

THE PLATFORM IS BURNING

Sam started with Walter Manufacturing right out of high school. He wanted to attend college, but he didn't have enough for tuition and he needed to earn money to support his future family. Shortly after joining the company, he married his high school sweetheart.

As with all new hires, Sam was on the maintenance crew and was assigned some of the most difficult and dirty jobs in the plant. The plant worked three shifts, and all new maintenance employees were required to work rotating shifts for at least three years.

While the work was hard, Sam was eager to learn and take on more and more responsibility. He was always asking, "What's next?" and was never afraid to take on a new challenge or assignment. In fact, Sam often stayed late to make sure his work was properly transitioned to the next shift.

After "putting in his time" on the maintenance crew, Sam's hard work and dedication were rewarded and he received his first promotion. Fast forward many years and Sam is still at Walter Manufacturing. He's progressed steadily, taken on many roles and is currently a general foreman. In addition to his steady rise in the company, Sam found time to go back to school and earn a bachelor's degree.

Back to the Future

If we were to tell you Sam's story was from 1975 you would easily believe it. There were a lot of Sams in 1975. Maybe you have not seen many lately. Well, Sam is thirty-five and has worked at the same place his entire life. He is a real person, and we simply changed his name and company.

Sam's generation, Gen Y, is the future of work. When we asked Sam why he stayed at the same job, put up with shift work, took on the dirty tasks, and worked unpaid overtime, his answer was simple. He wanted to. He wanted to because his managers and the business owners were true leaders and he simply wanted to work for them. They earned his loyalty.

When we probed further he told us his leaders pushed, challenged, corrected, coached, and, maybe most importantly, trusted him. They gave him several jobs to tackle and recognized his good work. He was encouraged to go back to school, even though a degree might have him looking for other opportunities outside the company. They also "called him on the carpet" when his work was sub-standard. In short, his leaders were true leaders.

This book, when all is said and done, is a leadership book for a new generation of employees and a new generation of leaders. Gen Y (also referred to as Millennials), all eighty million, demand a new leadership style. What worked in the past and passed for leadership will no longer work. Gen Y does not accept sub-standard leadership and will "vote with their feet." They will leave your company rather than work for someone who is not a good leader.

The Time Is Now

When we wrote the first edition of this book in 2009, businesses still had time to put their plans and strategies in place to attract and retain the next generation of talent. That window has closed. The time is now. Gen Y (born between 1977 and 1995) is fully in the workforce. In 2013 the youngest turned eighteen. In 2009 the

youngest was only fourteen, so the full impact of this generation was still in the future. Not now. Every Gen Yer is working, looking for work, or earning an advanced degree to enter the workforce. To paraphrase John Kotter, the inventor of Change Management, “The platform is burning.”

Since our first edition, much has changed and we will address it in this edition. The Great Recession* has had a major impact on Gen Y and how they view the world. Much like the Great Depression impacted the “Greatest Generation” for their entire lives, the Great Recession will impact all of Gen Y’s decisions, careers, and spending choices.

Not only has all of Gen Y entered (or are prepared to enter) the workforce since 2009, but the oldest of this cohort has gained many years of experience and vast amounts of education. In addition to being the most well-educated generation of all time, starting in 2013 every eight seconds *for the next eighteen years*, a Gen Yer will turn thirty-six. We certainly are not talking about “these kids” anymore.

As Gen Y matures and gains experience, Baby Boomers and Gen X are marching toward retirement. Gen Y will be replacing this lost knowledge capital. Boomers began to turn sixty-five in 2010 and a Boomer will turn sixty-five every 8.5 seconds until 2029.

Leadership for a New Generation

In many ways leadership is timeless. Many of the things we will discuss in this book are not new. However, many leadership tenants have evolved over time and no longer resemble the original intent.

*According to Wikipedia—The Great Recession is an ongoing marked global economic decline that began in December 2007 and took a particularly sharp downward turn in September 2008. The recession affected the entire world economy, with greater detriment to some countries than others, but overall to a degree that made it the worst global recession since World War II. It was a major global recession characterized by various systemic imbalances, and was sparked by the outbreak of the U.S. subprime mortgage crisis and financial crisis of 2007–2008. The economic side-effects of the European sovereign debt crisis, austerity, high levels of household debt, trade imbalances, high unemployment, and limited prospects for global growth in 2013 and 2014, continued to provide obstacles for many countries to achieve a full recovery from the recession.

This evolution ** has left us with some things that, at times, are not even recognizable as leadership. In fact, many of the leadership practices organizations say they do (and may even do as a part of their culture) end up having a very negative impact on Gen Y.

Over the past fifty years many organizations have said things like, “People are our greatest asset” or “We have an open door policy” or “There is no such thing as a stupid question” to motivate and communicate with their employees. In practice, people never hear feedback, are made to feel stupid when seeking input, and the boss’s door, while physically open, might as well be nailed closed.

First and foremost, this book is about leadership and aligning your words with your actions. We will challenge you to evaluate your leadership, get your peer leaders on board and, finally, to develop the next generation of leaders. All of this can be built into your culture. It’s the next step in the evolution of corporate leadership (see Figure 1.1). The opposite of evolution is extinction.

As a consultant and a coach, we have the opportunity to interact with many different people from all walks of life. We have also had the good fortune of working with some of the best leaders in the sports and corporate worlds. They have one thing in common. When it is time to change something in their organizations or on their teams, they first look in the mirror. Bear

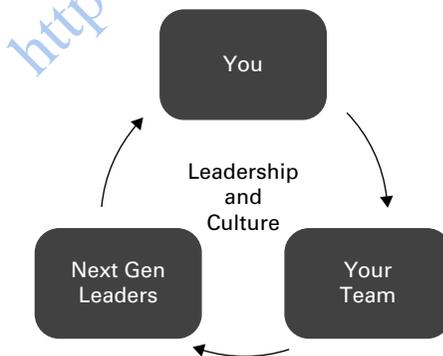


FIGURE 1.1. 21st Century Leadership: An Ongoing Process

**<http://i.word.com/dictionary/Evolution>

Bryant, the legendary football coach, used to say, “When we win the team played great. When we lose I coached a bad game.” And he meant it. Change and leadership start in the mirror.

“Management is about coping with complexity. Leadership is about coping with change.”

John Kotter, Harvard University,
Author, *Leading Change*

Consultant's Corner

Since the publication of the first edition of this book in 2009, I've had the good fortune of speaking to groups around the world on the topics of leadership and Gen Y. One of the things I do is ask the audience to write down the adjectives they think of when they think of Gen Y in the workplace. They are instructed to throw political correctness to the wind.

Without fail, the results are always the same. Folks start off with one or two nice things about Gen Y, like “tech-savvy” or “well-educated.” From there it is usually an out-of-control train wreck. The audience says things like “spoiled, lazy, entitled, soft,” and some things not fit to print.

I then relay my “road to Damascus conversion” regarding Gen Y. Coach Sendek had me open my mind and look in the mirror.

When we first started to discuss writing a book, I had very similar prejudices toward Gen Y. As the youngest of six children, born to Greatest Generation parents in a working class neighborhood, I did not think highly of Gen Y. In fact, the book was intended to be a “point/counter-point” book, with Herb giving the virtues of Gen Y and me challenging him every step of the way.

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Herb forced me to look in the mirror. As a lifelong student of leadership who makes his living working with Gen Y every day, Herb posed a simple point for my consideration. He said, "By definition, leaders have followers." Then he asked me, "If one cannot adapt his leadership to the new followers, guess what that means?"

It was time for me to look in the mirror. You may well have some of the same feelings I had about "these kids" and "Why can't they be more like us?" I pose the same question to you, "If you can't adapt your leadership to new followers, what does that mean?" The answer is obvious: you won't have followers for long, which means you will no longer be a leader.

The Right Kind of Change

Key Point

Gen Y will force businesses to align words and actions.

Let's, right up front, tell you what this book is NOT about. This book is NOT about coddling a new group of employees. It is NOT about compromising your values. It is NOT about giving in or acquiescing to a new generation. It is about leadership and leading the right kind of change.

"When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."

Victor Frankl, Author,
Man's Search for Meaning

Leading this change will have several very important benefits. An important thing to know is that any changes you put in place

that motivate Gen Y will also be well received by *all* of your employees. Gen Y has been more vocal and demanding than previous generations. Previous generations would “put up with” poor leadership and simply disengage. We call this “retiring on the job.” They may well stay and not quit, but they are not engaged and they are certainly not as productive as possible. Leading your organization in ways that will attract Gen Y will also increase your overall productivity from *every* generation.

This book will help you align your organization in ways that attract Gen Y, increase all employee productivity, and create a more engaged and motivated workforce. You will see that hiring and retaining folks like Sam is possible. Sam may eventually leave his current employer, and you will also lose quality employees who move on to other challenges, but you will have maximized your investment along the way and will be known as an employer (and leader) of choice. This is not something “warm and fuzzy” and “nice to do.” This may be the single most important thing a business can do to positively impact its bottom line.

Key Point

Every generation wants what Gen Y demands.

Exhibit 1.1. Families Want to Understand Gen Y, Too

As we worked with leaders throughout the country and around the world lecturing on how to better understand Gen Y, both of us have been amazed at the unexpected benefits our work has produced. While we set out to help business leaders create better recruiting and retention strategies, we found we were accomplishing much more: we were also helping Baby Boomer parents better understand their children.

Senior executives have approached us after our talks to thank us for the insights—not as business leaders, but as parents! While this book isn’t aimed at parents, we would feel deeply honored if even one person improved his or her relationship with Gen Y children as a result of the contents of this book.

Conclusion

Beginning in 2013 the last of Gen Y turned eighteen and is either in the workforce or preparing to join the workforce. They are the future of work and at eighty million strong will define talent acquisition and retention practices for decades. Business leaders in the 21st century will be challenged to adapt to several new realities and to discard 20th century management practices that no longer work. Business leaders must learn how to integrate four generations of “breadwinners” into their workforce and adapt their leadership in order to attract and retain the best talent available. Talent retention is critical for many reasons, including financial/bottom line profits. Turnover is costly and has a direct impact on the financial performance of any company.

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At the end of the chapters, following the traditional conclusion, we include a brief biography of a real Gen Y individual that describes his or her work situation. These bios are designed to provide you with an additional perspective on the points brought out in this book.

Ann’s Gen Y Profile

Name: Ann

Location: Northeast

Age: 27

Background:

- Graduated with a bachelor’s degree in English from a large state university
- Served as editor-in-chief of the university’s daily student newspaper during her senior year of college
- Worked for nearly six years at a major metropolitan daily newspaper as a reporter and editor
- Currently working as a copy editor at a worldwide business publication owned by a large corporation

After graduating from college in 2008, Ann was thrilled to land a job as a copy editor at a major newspaper near her hometown, calling it her “dream job.” After just a few years, though, Ann was seeking work at a new organization.

While she enjoyed reporting and editing, Ann was frustrated with the newspaper’s operations. There was no formal mentoring program or focus on professional development, so Ann felt like there was little room for improvement and even fewer opportunities to move up.

The paper’s newsroom was unionized, meaning Ann brought home a higher salary than a lot of her peers, but it also fostered a sense of complacency among her colleagues. Her editor, for example, arrived later and left earlier than Ann nearly every single day, leading Ann to feel resentful and disillusioned.

Additionally, the union focused on protecting older workers, which meant that Ann wasn’t enjoying some of the benefits of her peers working in other industries. A percentage of her pay went toward a pension fund she was not a part of, and the fund will likely never be solvent enough for Ann to count on it as a retirement plan. Because Ann is planning to start a family at some point, the newspaper’s less-than-stellar maternity leave policy also left her wanting to find an organization with more progressive benefits.

Ann sought new work for more than two years before deciding to leave the paper to work as a copy editor for a larger publication owned by a major corporation. This job comes with a higher salary and better benefits, including a 401(k). Ann’s bosses at her new job have also told her there will be opportunities for professional development, as well as chances to move into new roles with the company.

For Ann, the characteristics of a good job are

- Opportunity to learn and grow professionally
- Recognition that her development is good for the organization’s success
- A fair salary and progressive benefits, including flexible work schedules, paid time off, retirement plans, and maternity and paternity benefits
- Flexible work arrangements, including the ability to work from home

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Ann is motivated by:

- Feedback and constructive criticism
- The ability to affect long-term change
- Collaboration at work



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