

**FROM BOOMERS TO BLOGGERS:**  
***Success Strategies Across Generations***

**By Misti Burmeister, CEO Inspirion, Inc.**

*Foreword*.....

*Introduction*.....

*Chapter One: “How do I...?”*.....  
Productivity and Teamwork.....  
**Highlights Chapter One**.....

*Chapter Two: “Five Shifts to Common Understanding”*.....  
**Highlights Chapter Two**.....

*Chapter Three: Building Credibility/Creating a Path*.....  
With a Career Plan Comes Perspective.....  
**Highlights Chapter Three**.....

*Chapter Four: Creating a Learning Relationship*.....  
Creating a Learning Environment ~ a True Story.....  
**Highlights Chapter Four**.....

*Chapter Five: Creating a Common Vision*.....  
Appreciation of the Past, Preparing for the Future.....  
**What Are Vision/Mission?**.....  
Why create a vision/mission?.....  
Who should create the vision/mission?.....  
Tips on creating a vision/mission.....  
How do you contribute to your organization’s vision/mission?.....  
**Highlights Chapter Five**.....

*Chapter Six: Accountability for Results*.....  
Staying Focused.....  
**Highlights Chapter Six**.....

*Chapter Seven: Acceptable Risk*.....  
**Highlights Chapter Seven**.....

*Chapter Eight: Create a Sense of Community*.....  
**Highlights Chapter Eight**.....

*Chapter Nine: Leading Across Generations*.....  
Awareness.....  
Understanding.....  
When a Leader Takes an Interest.....  
Embrace Differences.....  
Get Creative.....  
Get into Action.....  
**Highlights Chapter Nine**.....

*Chapter Ten: The Benefit of Rotational Internship Programs*.....  
An Award Winning Internship Program.....  
**Highlights Chapter Ten**.....

*Chapter Eleven: The Win-Win of Mentorship Programs*.....  
**Highlights Chapter Eleven**.....

***Chapter Twelve: Promoting and Receiving Cross Generational Mentoring.....***

**An Award Winning Cross Generational Mentorship Program and Promoting a Culture Shift**

**Highlights Chapter Twelve .....**

***Chapter Thirteen: Personal Success for Seasoned Professionals .....***

Skills .....

Jobs .....

Informational Interviews/Networking.....

Goals.....

Brag ~ Be clear, specific and targeted.....

Locate Sponsors/Mentors.....

**Highlights Chapter Thirteen.....**

***Chapter Fourteen: Conclusion.....***

***APPENDIX A: Suggested Reading.....***

***APPENDIX B: List of Networking Resources .....***

## Foreword

As a member of the original Me Generation, I jumped at the opportunity to contribute to this book by a Gen Yer. Anything we Baby Boomers can do to support young professionals who pay into Social Security is a wise business decision.

I first met Misti Burmeister through our mutual participation in the Gen Y Project. I'm Chapter 4 and she's Chapter 19 in **Millennial Leaders: Success Stories from Today's Most Brilliant Generation Y Leaders** (Bea Fields, Scott Wilder, Jim Bunch and Rob Newbold [NY: Morgan James, 2008]).

What impressed me most about Misti's work is the balanced approach she takes to a topic that has caused consternation at best, and conflict at worst, for the past 15 years: generational diversity in the workplace. When did age become such a contentious workplace issue?

Travel back with me to the early 1990s when older generations, who grew up with the age-respecting system called seniority, first encountered visitors from another planet: those young, arrogant, disloyal slackers dubbed Generation X.

"I'll be loyal to your organization," Gen Xers said, "until I get a better deal. Hopefully, it's with you, in some part of your organization. But if not, don't take it personally. I'm responsible for my life and my career."

Xers weren't trying to be difficult, they were merely responding to a world that had changed; a world driven by fierce competition, globalization, technology, broken promises, and the demise of job security.

By the late 90s, some organizations earned the just-in-time loyalty of this talented group by offering flexible schedules, a variety of career paths, increasing spheres of responsibility, coaching-style managers and mentors--all Gen X motivators.

Others, to this day, are still grappling with the Gen X challenge, while finding themselves overwhelmed by the next wave of upstarts. If they thought Gen Xers were problematic, they are flummoxed by their younger siblings: the upbeat, optimistic, super techno-savvy, entrepreneurial, entitled, life-long learners, variously called the Millennials, Echo-Boomers, Creative Connecteds, and, most commonly, Generation Y.

Suddenly, Baby Boomers are stymied by the fact that they are now managing, or being managed by, people young enough to be their children.

While members of the Me Generation admit they incubated their Mini-Me's with an "I can do anything I want." attitude and "I'm entitled to the opportunity to do it," they have a hard time coping with these expectations at work.

Likewise, Gen Xers, forgetting about the curves they threw their managers not long ago, are exasperated with Gen Yers. "They want feedback, recognition, and new experiences every fifteen minutes!" one complains.

"I don't understand how they can juggle nine instant messages, but can't focus on one task," another adds.

And the beat goes on.

Enter Misti Burmeister, a Gen Y researcher, trainer, and coach, who has racked up some hard-earned wisdom based on hard-knock experience.

Several years ago, she recognized the disconnect among generations and their inability to focus on what unites, rather than divides them: the mission and vision of an

organization; the need to create a career plan for those just starting or redefining their jobs; and the importance of seizing every opportunity to gain and share experience.

Rather than embrace “blameology,” Misti puts responsibility for multi-generational communication squarely where it needs to be: on the shoulders of each person of each generation. She advises young professionals to “Do what needs to be done without complaining, be patient, consistently communicate your career aspirations with the right people and do what’s necessary for the success of the company.”

She reminds seasoned pros that “The long-term success of your organization depends on the success of young professionals. Take the time to mentor and coach them ... They need your help in seeing the big picture, creating a career plan and gaining the necessary experience to set them up for success.”

Misti’s message is refreshing, her advice practical. Throw in a sense of urgency and it becomes even more valuable. Boomers are beginning to retire in record numbers (some experts predict that, by 2011, 11,500 will retire every day) and Xers and Yers are already the majority of the workforce (52% as of this writing). Literally, the changing-of-the-guard is happening right now, and, no matter what our age, we need each other.

Young pros need to gain experience quickly and clarify the values that will guide their careers. Seasoned pros can help them do that.

Baby Boomers need to ensure a lasting legacy--and, perhaps, secure their pensions and Social Security--by developing the next generations of leaders to propel their organizations well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thank you, Misti, for tackling this topic head-on and inspiring everyone in every generation to take responsibility for their lives, their careers, and the success of their organizations.

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## Introduction

Are you a young professional looking for assistance in navigating your organization's environment, communicating with seasoned professionals, and moving your career forward?

As a seasoned professional, have you ever wondered how to best tap into and utilize the talents and skills of the youngest generation? Have you wondered how to get them to care about their work, show up on time and do what needs to get done without complaining about flex-time, holidays or promotions?

What if you learned everything you needed to know to effectively motivate, inspire and create results within every generation?

What if every employee *wanted* to be led by you?

What if every company and leader wanted *you* on their team?

What if you were more employable, rather than merely employed?

Have you wondered how companies like Google and Disney have created an environment to retain their talent? How about award-winning companies like Post Properties? Post is a national property management company that has created an award-winning internship program which sources a talent pool of dedicated employees for their future. This book will give you insight into how these winning corporations have kept their most valuable resources – their people, and how their people find fulfillment in their work.

In his book *Decoding Generational Differences: Fact, fiction ... or should we just get back to work?* W. Stanton Smith shares this critical information: “Gen X presents a much smaller pool of available workers, and will not be able to fill the positions left vacant by retirements. By 2008, the pool of available workers among 25-44 year olds will have decreased by 7% from the level five years previous (2003), resulting in a significant labor shortage. In fact, every year for the next 30 years, there will be fewer young people to replace retiring workers. The labor shortages will continue well into the future, as average annual growth of the workforce is projected to hover at around 1% through 2015.”

So, as seasoned professionals are beginning their move into retirement, organizations are required to find ways to attract, retain and motivate *across generations*. This book explores the best methods for organizations and individuals to attain their respective goals.

While there have been many books written to help seasoned professionals and organizations better attract, retain and motivate the youngest generation, I have not yet seen a book that assists both young and seasoned professionals effectively communicate with each other. There has also been a fair amount of finger pointing, suggesting that one or the other generation must conform to the other's desires. I believe, teach and have experienced how mutual understanding, communication and a focus on an organization's vision and mission provide professionals of all generations a satisfying work experience with strong growth opportunities.

Let me share with you why I feel this topic of generational communication is *so* important.

A young woman stood up in my audience at a prominent coaching and leadership development conference and asked, “What is my responsibility in bridging this communication gap? How can I help?”

She, like many in her generation, wants nothing more than to find the right words, learn the right tricks and gain the right visibility to advance her career, while helping her organization reach its goals. Many simply don’t have the “right” words and actions to demonstrate this desire to seasoned professionals.

She believes, as I do, that she could do something to bridge this generational gap. While most books and generational speakers address how organizations and seasoned professionals need to “deal with” the younger generation, I believe something entirely different. I believe the only way to bridge the generational gap is to address how both seasoned and young professionals can take responsibility for bridging their communication styles and ways of engaging.

I wish I knew all of this when I first entered the workforce after college!

As a “Generation Yer” entering the workforce, or as some like to call it “entering the ‘real world,’” I was eager to put my education and experience to work. Although my academic performance before college was less than stellar, I had taken the initiative and made the most of my opportunities in college. As a result, I had many great mentors and held a variety of leadership positions during six years of undergraduate and postgraduate study.

I had grown comfortable with the academic world, but I left that comfort behind to accept a fellowship with a federal agency in Washington, DC. While I had little clarity as to what I wanted to do with my career, I felt a deep need to show what I was capable of, find mentors and gain positive feedback for my contribution. As you can imagine, I was eager to plunge into the workforce and show them all what I was capable of achieving. Nevertheless, my managers interpreted these actions as my being overly needy or unwilling to “pay my dues.” That was never my intention!

I could not understand why the seasoned professionals in my department ignored my enthusiasm or found it off-putting. I really thought I was demonstrating how much I wanted to help them – and the organization – succeed. Didn’t they see that helping me would help them? Yet, I blew through five mentors and completed my fellowship with no idea of what I was going to do next.

After my fellowship, the first organization to offer me a position was a government contractor, and I took the job merely “because it was there.” I started out doing qualitative research. I received high praise for my work and enjoyed it, but then got shifted over to meeting planning, which I found boring. After four months of planning meetings, I took the initiative and began reading every media document the company had put out during the 25 years it had been in business. After completing all my research, I presented my study to the head of the company.

My hope, of course, was that the CEO would recognize that I was capable of doing so much more, including building the business. Instead, she said, “Misti, what did your parents do to deal with you? It’s clear you have problems with anxiety, do you take medication for that?”

After all the time I spent working on understanding the business (in hopes of getting some new, more exciting work), she showed no interest and completely

misinterpreted my actions. Without knowing where I was going or what I was going to do, I turned in my letter of resignation the next day.

I had moved across the country to Washington, DC, with huge expectations for both myself, and my employer. Yet here I was, jobless by choice, directionless and with no clear options. Lying on the floor of my one-bedroom apartment and truly worried about my future, I felt more lost and scared than I could ever properly express. Without first formulating a plan or building a network, I had just quit my job in a city where I knew practically no one *and* I had no career direction! I really didn't know where to begin.

I had a choice – I could stay on the floor and feel sorry for myself, or I could start making connections and begin learning about the possibilities “out there.” Realizing that I needed to regain my focus and build a network that would open the future to me, I chose to make cold phone calls for the purpose of scheduling informational interviews.

\*\*\*\*\*"With everything that has happened to you, you can either feel sorry for yourself or treat what has happened as a gift. Everything is either an opportunity to grow or an obstacle to keep you from growing. You get to choose."

- Wayne Dyer: Self-help advocate, author and lecturer\*\*\*\*\*

Dedicating my time and energy to conducting informational interviews over the next several months, I also began researching generational differences because I *needed* to understand what had happened to me. During this exploration time, I heard many stories similar to my own from other young professionals who were also feeling directionless, nervous about their future and “disconnected” after leaving college. Like me, many were unclear about how to gain positive traction in their careers; they also had huge expectations of themselves and their employers.

I recognized the need to help other young professionals, as well as myself.

Six months later, after having completed over 150 informational interviews, I had done the field research to gain a clear understanding of what was happening between young and seasoned professionals. In addition, as I read published research on generational diversity, I realized, “Ah, I said this and they heard that.”

I knew seasoned professionals wanted to help young professionals and vice versa – they simply didn't know how to communicate effectively with each other. So I started a new company – Inspirion, Inc. – to help companies create the systems that attract and retain talent across generations.

Now, after extensive research into generational diversity, personally witnessing both seasoned and young professionals struggle with the difference in their communication styles and coaching them through their challenges, I decided to write a book conveying critical, proven strategies that young professionals *and* seasoned professionals can use to truly bridge the generational gap.

Since I began Inspirion, I have had the privilege of speaking on generational diversity to thousands of people all over America and have worked directly with companies, executives and top military leaders to help them successfully manage the generational challenge so evident in today's workplace. I have received countless notes, emails and voice-mail messages from people telling me how understanding generational

differences has had a huge impact on the way they communicate with professionals of varied generations. They no longer think, “That person is going about it all wrong.” But rather, “Ah, I understand that is just a generational difference, now let’s *refocus onto what matters most: our common vision.*”

In the pages that follow, I will share with you some of their stories and outline specific ideas and action steps you can begin using today for your organization, your team members and yourself to create the success you really desire, with every generation and at any level.

Moving forward takes diligence and desire, an understanding of the tools available and application of strategies that work. The result is increased productivity, motivation, inspiration, alignment and improvement to the bottom line, both individually and organizationally.

Let this book guide you throughout your career to bridge the intergenerational communication gap and assist you in becoming a more effective leader in your career today, and where you aspire to be tomorrow.

I wish you the best on your journey!

Misti Burmeister

\*\*\*\*\*"The few things that work fantastically well should be identified, cultivated, nurtured and multiplied." — Richard Koch: Author, management consultant\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter One: “How do I...?”

“How do I get them to care?” “How do I help them to be most productive?” “How do I help them understand they need to slow down?” “How do I get my team, from various generations, to work well together?” These are questions I am frequently asked by seasoned professionals.

Seasoned professionals want to understand how best to tap into and utilize the talents and skills of their staff, regardless of generation. Although seasoned professionals are often put off by their younger colleagues’ impatience, communication style, appearance, etc., they want to know how to help them succeed.

According to a survey on job satisfaction conducted by leadership training and research company Leadership IQ, **the biggest driving force for Generation Y is praise and recognition**. This doesn’t cost a thing – it’s simply about leadership style. Managers have become used to catering to the needs of seasoned professionals whose driving factor, according to the survey, is a clear measure of their performance.

Additionally, it’s important to note that **leaders lead people and managers manage projects**. People prefer to be led, rather than managed. Clearly, **leaders need to be flexible in their leadership style** in order to be most effective with all generations in the workplace.

In a white paper entitled *The Under-Management Epidemic*, Bruce Tulgan, the founder of RainmakerThinking, discusses the “Five Management Basics,” in which he indicates the importance of offering:

- (1) Clear statements of performance requirements and standard operating procedures related to recurring tasks and responsibilities.
- (2) Clear statements of defined parameters, measurable goals, and concrete deadlines for all work assignments for which the direct report will be held accountable.
- (3) Accurate monitoring, evaluation, and documentation of work performance.
- (4) Clear statements of specific feedback on work performance with guidance for improvement.
- (5) Rewards and detriments distributed fairly.

The paper states that only 25% of managers discuss the “Five Management Basics” with direct reports on a monthly basis; only 65% do it even once a year.

When leadership is not interacting with direct reports on these basic matters, it becomes impossible to create an environment where employees can flourish. While seasoned professionals may be accustomed to receiving clear, measured, formal performance feedback on a yearly or bi-annual basis, young professionals crave additional guidance, and with an expanding job market, they have the freedom to easily change companies in search of their “ideal” opportunity.

When I listen to young professionals share their ambitions, I know they will have difficulty being received well by most seasoned professionals. Walking into a seasoned professional’s office making statements such as, “I want your job in the next six months,” or “I want balance,” or “Give me more opportunities,” does not align a young professional with seasoned professionals – or the organization’s vision/mission. On the other hand, if seasoned professionals understood what young professionals really mean

when they say these sorts of things, they would be able to better harness that energy, rather than take the words as a personal attack (which I have seen many do).

Differences, when not understood, can cause conflict. Likewise, when differences are understood and highlighted as positive, newfound commonality is created and people work together more productively.

I have encountered many stories about seasoned professionals taking offense at the language of young professionals. They assign a meaning to the actions of young colleagues, or what they said because of *how* it was said, rather than simply **inquiring further** and perhaps **giving them feedback** on how they are coming across.

You could ask something like, “What do you mean by that?” or “What is your anticipated timeframe for this to take place?” or “Would you explain in more detail?” This yields fertile ground for discussion and injects a dose of reality into the situation, creating understanding as to what the younger staff member really desires and what it will take to get there.

Alice, a young professional, went to her first meeting with her new supervisor, Joan, without pen and paper in hand. Joan, a seasoned professional assigned a lot of meaning to that one action/inaction (i.e. she doesn’t respect me, she’s not serious about her job, etc.).

When I asked Joan to consider other ways she could have interpreted Alice’s actions, she had no idea what to say. I suggested that perhaps, based on her generation, the young woman simply didn’t know she should arrive with a pen and paper ready to take notes, as no one ever told her. Alice, like so many in her generation, is used to being told exactly what to do, when to do it and how to do it. I asked Joan to consider the possibility that Alice *could* be the best employee she’s ever had because she’s so committed, talented and realize that she simply needs a little guidance.

\*\*\*\*“Good leadership consists in showing average people how to do the work of superior people.”

- John D. Rockefeller (1839 - 1937)\*\*\*\*\*

Similarly, in my work with the sales team at a large telecommunications company, many seasoned professionals were agitated with the young professionals’ inability to communicate personally with clients. They simply assumed their younger colleagues *should* have certain skill sets (after all, *they* did when they entered the workforce), and were disappointed and annoyed when a client expressed dissatisfaction.

Our colleges and universities produce bright graduates who are incredible with computers, enthusiastic in their approach to work and life and have a real desire for success. (Congratulations Baby Boomers – you taught them so well – they believe they can have, be and do anything they want!)

Yet according to a national study conducted by the American Institutes for Research, many young professionals are entering the workforce lacking skills that would allow them to use their knowledge more effectively. Many don’t know how to set goals, create a career plan or budget their time or money. Their face-to-face communication skills are insufficient, and they don’t know how to ask for help. Many fear they will come across as ignorant or somehow blameworthy if they ask for help, whether it be assistance

in understanding the corporate culture, creating a plan or determining how best to communicate with their superiors.

Focusing on proficiencies that young professionals “should have” *wastes time and energy* which could be more productively spent **helping them gain the skills** necessary to successfully carry out the organization’s vision and mission. After all, isn’t that task of paramount importance? If young employees are lacking in skills, help them create a plan to acquire what they are missing.

\*\*\*\*\*"It has been my observation that most people get ahead during the time that others waste."

- Henry Ford: Founder, Ford Motor Company\*\*\*\*\*

In most cases, helping a younger professional develop an important skill **will cost you nothing** more than a few minutes – the time it takes to think through the best strategy to impart that skill. The sales team I mentioned earlier found a way to help their young professionals build people-skills by having them attend in-person, client meetings with a skilled communicator (usually a seasoned professional).

My goal throughout this book is to offer solutions to such challenges. The real truth is that your young employees are all just beginning their career journey and need to continue developing themselves in order to help your organization continue to achieve great results. Even if they don’t know how to ask for it, they need your help in learning important lessons in a way they can understand. Over time, with your assistance, young professionals will pick up the skills they need to succeed in your organization.

### *Productivity and Teamwork*

When it comes to productivity and getting a multi-generational team to work well together, what is most important is clarity and individual alignment with an organization’s vision/mission. Many seasoned professionals have said to me, “What do you mean? I created a vision and mission, brought my team together and *told* them what we would be doing. They *should* know; *they* need to get on board.” If leading people were that easy, we could all simply go around saying, “Be here at this time, do this work and stay until you’re done.”

Instead, I encourage you to bring your team together, share your vision and provide a space in which workers can contribute their ideas and create a mission together. (More on this in Chapter Five.)

\*\*\*\*\*"Genuine leadership comes from the quality of your vision and your ability to spark others to extraordinary performance."

- Jack Welch: Former General Electric chairman and CEO.\*\*\*\*\*

As team members align with your vision, they create the mission and set major goals. Ask for volunteers to take on **responsibility** for the **results**. As individuals step up to the plate, you may think to yourself, “He/she cannot do this/that – they haven’t been

here long enough; they don't have enough training." I encourage you to let those conversations go and simply see what happens.

Be ready to coach your team along the way, as they will likely need your support. Young professionals are notorious for thinking they know how to do something simply because they read about it somewhere or have taken a class. Encourage this risk-taking and support it. There's no doubt they will have difficulties, but experiencing what author and leadership expert John C. Maxwell calls "failing forward" will be a valuable learning experience for young professionals.

\*\*\*\*\*"You'll come to see that a man learns nothing from winning. The act of losing, however, can elicit great wisdom." - Albert Finney, as Uncle Henry Skinner in the film *A Good Year*\*\*\*\*\*

As a leader, this is where you **let go of *how* employees reach their goals**. If they are hitting their targets, keeping the customers happy and contributing as team players, allow them creativity and autonomy. This kind of thinking requires a great deal of patience both with young professionals and with yourself.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with letting younger colleagues know your greatest concern is ensuring the customer is taken care of and that this new way of leading is pushing you out of your comfort zone. Lead by example and be willing to admit your discomfort. The truth is, there's room for every human being to grow. Those willing to say, "I'm not perfect" and admit to their human shortcomings, gain a great deal more respect and credibility than those always trying to cover their mistakes and show just how close to perfect they are.

Think about it for a moment. What kind of leader are you most attracted to? Those who pretend to be perfect, know everything and control processes, or those willing to admit their limitations and listen to your ideas?

### *Capturing Attention*

Capturing the attention of young professionals also can be a challenge. In a meeting with a potential client, I had the opportunity to learn about some difficulties they were having with their emerging leader program, which was in its inaugural year. As one might expect, the vast majority of program participants belong to Generations X and Y.

Six months into the year-long program, they were encountering disengaged participants. In fact, several participants were more than simply disengaged – they were outright rude to some of the instructors. Through my conversations with Jan, who headed up the effort, it became clear that participants saw this program as merely a box to be checked off in order to keep their careers moving forward, rather than valuable training.

I listened to a description of the program and its intended goals, and then began asking questions:

- What was going well and not-so-well in the program?
- When do participants seem to be engaged?
- What do program managers think needs to be adjusted?

The leaders had a great list of what was going really well and only a short list of what was not going well. What stuck out for me, however, was that participants seemed to like the program only when the instructor went out of his or her way to be engaging.

This naturally led me to share with my potential client the reality of this generation: They were raised on television, chat rooms, instant messaging and video games. They are used to being stimulated and expect it *now*, whether “it” is feedback, gratification or anything else!

As soon as I mentioned this, Jan (a Boomer) came back with, “It is not my job to keep them entertained!”

Her exclamation reminded me of the words of Bruce Tulgan, “[**Generation Y**] is **the most high maintenance workforce in the history of the world ...**” [Emphasis added]

Tulgan goes on to say, “The good news is **they're also the most savvy, capable, knowledgeable new generation of workers in history ...** They walk in with more information in their heads, more information at their fingertips – and, sure, they have high expectations, but they have the highest expectations first and foremost for themselves.” [Emphasis added.]

As Jennifer Deal mentions in her book *Retiring the Generation Gap, How Employees Young and Old Can Find Common Ground*, “When there are too few people for the number of jobs available, employees can ask for more, and organizations have to offer more if they want to **attract and keep employees** – even relatively young, untrained employees.” [Emphasis added.]

Finding a way to keep participants engaged, *even entertained*, will likely increase participation and add to your program’s overall success. While the more seasoned generation is far more tolerant and adaptive, and its members will therefore participate regardless of presentation type, every generation wants to be stimulated and involved. The biggest difference between generations is their respective skill sets and their approach to problem solving – if you can offer a variety of courses and keep them engaged, you’ll be effective across generations.

Likewise, finding a way to provide acknowledgement for achievements, training, flex-time, career counseling, mentorship programs and giving all generations a voice will likely increase participation and organizational success.

The vast majority of young professionals I have met, are searching for an employer that will fully utilize their skills, aid in their professional development, value them *and* their contributions, and help them understand how to advance in the organization. With an abundance of options, **of course** they will look for companies providing environments that will enable them to thrive.

U.S. Labor Department statistics have shown that more than 25 percent of all workers in the United States have been with their companies less than one year, and more than 33 percent less than two years. They also predict that the average Gen Y’er will hold between 10 and 14 jobs by age 38. These are staggering statistics, to be sure, and emphasize the need for companies to work on employee retention. **Young professionals truly need a reason to stay with your organization!**

Sarah Galbraith, young professional and Change Management Specialist at Raytheon, quoting Carolyn Martin, offers this insight:

*Gen Y’s know how to learn fast – if what they’re learning is meaningful to the job and*

*their career.*

- *They want feedback fast – because they don't want to wallow in mistakes.*
- *They want recognition for their accomplishments fast – because that motivates them to keep on contributing.*
- *In other words, they want managers who really do the job of managing. They will stay with organizations who provide them with great coaches and mentors.*

*Indeed, Gen Y's are demanding, but what they demand (training, feedback, direction, guidance, support, recognition) will only make them more effective employees and leaders.*

The chapters ahead offer ideas and strategies for retention of young professionals and provide specific action items to leverage the talents and skills of each generation. The **only** way to bridge the generational gap is to help members of all generations reach their goals and understand their contribution to your organization.

There are ideas and strategies to help seasoned professionals foster productivity across generations through sharing lessons (mentoring), build a strategy for success (coaching) and have fun along the way.

Seasoned professionals will discover strategies to enhance their own careers and create a strategic plan for the future. This is critical to providing seasoned professionals the mental space and energy to support their staff. When seasoned professionals know where their career is headed, they are much more actively engaged and interested in supporting young professionals.

If you, as a leader, have no real plan for your future, how can you expect to plan for the future of your employees or your organization? Leaders without their own plans have a difficult time empowering others. Even if you enjoy the position you are currently in and want to stay there for as long as possible, **there are always skills to be developed and experiences to gain**. Not only will your employees begin to thrive, rather than merely survive, you will be supporting your organization in preparing the next generation of leaders. As a leader, it begins with you!

## *Highlights Chapter One*

- The biggest motivators for Generation Y are praise and recognition.
- For seasoned professionals, the driving factor is a clear measure of their performance.
- Leaders lead people; managers manage projects. People prefer to be led, rather than managed.
- Leaders need to be flexible in their leadership style in order to be most effective with all generations in the workplace.
- Give feedback to young professionals on how they “come across.”
- When young colleagues make statements that don’t sit right with you, inquire further as to their meaning or intention.
- Meet with your direct reports a minimum of one time per week. If you’re leading via telephone and email, check in every day.
- The biggest difference between generations is their respective skill sets and approach to problem solving.
- To increase participation and boost the organization’s overall success, find ways to provide training, flex-time, career guidance and mentorship programs. Acknowledge achievements and give employees of all ages a voice.
- The majority of young professionals are searching for a company that will fully use their skills, aid in their professional development, value them *and* their contributions and help them understand how to advance in the organization.

## Chapter Two: “Five Shifts to Common Understanding”

The vast majority of books and research on the topic of generational communication are targeted toward helping seasoned professionals attract, retain and motivate young professionals. It’s almost as if the success or failure of communication between generations has been placed entirely on the shoulders of seasoned professionals.

**Communication between people of different generations is a responsibility held by both young and seasoned professionals.** In order for young professionals to gain the respect and experiences they are longing for, they must understand how best to communicate in the world of seasoned professionals. Likewise, seasoned professionals must learn the most effective ways to draw out the best in their young professionals.

Shortly after sending out a newsletter entitled “Pay Your Dues ~ Build Credibility,” I received numerous emails from the young professionals on my listserv. With a new understanding of the language used by seasoned professionals, they wanted more information on how to collaborate and communicate effectively across generations. Young professionals have demonstrated genuine interest in knowing how to create working relationships with seasoned professionals.

Since beginning my work on bridging the communication gap in organizations, my experience has shown me countless times that **it’s not *what you say that gets what you want; rather, it’s how you say it.*** In addition, simply understanding the experiences that created each generation’s worldview will aid greatly in shifting the conversation (inside our minds) away from “right” vs. “wrong” and toward our individual and organizational missions/goals.

When young professionals understand why seasoned professionals place great importance on certain things and learn how to think and act in harmony with their elders’ worldview, they will become more effective communicators. Likewise, when seasoned professionals understand why young professionals see the world the way they do, they will more effectively tap into the talents and skills of the youngest generation.

Challenges arise because we all define “respect,” “feeling valued,” or “working hard” in different ways. **Taking the time to understand what people *really* mean when they make comments that upset you will help tremendously.** If you probe a little deeper and perhaps ask what was meant by the comment, you’ll likely find the intention was not what you thought. When the focus in conversation is about “right” vs. “wrong,” it is helpful to come back to the common ground between people.

The following chart, “Five Shifts to Common Understanding,” shows the corresponding viewpoints of both young and seasoned professionals, with a focus on creating common ground in each example:

Seasoned Professionals:

COMMON GROUND

Young Professionals:

1. Paying Your Dues	→ Building credibility / create a <i>path</i>	← Wanting it all now
2. Making them just do the work	→ Creating a <i>learning</i> relationship	← What can the company do for me?
3. Make them appreciate what has come before them	→ Creating and focusing on a common <i>vision</i>	← Bucking the system
4. Be at work when you are needed	→ Company/individual mission and vision <i>alignment</i> / <i>Accountability</i> for results	← Freedom and flexibility in my schedule
5. Adhere to the rules	→ Creating a common <i>strategy</i> to reach the vision / Acceptable <i>risk</i>	← I can do it faster and better and I have fresh ideas

I will cover each of “Five Shifts” separately in the following five chapters.

When you or your team members are unclear as to the organization’s direction or individual career goals, there’s a much greater need to protect and covet rather than share and contribute. However, when there is alignment between your company/department mission and individual career goals, synergy results. Team members see how their contribution affects the whole and the conversation switches from “Why am I not getting what I want?” to “How can I further support my organization, while advancing my career?”

Is there alignment in your organization? **When alignment is present, coming back to common ground is easy.**

## *Highlights Chapter Two*

- Communication between people of different generations is a responsibility held by both young *and* seasoned professionals.
- It's not *what* you say that gets what you want; rather, it's *how* you say it.
- Understanding the experiences of each generation will help shift the conversation away from "right" vs. "wrong" and toward individual and organizational missions/goals.
- Take the time to understand what people really mean when they make comments that upset you.

When there is alignment between your company/department mission and individual career goals, team members understand how their contribution affects the whole and productivity increases.

## Chapter Five: Creating a Common Vision

<b>Seasoned Professionals:</b>	<b>COMMON GROUND</b>	<b>Young Professionals:</b>
3. Make them appreciate what has come before them	→ Creating and focusing on a common <i>vision</i>	← Bucking the system

### Young Professionals:

According to Boston-based research company, the Aberdeen Group, **90 percent of employees make the decision to stay at a company within the first six months.** Whether this is “right” or “wrong,” it is a fact that should keep both organizations and employees on their toes.

Here is how this “stay or go” decision process played out with one young professional:

Ken, a young professional at a large telecommunications company and a previous coaching client of mine, had been with his company for five years. He wanted to be promoted sooner; he also wanted to be more involved in higher level management decision making. His company, like many companies this size, had a very specific system for promotion and Ken did not yet meet the criteria for advancement. As a result, he didn’t make the pay he felt he deserved, nor could he get involved in top-level meetings.

Ken went out of his way, attempting to break through the promotion system in order to gain the opportunities and salary he wanted. After six months of running into roadblocks and red tape, Ken gave up and took a job with another company. Instead of sticking it out, building relationships and looking for ways to be of service to his company, he quit.

Within the first two months, Ken called to let me know he wasn’t happy in his new position. He realized that he had jumped ship too soon and wanted coaching on how to approach his previous employer to be rehired. He also wanted to learn about the value of established systems.

In a *BusinessWeek* article (May 28, 2007) entitled “Which Job is the Right Job?” Jack and Suzy Welch point out that, “There are five questions you need to ask yourself as you weigh competing opportunities: Will the new job be filled with co-workers who share my sensibilities, or will I have to zone out or fake it to get along? Will the new job stretch my mind and build my skills, and otherwise take me out of my comfort zone, or am I entering at the top of my game? Will the new job open or close doors for me should I ever leave? Will the new job turn my crank, touch my soul, and give me meaning? Who am I making happy by taking this job, and am I OK with that bargain?”

Needless to say, Ken neglected to ask himself these important questions before he jumped ship. We all have our own lessons to learn and Ken clearly learned his.

**Individuals who stay around and demonstrate commitment to the mission and vision of the organization are likely to be promoted.**

On the other hand, some promotional systems do need updating to meet with changing times. Established law firms offer a good example of outdated systems. Once a young lawyer begins working for a firm, they must wait six to nine years to be offered a

partnership position. There are no intermediate steps to denote accomplishments. Waiting six to nine years to get to the next level is longer than many young lawyers care to wait.

Rebecca Logan echoes this in her article “Making Partner Can Be a Trade-Off for Lawyers” (*Washington Business Journal*, June 8-14, 2007). “Nowadays, these kids are coming into our offices ... saying, ‘I really want to work on this’ or ‘I didn’t get that kind of work over the last three months.’ They’re much more proactive – or paranoid – about managing their careers.”

Today’s young professionals are used to being consistently rewarded for their accomplishments. This is neither “right” nor “wrong” – it just *is*. Adding levels provides a way to promote and recognize your people. Opportunities for promotion recognize achievements and recognition is the number one thing young professionals are seeking.

When organizations create more steps on the career ladder and greater opportunities for acknowledgement and rewards, including levels of accomplishment, they often see an increased retention among their young professionals.

### **Seasoned Professionals:**

Steve, a master chief in the Navy, told me this story when I was speaking on a Navy “road show” in San Diego:

One of Steve’s direct reports, Frank, let him know that a young sailor, Josh, would not wash the dishes in the specific way that was required. Steve said, “What do you mean he won’t do the dishes that way?” Frank replied, “That’s it. He said he won’t do the dishes.” So, Steve went to Josh to inquire further.

Steve approached Josh and asked him why he wouldn’t wash the dishes in the required manner. The young sailor said, “This sign here tells us how to wash the dishes and the chief says to do it differently, and that makes no sense.” Steve responded, “What the chief says to do is the right way to wash the dishes, but what you’re telling me is having that sign posted makes no sense, right?” Josh proudly exclaimed, “Yep, it makes no sense!”

Steve looked at the sign and agreed with the young sailor, “You’re right, having that sign there makes no sense.” Then he went on to say, “Now that we are in agreement regarding the sign, would you also agree with me that the dishes still need to be done, regardless of this stupid sign?” Josh looked at Steve and said, “Yes, the dishes still need to be done.” Steve left and Josh began doing the dishes.

Steve stopped to fully listen to what was upsetting Josh, acknowledged his frustration without telling him he was wrong and got him focused on the mission at hand, the dishes. Sometimes people just need to be acknowledged and understood, then refocused. In this case, Steve and Josh created the alignment of a common vision, thereby allowing matters to move forward.

**While on the surface it may seem that someone is “bucking the system,” it may actually be that they are either confused and need more direction, or have an idea that is worth listening to.**

Simply pushing someone into what you want them to do is only going to cause frustration and conflict. When you meet frustration with frustration and seek to gain control, what you get is even more frustration. Likewise, when you meet frustration with

compassion and listening – even when the other person seems “wrong” – you transform the energy in a positive direction and the situation can move forward.

\*\*\*\*\*"Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen." - Winston Churchill\*\*\*\*\*

### *Appreciating the Past, Preparing for the Future*

While we aren't addressing gender-related issues in this book, it's worthwhile to note that as young women enter the workforce, many seasoned female professionals want to be acknowledged and appreciated for all they endured to gain opportunities for women. This is a frequent challenge among seasoned women professionals.

The biggest problem is that young professionals don't know what came before and don't *understand* what women went through to accomplish the current climate for women in the workplace. Many of today's young professionals grew up with both parents working and were, to a greater extent than ever before, “raised” by institutions, each other and the media. They don't have a clear understanding of the experiences of the women who came before them. This has both advantages and disadvantages.

The advantage is that young workers **have a fresh set of eyes and are able to recognize process improvements and opportunities that may not be obvious to seasoned professionals**. They are anxious to try new approaches and make a mark for themselves. The disadvantage is that they do not know what has already been tried, what has worked well, what has not, and why.

Helping young professionals to understand the progression of established systems, and being open to hearing their ideas for possible improvements is a great way to create common ground. Sometimes current processes need to remain as they are and sometimes they need to be revamped to reflect current technologies, market changes, etc. What's most important is to communicate a clear mission, based on an understanding of the organization's vision, and move forward with ideas and innovations.

Whether you're a seasoned or young professional, your flexibility, communication and understanding will go a long way toward creating common ground.

### ***What Are Vision/Mission?***

Leaders create the vision, which gives the long-term goal of where they, the team and the organization are headed.

A mission is a statement of purpose put together by a team of people, which creates clarity, focus, teamwork, personal accountability and inspiration. It gives direction as to how the vision will be achieved. Bringing key people together to strategize on your mission naturally creates synergy, teamwork and collaboration.

For example, here are Inspirion Inc.'s Vision and Mission:

**Vision:** Inspirion Inc. will know that it is being successful when people of different generations support and help each other regardless of differences.

**Mission:** To create generational partnerships throughout the world.

As you can see, the mission is the path (created by the team) to establish the vision (created by the leader). It's then up to the team and the leader, together, to determine the tasks that will enable the mission to be accomplished and the vision to be realized.

\*\*\*\*\*“Vision must be defined by the leader. But it is the subordinates who must define the objectives that move the organization toward the desired outcome.”

-- Lt. Gen. William G. Pagonis\*\*\*\*\*

### *Why create a vision/mission?*

Imagine for a moment, a football team without a coach; a hockey team that doesn't know which net belongs to which team or an orchestra without a conductor. In each situation seriously under-utilized talent will set the stage for plenty of chaos, not to mention unhappy patrons!

When you and your team have clear instructions for hitting the target, you're more likely to reach your goal and increase your bottom line while leaving customers ecstatic.

If you want your team/organization focused, inspired, working together and taking personal responsibility, bring them together, create a mission statement and help them see how they each contribute to the success of that mission. This prevents them from drifting in different directions, perhaps at cross-purposes with one another, and not utilizing their abilities. **With a clear vision/mission, your team can consistently come together and determine what adjustments are necessary to move closer to their target.**

When organizations take the time to look at the big picture and create a meaningful mission and clear vision, those working for the organization naturally feel a sense of purpose in their work. When they clearly understand where the company is headed and the importance of their contribution toward accomplishing the vision, they naturally feel a sense of ownership.

### *Who should create the vision/mission?*

Regardless of organization size or number of people on any given team, any person in a leadership position can pull their employees together to create a mission for the team that will be aligned with the vision. While the leader sets the tone, generates the energy and may be the person who calls and leads the meeting, **it's the team who creates the mission and the leader who creates the vision.**

### *Tips on creating a vision/mission*

Creating a great mission statement has to do with the energy/excitement generated within the team. I've heard mission statements that sound similar to this, “Make a billion dollars.” While that may be a great goal, it isn't a mission that excites most young professionals. If your young professionals were promised a percentage of those dollars, they might get excited ... but only momentarily.

**A vision/mission should be something so empowering that individuals on the team are excited to do their best every day.** Example: “Vision: To be the number one manufacturing company in the world, dedicated to employee development, customer

satisfaction and community development. Mission: We are a company who listens and responds to the needs of our employees, our customers and our community.”

Some questions to consider when creating a vision/mission:

1. What problem(s) do you solve? What need(s) do you fill?
2. What do you sell? How do you make your money? What is your revenue model?
3. How is your organization different from every other organization out there? What is your organization’s unique selling proposition?
4. Who do you sell to? What is your target market?
5. What are your economic/financial goals?
6. What are your social/community goals?
7. What type of organization/team do you want to create? Are you a “lifestyle” or “high potential” organization?
8. Where is the organization /team going? What products/services/industries do you plan to venture into?
9. What is your five-year strategy? Do you want to sell internationally, build an online store, franchise your business, build certain partnerships, develop additional products?
10. What are strengths/weaknesses of your team? What skills need to be strengthened? What talent needs to be brought in?

I facilitated a mission/vision exercise for a team within a large telecommunications company. The result was increased teamwork, a renewed excitement for the future and a new sense of creativity and fun. Here’s specifically what I did:

I first shared a short video demonstrating that regardless of where you work or what you do, you can make a contribution and create a legacy for yourself. In the video, a woman had recently taken over as CEO of a large grocery store chain. She gave a speech to her entire team to inspire and help them understand their importance toward the company’s long-term success. She asked each of them to find their own unique way of creating a positive experience for their customers.

One young man, a bagger, took her request seriously and began creating his own unique way of touching each shopper. He found an inspiring quote each day and brought it typewritten on small pieces of paper. He would then place the little quote inside one grocery bag of each customer. Over time, customers would literally stand and wait in his line, even if the other registers were open, in order to receive his quote of the day.

Through her vision, the CEO was able to inspire her team toward a clear mission and allowed them the freedom to create their own unique contribution. Regardless of your position, you can always have a positive effect on the people around you, add value to your team and develop a first-class reputation.

After showing the video, I asked the team leader to identify his company’s customers. Then I asked each individual to consider their own unique contribution to both the team and their customers. Finally, I had them brainstorm about the specifics of what they do and the value their team brings to the company. Within an hour, they created their team mission.

*How do you contribute to your organization's vision/mission?*

Once they had created their team mission statement, I asked each of them to think about their talents and what they most wanted to achieve in their careers. Because many of them had never thought about this, they wrote down the parts of their jobs they most enjoyed. *What do you love about what you are doing? Or what would you like to do?*

Next, they considered what job would allow them to focus on those most pleasurable tasks. This exercise gave them the framework for their career future. *What are your goals? Where do you want to be in the next three to five years? What new skills do you want to develop?*

I asked them to share their career goals and consider ways they could help each other reach these goals. *What relationships do you need to cultivate in order to achieve your goals?* While creating clarity, they were also able to see how they could support each other in gaining the experiences necessary to achieve their professional aspirations. A sense of teamwork and focus emerged that continues today. In fact, this team became more innovative in the following six months than they had been in years, and the company's sales have increased as a result.

If you want your team working *together* toward a common goal, you have to take the necessary time to create a mission *together* that is aligned with both your vision and the company's vision.

\*\*\*\*\*"A clear vision, backed by definite plans, gives you a tremendous feeling of confidence and personal power." - Brian Tracy, Author and Speaker\*\*\*\*\*

As demonstrated in the example above, once you create a clear vision/mission, the next step is to learn about the career interests of those on your team. Understanding each individual's goals and career aspirations is tremendously helpful toward best supporting them as individual contributors. Most people aren't really conscious of their abilities. Over time, and with your consistent support, their awareness will increase and you, as a leader, will gain tremendous loyalty as a result.

Confirming the critical nature of getting to know your team members, Thomas J. DeLong, et. al., wrote in their article entitled "Why Mentoring Matters in a Hypercompetitive World," (*The Harvard Business Review*, January 2008), "Ask an associate what kind of work she wants to do, where her passions lie, what skills she wants to develop. Don't leave this important job to human resources."

When individual career aspirations are in alignment with your organization's vision/mission, synergy occurs. When the organization can provide opportunities for employees to gain the experiences they want, it's a win/win situation. This kind of alignment provides rich ground for individuals to perform at their best, while the organization prospers significantly.

**The vision/mission should be readdressed every four to six months and more often as team members join and leave.** There's huge value in consistently reestablishing the direction and re-empowering your team. For example, "[Simply Audio Books] also hosts monthly all-staff meetings to ensure employees are kept apprised of the company's strategic direction and how they fit into the pursuit of corporate goals. Equally

important is helping young workers find a career path.” (Jennifer Myers, “The How and the Y,” *Profit Guide*, October 2007.)

The direction provided by the creation and recreation of a vision/mission is the foundation for any team’s/organization’s success.

## **Highlights Chapter Five**

### ***Young Professionals***

- 90 percent of employees make the decision to stay at a company within the first six months.
- Moving from company to company isn't necessarily going to bring the results you seek.
- Individuals who stay around and demonstrate commitment to the organization's mission and vision will likely get promoted.
- When law firms and other companies create more opportunities for recognition and rewards, including levels to be reached, it's likely they will see increased retention among young professionals.

### ***Seasoned Professionals***

- Flexibility, communication and understanding will go a long way toward creating common ground.
- While on the surface, it may seem that someone is "bucking the system," it may actually be that they are either confused and need more direction, or have an idea that's worth listening to.
- Communicate a clear vision and then, as a team, create the strategy (mission) for getting there together.
- When you meet frustration with compassion and listening (even when the other person seems "wrong"), you transform the energy in a positive direction and the situation can move forward.
- Help young professionals understand the reasoning behind current processes and listen to their ideas for possible improvements. They have a fresh set of eyes and are often able to recognize process improvements and opportunities that may not be obvious to seasoned professionals.

### ***Creating a Vision/mission***

- The vision states the long-term goal of where the leader, the team and the organization are headed. It is created by the leader.
- A mission is a statement of purpose put together by a team of people, which creates clarity, focus, teamwork, personal accountability and inspiration. It provides direction for how the vision will be achieved.
- With a clear vision/mission, your team can consistently come together and determine what adjustments are necessary to get closer to their target.
- A vision/mission should be something so empowering that individuals on the team are excited to do their best every day.
- The vision/mission should be readdressed every four to six months, and more often as team members join or leave.

## Chapter Eight: Create a Sense of Community

According to a 2006 research study by SelectMind, a corporate social network solutions provider, “Today’s youngest workers are bringing a new sense of importance to workplace relationships. More than three-quarters (77%) of workers age 20 - 29 believe that the social aspects of work are very important to their overall sense of workplace satisfaction, compared with 67% of their older colleagues.”

The study further states, “When transitioning into a new job, Gen Yers rank ‘cementing relationships with colleagues and supervisors’ (41%) as their number one challenge, ahead of learning the new job responsibilities (27%) and adapting to a new company culture (33%). For many of these young workers, relationships function as an information ‘search engine,’ providing them with information that is pre-qualified and, therefore, credible.” This was true for Veronica at ABC Company, as was discussed in Chapter Four.

Quoted in the November 2006 issue of *T+D* (a magazine of the American Society for Training & Development), research by The Corporate Leadership Council suggests that new employees decide within the first 30 days whether they feel welcome in the organization.

Further emphasizing the need for networking programs, SelectMind’s study also concluded that, “Nearly half (46%) of these Gen Yers also rate the availability of support/networking programs for employees with common interests (new mothers, pre-retirees, new mid-career hires and recent graduates) as a very important factor in their decision to join and/or remain with an employer, compared with 36% of their peers.”

\*\*\*\*\*"You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation." - Plato \*\*\*\*\*

Creating community seems like such a simple idea with a great outcome, yet few organizations make it a priority. When I think of organizations that do a great job creating a community among professionals, two companies come to mind. The first one, a law firm in Maryland, does an outstanding job creating community among all levels within the firm. In order to keep people around during lunch and help them get to know each other, the firm buys lunch for everyone from a local restaurant every day.

No one is forced to eat at the firm every day, but most days co-workers do end up eating together at the office, chatting over lunch. Because they **spend less time out of the office** going for lunch, they’re able to get more done and have time to connect with each other. In addition to providing lunch daily, the firm throws a few parties throughout the year, which brings family members into the mix as well. Its retention rate is extremely high and most employees work well together. The company has really done a great job!

The second company, a video game company in Virginia, brings lunch in periodically and occasionally rents out an entire movie theater or bowling alley in the middle of the day, encouraging employees at all levels to attend with their family members. The company also throws a big party during the holidays and invite friends and family. At the beginning of every summer it rents an outdoor space and throws a barbeque with plenty of special activities for employees and their families.

Both companies understand the importance of creating community among their employees. It’s common to see the **executives from both companies participate in**

**most of the events.** Their participation adds to their credibility as leaders and to the cohesiveness of the company.

Creating opportunities for people to get to know each other where title, project or experience level doesn't matter, makes for even greater working relationships. It's this simple: **People who know and like each other are far more likely to work well together.**

When individual leaders begin conducting small outings with their team, they create an even stronger bond among team members. Good leaders ask staff members for ideas. Below are some possible activities to get you started:

- ◆ Roller Skating/Ice Skating
- ◆ Bowling
- ◆ Go out for lunch/ordering in
- ◆ Barbeque
- ◆ Beach Day
- ◆ Softball
- ◆ Creative, friendly competition in teams (perhaps to make something that will be donated to a children's hospital or orphanage)
- ◆ Treasure or Scavenger Hunt in teams
- ◆ Hiking
- ◆ Chili Cook-off
- ◆ Community service – painting an elderly person's house, fixing up a playground, visiting folks in a nursing home or children in the hospital, etc.

Young professionals are interested in work/life balance, so doing such activities during working hours will be well received. Rewarding your team through outside activities is a wonderful way to keep them charged up.

If you're concerned about the amount of time it takes to create and attend such activities, let me remind you how **much more will be accomplished as a result of building strong relationships and enhancing cohesiveness between employees.** Making these activities a priority sends a powerful message to your employees. Your presence also ensures that employees from all levels of your organization feel important.

This reminds me of a story about a large financial services company that held what was announced as an exciting teambuilding weekend. The only problem: Executives stayed at a more expensive hotel and didn't participate in any of the activities, except meals!

This is definitely NOT the way to build morale and team spirit. Leader participation in community building events is critical. It's just as important for leaders and teams to get to know each other informally as it is for team members to get to know each other. In other words, providing opportunities for employees to build relationships, regardless of level, is important to the success of each employee and, in turn, the entire organization.

### *Highlights Chapter Eight*

- More than three-quarters (77 percent) of workers age 20-29 believe the social aspects of work are very important to their overall sense of workplace satisfaction.
- Gen Yers rank “cementing relationships with colleagues and supervisors” as their number one challenge (41 percent), ahead of learning the new job responsibilities (27 percent) and adapting to a new company culture (33 percent).
- Creating an opportunity for people to get to know one another, without concern for titles, experience level or projects, makes for better working relationships.
- People who know and like each other are far more likely to work well together.
- Executive participation in social events adds to their credibility as leaders and builds cohesiveness within the company.
- Individual managers can step out and begin conducting small outings with their teams to create an even stronger bond among team members.