



ITS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

AG PLEEZ DADDY!

A consultant who works for me was expressing the disappointment and disillusionment that had set in after a teenage rally he recently facilitated. As an introductory exercise he had asked each person to stand up and talk a little about themselves but half way through he had to call a halt as he said it was too painful to listen this youthful group's utter, lack of eloquence and stumbling attempts to try and express themselves. He attributed this inarticulateness to the fact that our youth no longer need to know how to speak, read and write correctly because they live in a time where technology demands that every message becomes a compressed file, distorted and reduced to its absolute lowest level.

Had the facilitator of the group asked them to quickly SMS their introduction to himself, chances are a better and more effective result would have been achieved. Researchers in the U.K. say that 1.4 billion text messages were sent in January 2002 and that SMS is a key means of communication for teenagers. Consider these sad statistics. U.K. surveys have shown that: 13 percent of teens have used SMS to end a relationship... 37 percent have used SMS to tell someone "I lv u"... 80 percent use their mobile while on a date to do things like organize their social lives, ask difficult questions or find out football scores... and 42 percent of teens flirt with SMS

We might find these stats shocking but they do highlight the need to understand the world that we live in and the realities we face. Sure I appreciate the tendency to bemoan the new generation and frown because they are not like we were but if we want to manage the situation we have to go beyond that.. The other day I was in GAME with my two daughters and three of their friends and they headed for the mobile counter to check out some of the new models. When the lady behind the counter wouldn't let them near the phones saying it was policy no to allow 'kids' to touch them without an adult present' they had a collective teenage hissy fit which adds up to bad news for that retail store. Let me point out the number of errors there – 1) you don't call teenagers 'kids', 2) you don't tell them they need adult supervision and 3) you certainly show them the phone cos if they want to buy it chances are they will – you need to recognise the enormous purchasing power of this generation.

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So I'm sorry to tell you that you lost 5 customers there - when they are to get a new phone for their birthday and mom or dad ask where do you want to go – last place on their mind will be GAME. You blew it big time.

Take note of this snippet on their financial clout, courtesy of the UK's Daily Mirror on 15 January, 2003: "tweenagers aged 10-13 have more spending power than ever with tastes more like older teenagers, a survey has revealed. The group is showered with money by a growing number of absent parents to ease their guilt. Tweens receive an average of £7.58 (90 pula) a week, up from £4.81 (58 pula) in 1997, but they are now spending it on CD's and magazines rather than toys and sweets." Analyst Piers Berezai said "in the U.K. there are 2.79 million tweens and a desire to be older means they are looking to buy grown-up products." And one of the most desirable objects for this group is a mobile phone. Not just any old phone, mind. They want the latest models and the most advanced features and they have no qualms about nagging recalcitrant parents into submission to get what they want.

Anyway what I am getting at here is that it doesn't matter if we are at a teenage rally or selling mobile phones at GAME. What is important is to understand the context in which we live. Kids are being given more and more and growing up faster and faster. For us in business it is vital to note that these are the people who are starting to populate our organizations, so we need to know who they are, what makes them tick and what they are doing now to be able to understand what our organizations have to be like to accommodate them And forget the notion that they must 'fit in' – this emerging generation doesn't acknowledge the phrase or the attitude behind it - they are too empowered for that.

Earlier this week a client was explaining the challenge facing their organization in being able to retain their graduate trainees. To me it was apparent that the reason that they cannot keep these new empowered people is because they are trying to panelbeat them into fitting into the organization as opposed to recognizing that the younger generation are demanding a different work life from us. We were happy with hierarchical structures, valuing time-based promotions, corner office values and working into the wee small hours of the morning for the sake of the firm.

The new emerging educated employee wants to contribute; they want to see that their contribution is being effective and being recognised; they want to learn; they want to grow; and they want to feel that they are part of a successful enterprise that is making a difference in the world. And just as issuing instructions no longer works with my teenage daughter you can no longer simply say, "Drop everything you're doing and do this instead." They want to know why they are doing something and to appreciate that there is purpose behind it.

But more than anything the new workforce wants flexibility. The emphasis has changed from fitting the employee into the organization to fitting the organization into the employee. For a generation with a higher level of self esteem than we ever had, an attitude of entitlement and a propensity for quality of life (in other words they are generally lazy) it is easy to feel frustrated but it does little good. If that's the reality that's what you have to manage.

So the organization that is going to succeed in the next 10 years is the one that adapts to allow the new generation to come in and add value in a different way, in an organization with fluid structures, flexible rules, opportunity for creativity and contribution and above all plenty of time available to check text messages!

