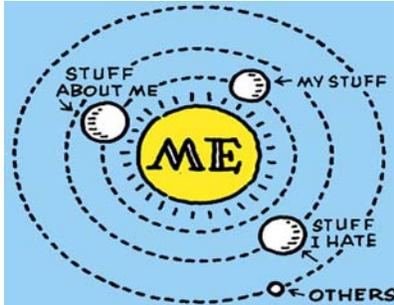


# GenY, SoMe, And Global Change<sup>1</sup>

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I have a clear message for old-school managers—those born before 1980. But, before I do that, I need to tell you some background stories...

In 1990, I was finishing the draft of a book, *The MeVolution: The Real Meaning of the Me Decade*. I had been reading such authors as Tom Wolfe, who labeled the 1970's as the "Me Decade," and I was fascinated by the movie *Greed is Good*. People then were contending that the '70's had spawned a selfish, ego-centric, manipulative, and socially irresponsible generation of "Me-Firsters," with a narcissistic focus on Self. Many saw our society on the verge of throwing out the advances we had made toward a caring, civilized society. They saw us regressing to a "survival of the fittest" mentality.



But I felt differently. I believed then that advances in the social sciences were opening the doors to the previously sacred chambers of our own psyches. We were making ourselves less mystical and, therefore, less unknown. The more we know about ourselves, the more we become aware of our own vulnerabilities. The more we become aware of our own vulnerabilities, the more we will be aware of and can be sensitive to the vulnerabilities of others.

In spite of the plethora of self-serving events evident in the 70's and 80's, I saw our fixation on Self as bringing us to the brink of an exciting, entirely new perception of ourselves and each other—a virtual redefining of species survival—from survival of the fittest to a wider perspective of the survival of our global community. I saw our world getting smaller every day. I argued that we could only make it as a species in the future if we survived as a fully interconnected global group. Instinctively, we always have known that our individual survival will ultimately depend on our group survival. But not until near the end of the 20th century did we have the beginnings of the knowledge and maturity needed to bring that about.

Unfortunately for me, prospective publishers didn't agree with my point of view. I finally put the draft of my book aside.

It is now 20 years later. A revolution is occurring that is more significant than the industrial revolution. The Internet and burgeoning social media (known as SoMe) is linking people throughout the world. Spearheading that revolution are members of the millennial generation (GenY), people born between 1980 and 2000. Through SoMe such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace, GenYers are interconnected far more than they ever could be face-to-face. Their daily digital behaviors are virtually rewiring their brains. They are revealing themselves to one another like no other generation has ever done before. And, their vision is becoming global. For this millennial generation, social media has eclipsed politics, corporations, and consumer power as the greatest agent of change.



<sup>1</sup> From: [http://www.arniedahlke.com/101215\\_GenY,\\_SoMe,\\_&\\_Global\\_Change.pdf](http://www.arniedahlke.com/101215_GenY,_SoMe,_&_Global_Change.pdf) The Me graphic was adapted from Ron Barrett, New York Times, July 20, 2008.

But, once again, I hear critical voices. “GenYers are narcissistic and selfish.” “GenYers are immature, disrespectful, and nonprofessional.” Many business leaders see them as having a hard time accepting personal responsibility for their decisions. Many managers see them as not having a clear sense of direction or purpose in the office.<sup>2</sup> They see them as a threat to good business practices.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. In February, 2010, a global study of 15,000 people, from 23 to 28 years old, found that this generation is “the most socially responsible generation that has existed and they have the power to make the world’s leaders follow them.”<sup>3</sup> Eighty-one percent of those polled felt that multinational corporations are obligated to conduct business ethically and responsibly. They also believe that business must stand for something more than profit and they are prepared to censure unethical companies with their purchase decisions. And, they are more prone to collaboration and teamwork than previous generations, having grown up in an atmosphere of highly scheduled sports and school project events. Using today’s digital technology, they are more globally connected than any generation in history.



Many managers, particularly those in non-IT organizations, believe that GenYers are narcissistic and selfish. To the contrary. Millennials tend to be more other-directed and community-minded. Widely connected through SoMe, they harness the newer technologies to reach out and help other people. For example:<sup>4</sup>



Fourteen year-old Frank Daily boarded a bus wearing his brand new pair of Nike basketball shoes on a snowy winter day. At one bus stop, a pregnant barefoot lady got on the bus and told the driver she was riding on the bus to warm her feet because she couldn’t afford shoes. When the bus came to the end of its route, Frank took off his shiny new shoes and gave them to the lady before disembarking. He told her, “You need these more than I do.” He then walked home three blocks in the snow—shoeless.

A 13-student group in JD Hodgson Elementary School in Ontario, who call themselves the *We Workers*, are dedicated to making a difference in their community and around the world. They have conducted such local campaigns as *Halloween for Hunger*, in which students collected canned goods instead of candy, while trick-or-treating, and donated them to their local food bank. They promoted the participation of more than 115 students having no voice for a 24 hour period to support *Vow of Silence*, designed to raise awareness of children’s fundraising for overseas projects for *Free The Children*. They are currently planning a global project they call *Brick by Brick*, with the goal of building a school in Ecuador over the next two years.



Marcos Salazar, now a 31 year-old psychologist from Brooklyn, N.Y., was teaching an online business course one day and discussing selling products and services on the web. Struck by how engaged his students were in the class and how enthusiastically they generated ideas, he was inspired to start SNAP (Strategic Neighborhood Action Project), a non-profit which helps low-income or unemployed people in the Brooklyn and Fort Greene areas develop business and technology skills. He works hard at getting to know every aspect of his neighborhood and the surrounding areas. He engages others to get more involved in working with local non-profits and elected officials to improve the way of life for everyone in the community.



GenYers are not only more helpful and community-minded. In spite of the perception of many old-school managers who view them as irresponsible and uncreative, millennials also are very creative and entrepreneurial, as the following examples illustrate:<sup>5</sup>

Fifteen year-old Savannah Britt started her own magazine called *Girlpez*—making her the youngest magazine publisher in the world. The magazine features coverage of events, like concerts and fashion shows, along with interviews from top popular music stars. She then developed a website for girls ages 12-16 ([www.girlpez.com](http://www.girlpez.com)). Accompanying the website is



<sup>2</sup> According to research from York College’s Center for Professional Excellence, which polled 520 hiring managers, human resources leaders and business executives—<http://www.eweek.com/c/a/IT-Management/GenY-Shows-Lack-of-Professionalism-at-Work-Report-718021/>

<sup>3</sup> From the Inaugural Study from Euro RSCG: <http://www.itnewsonline.com/showprnstory.php?storyid=123547>

<sup>4</sup> *Kids with Courage* by Barbara A. Lewis, (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, Inc.), 1992, pp. 81-86, <http://www.haliburtonecho.ca/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=2877972>, and <http://www.examiner.com/generation-y-in-national/gen-y-gives-thanks-helping-others-is-meaningful-and-admirable>

<sup>5</sup> <http://juniorbiz.com/top-25-young-entrepreneurs>

a hard copy magazine entitled *Girlpez Fashion Magazine*. The magazine has recently transitioned from print to being online only. The magazine has been seen and endorsed by some of the top people in the industry such as Amy Astley, the editor in chief of *Teen Vogue*.

Syed Balkhi, 19-year old social media prodigy, along with a handful of college friends, has started a successful web service company called *Uzzz Productions*. His blog for WordPress beginners, *WPBeginner*, has been up since July 2009 and already attracts an incredible 145,000 unique visitors each month. Users of Uzzz are very enthusiastic. They see Uzzz as very responsive, affordable, and expert at using WordPress.



Marshall Haas, 20-year old Architect Outsourcer has recruited a team of 20 artists in the Philippines to create architectural images from floor plans—he began attracting as many as eight clients a month. He is also developing a mobile web application called *Podums*, which uses game mechanics to encourage people to be productive.



Twenty-year old Catherine Cook, a junior at Georgetown University in Washington, DC developed *myYearbook.com* in her dorm room. It now has over 20 million members and is ranked in the top 25 most trafficked websites in the U.S. according to *comScore*, pulling in \$20 million in annual revenue.

These stories are just a sampling of the many stories about this new generation of helpers and entrepreneurs. They will be the managers of tomorrow. By 2014, it is estimated that there will be more than 58 million Millennials employed in various organizations.<sup>6</sup>

### **My Message To Old-School Managers Is Loud And Clear:**

**Rather than force them into your own, often out-of-date, top-down style of management, prepare yourself to harness the burgeoning talents and skills of this remarkable new generation:**

- ◆ **They are tied to their 21<sup>st</sup> Century, multi-device technology.**  
Provide them with the most up-to-date technology and encourage them to find ways of using it to both improve organizational functioning and create customer valued products and services.
- ◆ **They value making an impact more than making money.**  
Mentor rather than evaluate. Give them constructive feedback and coaching. Praise them clearly when they excel. Give them public arenas, such as attending conferences, to demonstrate their competence.
- ◆ **They are communicators.**  
Keep them informed about your organization—where it is going and how it is doing. Cultivate a mutually respectful, two-way communication with them, both face-to-face, and through their SoMe links.
- ◆ **They resist hierarchical bureaucracies and, at the same time, are collaboration-oriented.**  
Engage them in team efforts. They thrive when they collaborate. Set them to work on special projects with clearly stated goals—then turn them loose!
- ◆ **They are inventive.**  
Give them blocked-out time to innovate—to create new products and services and improve processes.
- ◆ **They are community-minded.**  
Provide them a way to participate in connecting your organization to the surrounding community. Involve them in projects that benefit the community. Not only will this strengthen their commitment to their work, it also will give your organization good press.

Google is a wonderful example of an organization doing it right with the new generation. They have a policy to allow people 20% of their time to pursue their independent products. A study conducted in 2005 determined that 50% of all product releases were generated during that 20% independent project time. And, as of January 1st, to demonstrate the value they place on their employees, every employee will receive a 10% raise and a \$1,000 tax-free bonus, costing the company an estimated one billion dollars a year!<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.myarticlearchive.com/articles/9/175.htm>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.think-differently.org/2007/08/google-on-innovation.html> and <http://www.businessinsider.com/google-bonus-and-raise-2010-11>.