were up and running quickly, thanks to technology. But in the light of the now palpable threat of terrorism, will technology be enough to improve our lives, advance us, indeed save us? TD

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◀️ Additional sources for article/www.businessweek.com; the Next Big Thing, www.tnbt.com; www.wired.com

◀️ Sources for statistics/Cooperative Institutional Research Program, U.S. Census, U.S. Dept. of Education, Monster.com, *American Demographics*, Twentysomething Inc., *American Psychologist*, www.wired.com, *Cyber Atlas*, www.prnewswire.com