

## **Gen Y Workers Start Labour Revolution**

**By Paul Brent**



A lot of ink has been devoted to Generation Y of late, the coddled, computer-savvy offspring of the Baby Boomers. Self-entitled, impatient, insular and social-networking obsessed are just a few of the disparaging descriptions thrown about by Boomer and Gen X managers of workers born after 1980. Here's another one: revolutionary.

Because of their unique status as the first generation raised entirely during the age of the personal computer and Internet, they are going to have a profound impact on the workplace – and faster than organizations expect or are likely equipped to handle. Rather than harness their new century capabilities, however, managers are trying to squeeze them into the pre-information age world of 9 to 5 work better suited to the B.G. era (Before Google).

"We're trying to teach people about the past rather than planning for the future," said Gerry Madigan, a Calgary-based performance management specialist. "We're trying to tell Generation Y how they should be doing things instead of asking them how they do things."

Madigan points to the powerful slideshow presentation of Colorado teacher Karl Fisch' "Shift Happens," - on YouTube of course, where its views are in the multi-millions. Already two years out of date, Fisch's presentation argues that we are now in a time of exponential change driven by technology. Here are just a few of the observations: China will soon be the No. 1 English-speaking country, the U.S. Department of Labour estimates today's students will have 10 to 14 different jobs by age 38 and the top 10 jobs in demand in 2010 will not have existed in 2004 according to a former U.S. Labour Secretary.

Madigan is spending much of his time attempting to convince organizations' mostly Boomer management to step back and take a more advisory and directional role with their Gen Y workers rather than insist they perform work the way it has always been done. "The energy and the energy and creativity of Generation Y is absolutely astounding, it is incredible if you can harness it the right way," he said.

The most connected generation ever chafes under management who they believe only want the unquestioning workers of yesteryear, notes Madigan, pointing to studies that identify a wide engagement gap between Gen Ys and their jobs. "Generation Y see a huge disconnect. They feel that senior management don't really listen to them or give them any credibility for their ideas and they are sort of forced into old methods and processes of how they do things whereas they have got these highly creative minds and they want to have face-to-face communications with managers."

In an article in the Harvard Business Review, Concourse Institute president Tamara Erickson argues that the traditional 40-hour work week is anathema to Gen Y's idea of work. They prefer jobs to be defined by task, not time, and want to be compensated for what they

produce. Hanging around the workplace after the job is completed, waiting for a whistle to blow - like modern-day Fred Flintstones- does not fit with their world view.

For Erickson, the structure and reward system of work is moving back to what existed in pre-industrial revolution times when agricultural and craft workers were paid based on production. That changed when production "shifted from the discrete output of individual workers to a complex, integrated process in which it was difficult to isolate tasks," she wrote. "Logging time made more sense. Post-Depression regulations and the rise of unionization soon led to standardized hours."

Erickson said we are already moving towards a less regimented way of work, which will accommodate the newest generation of workers. "Many salaried knowledge workers are already effectively paid for tasks rather than time. Allowing telecommuting and flexible hours is essentially trusting that the task will be accomplished, even when people working from home are expected to put in a specified number of hours." She cites the fact that already 40% of IBM employees have no official offices.

At Best Buy's headquarters, more than 60% of the 4,000 employees are now judged only on tasks or results. "Salaried people put in as much time as it takes to do their work," she notes. "Hourly employees in the program work a set number of hours to comply with federal labour regulations, but they get to choose when. Those employees report better relationships with family and friends, more company loyalty, and more focus and energy. Productivity has increased by 35%, and voluntary turnover is 320 basis points lower than in teams that have not made the change."

Madigan, too, predicts a massive shift in the workplace but sees Boomers in the role of counter-revolutionaries when it comes to telecommuting and flexible hours based on his work with employers experimenting in those areas. "The resistance I get is mainly from the Baby Boomers who are so accustomed to the command and control methodology and that is gone. It really does not work in today's society, especially with Generation Y."

In the end though, we non-Ys likely won't have any choice but to join the revolution.

"We are not the ones who created the world, the way it is going from a technological point of view," said Madigan. "The young people have done that. They have created this world and we need to know how to work in their world and work with them."



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