

TWENTY- SOMETHING

MANAGING & MOTIVATING TODAY'S NEW WORK FORCE

Claire
Raines

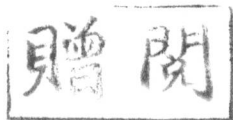
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with JO LEDA MARTIN



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Twentysomething

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Today's New Workforce



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Twentysomething

It's hard to chase the baby boomers,
who have so much and left us so dry.

Patty, age twenty-four

Acknowledgments

For three years, Jim Ring, human resources manager for the Business Services Group of ARA Services, encouraged us, loaned his videotapes, and referred contacts.

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A couple of years ago, when we decided to pursue the twentysomething topic seriously, Linda Keller, a poet and artist from Denver, spent days in the library looking for information. At that time, almost nothing had been written, even in magazines and daily papers. Linda's task was often frustrating.

Coleen Hubbard, a playwright and author from Denver, contributed significantly by researching and writing sections of some of the chapters. We are grateful for her ability to pick up our purpose and style instantly and produce what we needed.

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Foreword

I believe America is coming into a period of crisis. It's a crisis of many dimensions. Never before have Americans been so unsure of The American Way—so confused about what's real, what counts, and what to do with their lives.

One of the many dimensions of this crisis is a crisis in job, career, and personal direction. We have a whole generation of very troubled young people coming into the workforce, and it will be our challenge to help them deal with their troubles and find meaning in their lives. I will go so far as to say we must literally reclaim a lost generation.

Today's children, adolescents, and teenagers are without doubt the most commercially exploited generation in our history. They are richer, better fed, better dressed, more indulged, more confused about who they are, more cynical, and less committed to anything than any generation has ever been.

In many ways they are the most cheated generation that has ever come along. The American high-pressure video culture of hedonistic immediacy has robbed them of their childhood and made them into decadent, worldly mini-adults. It has taken from them the opportunity to learn the most basic human values of honesty, self-restraint, consideration for others, playing by the rules, and hard work. And now they come to us in all their diversity and varying degrees of maturity and commitment to ethical values.

If the leaders of American organizations, in both public and private sectors, hope to build strong, vibrant cultures based on a commitment to service and quality, they will have to grow and develop

these mini-adults into competent, committed workers and organizational citizens. The challenge is enormous, and it will not go away.

I am optimistic that our leaders will face up to the challenge, although it will surely be a very stressful adaptation for both the leaders and the led.

Larry Bradford and Claire Raines have done a great job of defining this new workforce, and they have given us workable methods and techniques for motivating and managing them. They explain who these folks are, how they got that way, and what we must do to develop them into valuable contributors to our organizations. *Twentysomething* makes a much-needed contribution in an area which is vital to the success of American business.

—Karl Albrecht,
co-author of *Service America!* and
author of *The Only Thing That Matters*

Introduction

Have you ever heard yourself say, “You just can’t get good help anymore”? Try this one on for size: “You can’t get *any* help anymore!” The pool of entry-level workers in the United States today is smaller than at any time in the past fifty years. Also, the workers who are going to be available in the next few years are an entirely different breed of feline.

If you’re a manager today, it’s because you’ve put in years doing lots of hard work to get where you are. But young employees in this last decade of the twentieth century have very different values and assumptions about work and “the job” than you do. They want what they want, and they want it *now*. They’re not particularly respectful of authority, tend to ignore chains of command, believe hierarchies are irrelevant, and aren’t put off by the threat of being fired. At the same time, they possess a tremendous driving force, which pushes them toward accomplishing their goals. They bring energy, innovation, and a willingness to challenge systems unlike any other generation. They’re small in number, but mighty in the impact they will have on American business.

If you’re supervising employees between the ages of seventeen and twenty-seven, this book is for you. If you’re frustrated in your efforts to understand this new generation, then you need to read this book now. If nothing else, it may help you to override that occasionally overwhelming urge to choke the living daylights out of some young hotshot who desperately needs it.

Why This Book?

If you're standing in a bookstore at this moment, take a look around at the business books at hand. We'll wager you won't see very many dealing with managing and motivating younger workers, because the attention in the past few years has been focused on the largest population of American workers and managers—the generation born between 1946 and 1964. If you're among them, then you're one of 76 million baby boomers, and thousands of pages in hundreds of books have been devoted to understanding your generation. But very little has been written to help your generation, and the one before you, understand and motivate the newest generation, the baby busters.

What we've discovered, in speaking to managers throughout the United States, is a highly frustrated and visibly angry group of baby boomers who are faced with managing a new generation. We've also encountered a sizable number of frustrated pre-baby boomers—the generation we call the loyalists. They're the folks born between 1925 and 1945, who are now in senior management and executive positions. Many of the older ones are entering retirement.

From both groups we hear a common theme when today's managers talk about today's entry-level workers:

"He wants everything without earning it."

"They don't have any respect for authority."

"She just goes right past me and ignores the fact that I'm her boss!"

"Why does he have to know 'why?' every time I tell him to do something?"

Sound familiar? Katherine Ann Samon, in an article for *Working Woman* magazine, coined the phrase "The Brash Pack," when describing this new generation.¹ In many ways, they *are* brash. But, weren't we all when we first started out? Not in the same way as this twentysomething crowd. They're the product of a very different type of upbringing and, as a result, are driven by different motivations. It's critical that you understand what drives these young people because

this is the generation that will supply us with the bulk of our employees for the next ten years. Attracting, hiring, motivating, and developing them will be *the* major challenge facing managers of the nineties.

Michael Maccoby, author of *Why Work: Motivating and Leading the New Generation*, believes that the baby busters are a product, to a great extent, of their growing-up years, many of which were spent in homes where both parents worked.² These are the latchkey children you've heard about. As we'll see in the chapters ahead, these latchkey children have developed some interesting and challenging attitudes about themselves and the way they want to work.

San Francisco writer Sophie F. Deprez reviewed the novel *Generation X* by Douglas Coupland for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Coupland calls his characters "Generation X" and they are the twentysomething generation. Deprez writes:

Disillusioned by yuppiedom—and the materialism, restriction and artificiality it represents—too old to accept the notion of shopping malls as vital structures, yet too progressive and sophisticated to regress to sheer hippie-ism, they have rejected their past and their future and have chosen to explore the many possibilities complete freedom offers.³

We can't promise that by reading this book all your problems in leading and motivating this younger generation will disappear. But we can promise that you'll gain new understanding and insight into their attitudes, beliefs, and values. You'll have an opportunity to read their own words as they describe what makes them tick. And you'll find plenty of practical suggestions for getting the greatest productivity from this very special group of workers.

No matter what we or anyone else may say, generations are going to continue to collide. As different world views clash, conflict between generations is inevitable. Our intention in writing this book is to ease the impact a bit, so the managers and workers involved can meet one another on some productive middle ground. We believe

this is essential. We've asked a colleague of ours—herself a twentysomething worker—to write a message to all managers. You'll read an open letter from her in chapter eleven. Though understanding doesn't always mean that agreement will occur, it is a prerequisite in leading, motivating, and working with today's employees. That's what this book is all about.

Notes

1. Katherine Ann Samon, "The Brash Pack," *Working Woman*, August, 1990, p. 67.
2. Michael Maccoby, *Why Work: Motivating and Leading the New Generation*, Touchstone: New York, NY, 1988.
3. Sophie F. Deprez, "The Twentysomething Gang," *The San Francisco Chronicle*, April 14, 1991, p. 8.

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*The younger generation is not going to the dogs
... but it's a very mixed kennel.*

—Former Education Secretary Chester Finn

1

Meet the Twentysomething Generation

We assume you're reading this book because you now manage, or expect to hire and manage, young workers between the ages of seventeen and twenty-seven. You want your employees to be as productive as possible. After all, the success of your business depends upon worker productivity. As a leader, you want to develop your subordinates to be the best they can be. To manage them effectively, you need to know something about them. The young adults of this new generation have some unique characteristics, ranging from their demographics to their skills and education, their attitudes toward work, their attitudes toward themselves and others, how they see the world, their drive toward independence, and how they respond to authority.

Maybe you're saying to yourself, "I know everything I need to know about them." We've heard quite a few managers voice that kind of sentiment with a decided note of exasperation. Take a few minutes to read the ten statements below and decide on a scale of one to five the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of them.

If you find yourself agreeing with most of these statements, you're not alone. These are but a few of the many complaints we've heard from managers all over the country when they talk about their

	<i>Disagree → Agree</i>				
• Young workers today have a “you owe me” attitude.	1	2	3	4	5
• Young people are interested in making a lot of money fast.	1	2	3	4	5
• Young workers are well educated, but their skills are poor.	1	2	3	4	5
• Young workers are too impatient.	1	2	3	4	5
• Young workers don’t want to work hard.	1	2	3	4	5
• They don’t want to start at the bottom and work their way up.	1	2	3	4	5
• Younger workers have very little company loyalty.	1	2	3	4	5
• They complain a lot.	1	2	3	4	5
• Young workers aren’t team players.	1	2	3	4	5
• They lack motivation.	1	2	3	4	5

younger employees. Most managers’ scores are in the four-to-five range on all the above. We’re not saying these statements are true or false, only that they are valid perceptions today’s managers have formed about their employees.

The purpose of this chapter is to give you a snapshot of these young workers and lay a foundation for a better understanding of this group. Subsequent chapters will add detail, expand your knowledge, and pave the way for acquiring new skills in motivating and leading them. For starters, let’s meet the twentysomething generation.

A Limited Edition

There’s no doubt that young people entering the workforce today are a limited edition. These baby busters were born between 1965

and 1975. They get their name because they represent a decided drop in the birth curve when compared to all previous years, but especially the baby boom years of 1946 to 1964. The single lowest birth year in U.S. history was 1975. Young people born in that year will be seventeen in 1992 and can expect to begin their professional careers by about 1997, if you allow a few years for college (although not all of them will take the mortarboard route).

As the smallest population group in history, baby busters represent the thinnest pool of entry-level workers in modern times. Think about it: during the baby boom years, about 4 million people were born each year; lots of folks to go around and plenty of people to flip the burgers. Contrast that to the period of 1965 to 1980, when only about 3.5 million Americans came kicking and screaming into the harsh light of a delivery room each year.

The pipeline of young workers that traditionally has fueled the American workforce is drying up. According to Census Bureau figures, the number of people age twenty to twenty-nine will shrivel to 34 million by year 2000 (from 41 million in 1980), and they will represent only 13 percent of the population. The Labor Department predicts that the economy will grow by 2 to 3 percent, on average, throughout the nineties. But, the supply of workers will grow by only 1 percent a year. What this means is that a shrinking labor pool, juxtaposed against a huge baby-boomer workforce nearing retirement years, will create a crisis for American business. It's going to be a great deal more difficult to find, attract, hire, motivate, and keep younger workers. There are simply not enough of them to go around.

Johnny and Jane Can't Make Change

Not only will there be fewer young workers than in any decade since 1930, but a shocking percentage of them will lack the skills needed to meet the demands of business and industry. One of the more alarming bits of information about the younger workforce is that,

while a higher percentage of them have finished high school, many of them are short on the basic skills needed to perform successfully in today's high-tech world. There is a glaring discrepancy between the education received and the applicable skills that young folks are taking into the workplace. We'll explore this in greater detail in chapter five.

On the surface, the picture looks more positive than it really is. There are actually more college graduates in the workforce today than there are high school dropouts. The quantity of education available is not the problem. The problem is that the pool of available young workers—whether educated or not—is shrinking. Those who dropped out of high school are going to have an increasingly difficult time finding top-paying positions. Because of the shortage of young workers, there will be plenty of opportunities for them to make pizza, wash cars, sell merchandise in a retail store, and perform other low-paying, entry-level jobs. But it is going to be more difficult for the undereducated to make their way through the proverbial jungle out there. They are going to have to clear a career path for themselves with the equivalent of hand shears, while their better-educated counterparts are attacking the corporate jungle with chain saws.

Samuel Halperin, study director for the William T. Grant Foundation, which takes the pulse of the nation's youth, says, "Overall, the tendency in this country has been to assume that when you graduate from high school, you're on your own, you're headed for a life at least as good as your parents' or maybe better. That just isn't true anymore. It's a lot harder for young people to be successful in the world and raise a family."¹

In chapter five, you'll read in more detail about the skills shortfall facing American business as it recruits younger workers, and how this will affect you, the person who has to train, manage, and motivate them. We'll also offer practical steps you can take to help fill in the gaps for your younger employees, who may lack the basic skills they need.