

living for young families. As the economic squeeze of housing prices and child care expenses intensifies, fewer children will get good quality day care or have their own yard to play in. The next generation will have fewer siblings, as fewer families will be able to afford large houses, day care for multiple children, and several college tuition bills. Only children will become more common. There will be a growing gulf between rich children and poor children as economic pressures sort people more definitively into the haves and the have-nots.

In the following sections, I'll discuss what these trends mean at a practical level. I'll start with the implications for employers and marketers, who are managing and selling to this generation right now and will be for years to come. I'll then move on to what comes next—things that all of us together, and parents and young people in particular, can do to change things for the better in the future, for this generation and the next.

FOR EMPLOYERS

What do these generational changes mean for managers who work with younger people? The first step is to try to understand Generation Me—realize that younger employees may have a very different outlook on life. The times that shaped GenMe'ers as children are very different from those experienced by older generations. You can't blame someone for absorbing the culture around him. Realize that GenMe's attitudes are not wrong, just different. Just trying to see things from their perspective will help a lot. At minimum, think about how old your employees were during certain events; avoid the mistake of one man I worked with who asked where I was when JFK was shot. (Answer: Not born for eight more years.) People born in the 1980s will soon dominate the young workforce; many of them do not remember Ronald Reagan's presidency, the USSR, or Michael Jackson with dark skin.

Some young people will arrive with a feeling of entitlement, believing they deserve everything right away. This generation has "shockingly high expectations for salary, job flexibility and duties," notes the AP "Entitlement Generation" article. Mike Amos, a franchise consultant for Perkins Restaurants, says, "It seems they want and expect everything that the 20- or 30-year veteran has the first week they're there." This is the natural outcome of the self-esteem movement, but as an employer it's too

late to change your young employee's upbringing. Be prepared to explain to young people that success and privileges will not happen overnight; add that you know this is frustrating, but it's the way business works. Your patience and understanding will pay off. "The manager who says I don't have time for that is going to be stuck on the endless turnover treadmill," says Eric Chester, a consultant on young people in the workplace. Not surprisingly, 60% of employers say that their workplaces suffer from tension among the generations.

The best thing you can do is realize that this generation is not "spoiled" and does not "have it easy." GenMe has been raised thinking we were special and getting lots from Mom and Dad, but when we hit young adulthood we face an enormous mismatch between what we expect and what we actually get. Before you say "Poor babies," realize that the inflated cost of housing and the ultracompetitive market for college and good jobs would be difficult even without our high expectations. A boss who understands this will have a much easier time connecting with young employees. Young people are unlikely to change overnight, and berating them isn't going to do any good.

So what, specifically, can you expect from your young employees? They will work hard, but even harder if they are praised and appreciated. This is true of any generation, of course, but it is especially true of GenMe'ers, who were raised on extensive praise and almost expect it. This generation is not motivated by feelings of duty—working hard is not virtuous in itself, but it is worth it if they are singled out and recognized. They will be frank and might have few qualms about sharing information you might consider sensitive or private. They appreciate directness rather than abstraction. They do not have automatic respect for authority and will feel free to make suggestions if they think it will improve things. You may have to earn their respect rather than receiving it simply by your position in the company. "If you just expect them to stand behind a register and smile, they're not going to do that unless you tell them why that's important and then recognize them for it," says John Spano, a human resources director for a movie theater company, interviewed in the AP article. Of course, this applies even more to college-educated employees, who will have an even greater desire to understand what they're doing and be praised for it.

Your young employees will learn best by doing. Raised with the Inter-

net and in collaborative learning classrooms, they are not used to sitting through long, boring lectures. Training seminars will put them to sleep if they are not interactive. A generation raised not just on television but on cable, they will perk up during a presentation with video clips and moving graphics. They'll perk up even more if you can get them involved through a demonstration or role-playing. One-on-one training should be Socratic and task-oriented—don't just show them something, but have them do it themselves.

You will find that your young employees are very flexible and used to dealing with diversity. If you need someone to meet clients who are from a different culture or background, a young person—even if he or she is not from the same background—will adapt to this situation well. Young people today often have friends or schoolmates from different backgrounds, listen to diverse forms of music, and eat ethnic food the way earlier generations ate bacon and eggs. On the other hand, young employees may need some guidance on how to deal with older people. They may come off as disrespectful when they are merely being friendly and informal. Some young employees might need to be taught to “clean up” when talking to older folks, using “Mr.” and “Mrs.” and speaking more formally.

Today's young employees also appreciate flexible schedules and independence. They don't respond well to micromanagement, and will find rigid schedules stifling. Consistent with this theme, they will also respond to a casual dress code. GenMe loves doing their own thing and will like working at a place that values this. The book *Generations at Work* advises that you “include the phrase ‘we want you to have a life’ at least three times during the [job] interview.” Work for work's sake is not a big hit with this generation, though in a “fun” workplace they might be more willing.

One downside to this generation is that they do not take criticism well. The self-esteem ethos in schools and parenting has valued protecting young people's positive self-feelings over all else. Some GenMe'ers attended schools where teachers did not correct their mistakes, and others had parents who let them do whatever they wanted. They are used to feeling important and having their work praised. When you need to criticize their work, begin with something positive and explain the reason behind your criticism. Do not be surprised if you encounter defensiveness. Things will go better if you can take that in stride and not get defen-

sive in return; just explain exactly why it's wrong and move on. Over time, young employees will grow more accustomed to criticism; it might just take longer since they are not as familiar with it.

Expect this generation to be ambitious, sometimes wildly so. The optimism of youth, combined with the instant gratification that technology has provided, often leads to impatience. Some young people will expect that they will be a senior manager within five years. It might be best if another young person—perhaps someone with just a few more years' experience—explains the usual length of career paths. This is especially true of the most qualified young people; even more than others, they have been encouraged to have lofty ideas about their future. Other young employees may have the idea that their job is only temporary, and before long, they'll break into acting, sell their screenplay, or get on *American Idol*. Don't worry—they'll find out soon enough that they shouldn't quit their day job. Others will want to explore many different career paths before settling down. Much of this comes from the Twixter phenomenon, in which young people spend their twenties uncommitted to careers and relationships, free to pursue many different possibilities. But young people will stay at a job if they feel they are valued for their unique abilities.

Realize how important salary is to this generation. Every generation has valued compensation, of course, but young people today face an uphill battle to buy houses in a real estate market that has far outpaced inflation. Even dual-income couples have a difficult time finding affordable houses in many cities now. Add in escalating costs for health care and child care, plus a staggering amount of college debt, and young people are often in very precarious economic positions. Nothing raises the ire of a young person more than an older person who doesn't understand current economic realities and assumes that we're out spending our money on luxuries. I'll never forget a faculty meeting at which an older professor said he thought the \$50,000 salary for a new position sounded too high. Perhaps because he bought his own house forty years ago, he seemed oblivious to the fact that a \$50,000 annual salary won't even buy a two-bedroom condo in San Diego anymore. Though it's true that GenMe is more materialistic, we are also finding it difficult just to pay for the necessities of life.

One of the best recruiting tools you have for this generation is good

benefits. Jobs with decent health care plans are difficult to find these days, and there is nothing more demoralizing for a young employee than to find out they are paying \$500 a month for health care and still have to wait four months to see a doctor. A job with an excellent health care plan is extremely difficult to leave. Retirement plans are also a surprisingly good recruiting tool considering the youth of this generation. GenMe assumes Social Security is not going to be there to support them, so they will have to stand on their own. With so many more dual-income families, perks like on-site day care, flexible schedules, work-at-home options, and generous parental leave policies will also significantly improve retention. Hewlett-Packard instituted many of these reforms during the late 1990s and now has one of the lowest turnover rates in the business. These types of programs are already growing in popularity and will continue to do so as women constitute a larger and larger percentage of the college-educated workforce (women now earn an incredible 57% of college degrees). Even for young people without children, flexible scheduling is a big hit. They're willing to get the work done, so who cares if they take a long lunch to see a friend who's in town?

You probably already realize that your young female employees are a very different breed from the women of previous generations. They will be just as confident and assertive as the men you employ. They're still different from men in other ways, however. Cultural expectations for feminine appearance have grown even more demanding in recent years, for example. And women don't take to trash talking and blunt teasing the way men do; this sex difference still persists. (Women do not call their friends "Dumbass" like men do in that odd masculine cross between affection and insult.) On the flip side, realize that young men no longer find it odd for guys to be interested in cooking or interior decorating; the metrosexuals among them will also be interested in fashion. Gender is a fluid concept to this generation.

For economic reasons, two incomes will continue to be the norm for this generation. Most women with children return to the workplace soon after their maternity leave is up. However, many women would rather work part-time after having children, so don't be surprised by this request should you hear it. Over the next few years, you should also not be surprised to hear such requests from new fathers. Men are getting more and more involved in child rearing, and many young men are not willing to

miss out on their children because they have to work twelve hours a day. With more women getting a college education, an increasing number of men will make less than their wives. Most day care centers close at 5:30 or 6:00 P.M.; that's often a nanny's quitting time as well. Thus late meetings will lead to frantic calls to spouses and lots of stress. Managers might still have to call late meetings, sometimes, but they need to realize the impact they will have.

FOR MARKETERS AND ENTREPRENEURS

Marketers and salespeople already know about—and use—the self-focus of Generation Me. This generation is, by definition, interested in products that satisfy their personal wants and help them express themselves as individuals. At the same time, this generation feels a tremendous amount of anxiety about succeeding in life. The market for products that help young people get into college or graduate school, do well in interviews, and look good for those interviews will continue to grow. Young women in particular will respond to an advertising campaign that shows them how to dress professionally in a way that is still attractive. This balance is still difficult to strike, and more and more young women are anxious about their job or graduate school interviews. They've gotten mixed messages from TV and movies about how to dress on such occasions, since these sources often show professional women showing lots of leg and cleavage (anything for ratings). Sisterly advice in this department will be welcomed.

Young people are also starving for good advice on career paths. Ten years ago, who had ever heard of a "life coach?" Companies like My Guidewire (myguidewire.com) ask if you are "unhappy with your job" or "wanting to shift from surviving to succeeding," and promise to help you "gain a competitive advantage" (for a monthly fee, of course). Expect this market to expand as more and more young people find it difficult to navigate the transition from college to first job, or find themselves dissatisfied with their first job (or second, or third). With more college graduates emerging with business and psychology degrees, many young people will gladly pay someone to help them find a job that uses their skills.

The continuing rise in the age at first marriage and young people's long working hours both suggest that Internet dating services and "speed

An informed, rollicking look at the epidemic narcissism, illusory optimism, and anxiety and depression of today's younger Americans. Compelling reading . . . *Generation Me* is marvelously written with a sparkling humor."

—David G. Myers, author of *The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty*

Called "The Entitlement Generation" or Gen Y, they are storming into schools, colleges, and businesses all over the country. In this provocative new book, headline-making psychologist and social commentator Dr. Jean Twenge explores why the young people she calls "Generation Me"—those born in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s—are tolerant, confident, open-minded, and ambitious but also cynical, depressed, lonely, and anxious.

Herself a member of Generation Me, Dr. Twenge uses findings from the largest inter-generational research study ever conducted—with data from 1.3 million respondents spanning six decades—to reveal how profoundly different today's young adults are.

Here are the often shocking truths about this generation, including dramatic differences in sexual behavior, as well as controversial predictions about what the future holds for them and society as a whole. Her often humorous, eyebrow-raising stories about real people vividly bring to life the hopes and dreams, disappointments and challenges of Generation Me.

GenMe has created a profound shift in the American character, changing what it means to be an individual in today's society. The collision of this generation's entitled self-focus and today's competitive marketplace will create one of the most daunting challenges of the new century. Engaging, controversial, prescriptive, funny, *Generation Me* will give Boomers new insight into their offspring, and help those in their teens, 20s, and 30s finally make sense of themselves and their goals and find their road to happiness.

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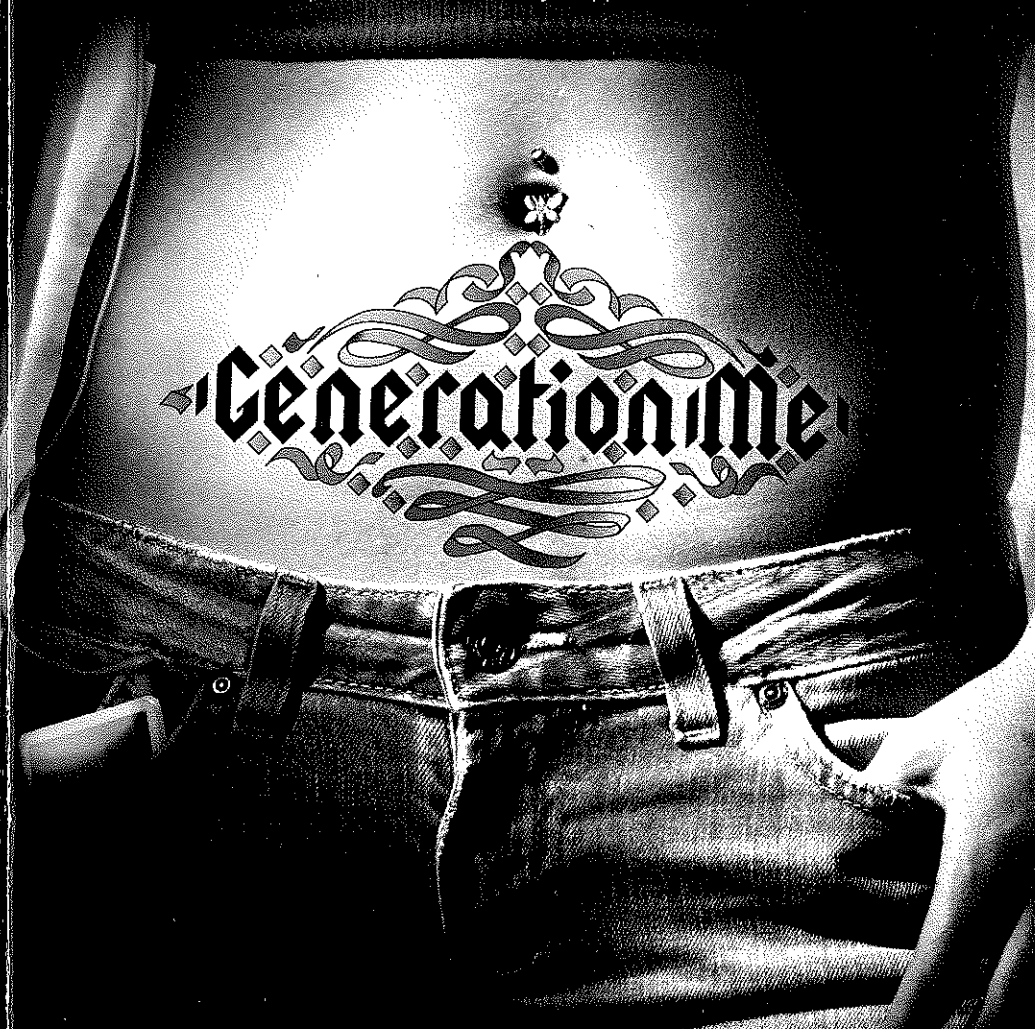
GENERATION ME

Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—

Jean M. Twenge, Ph.D.

"Twenge does a huge, decidedly un-GenX amount of research and replaces [hunches] with actual data. . . . [L]ucid and entertaining . . . bold . . . refreshing."

—Chris Colin, author of *What Really Happened to the Class of '93*



Why Today's Young Americans Are More
Confident, Assertive, Entitled—
and More Miserable Than Ever Before

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