

# Leadership and the Inter-Generational Divide

Issues, Trends & Solutions


*An e-Book!*



James Taggart, MA, MA  
Taggart Leadership Consulting Inc.

Ottawa, Canada

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*Your childhood made you fiercely  
dedicated to being good parents,  
prompting you to raise important  
questions about the way we all  
balance work with commitments  
beyond the corporation.*

Tammy Erickson (Author) On Generation X

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## Author's Note

This e-book is an edited compilation of a dozen blog posts that I wrote on intergenerational issues over a 16 month period. I have selected the most salient portions of these posts, adding new information I have recently come across.

My aim is to provide a readable e-book which will enhance your understanding of the intertwined issues and trends underlying the subject of what has been referred to as the intergenerational divide. Leadership permeates this book. Much is at stake in how organizations—whether in the public sphere or the private sector—address the challenges posed by an ageing population, and in particular a labor force that spans four generations, and soon five.

Generation Y, an age cohort spanning some 15 years, will play an important role over the longer-term when it comes to leading organizations. Because of this role, combined with the impact of the Great Recession on this cohort, this e-book places a particular emphasis on the issues Gen Y faces and their role in organizations.

To optimize the value of this e-book, it is best read digitally (you'll also help save a tree). Hyper-text links are embedded throughout the text, enabling you to transport yourself to sources cited and also to some videos of experts speaking on intergenerational issues. Enjoy! **JT**



## The Big Picture

And you thought the world had enough problems already? Just wait, it's going to become a lot more tense, especially among generations.

The world is going through a massive demographic transition that will reshape nations, economies and markets over the next 100 years. [Forecasts by the United Nations](#) predict the world's population peaking and then stabilizing in the next 40 years (around 2050). Why the sudden halt to what has been exponential growth since the Industrial Revolution? It has to do with the improvement in economic conditions around the globe, most recently with emerging economies. China, in particular, has finally brought under control its population growth as a result of its one-child policy.

However, with any substantial global shifts come other challenging issues, most notably a radically changing demographic composition that varies from region to region. For example, between 1950 and 2000 those older than 60 years of age grew, as a percentage of world population, from 8% to 10%. By 2050 this age group's share will leap to 21%. But that's only the world average. Here's the shocker: in Japan and some Western European countries those over 60 will account for over 40% of their respective populations!

*The leadership challenge emerging from an ageing population is enormous—but not impossible.*

China's situation has been noted; however, it comes with a dual challenge. First, the country faces a rapid rise in the 60 plus age group, from a current 11% to 28% by 2040. Second, it's estimated that because of the country's repressive one-child policy and the desire to have boys and not girls, there is an imbalance of an excess of 40 million males. The long-term social costs stretch one's imagination. To put this in context, Canada's total population is a mere 34 million.

In many other developing countries birth rates are still elevated. Examples include Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Africa, the last of which is expected to experience a jump from 9% of the world's population to 20% by 2050. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel, Venezuela and Malaysia are forecast to

experience the fastest growth in their working-age populations (15 years of age plus), according to [HSBC's The World in 2050](#). Following the top five are India, Columbia, Argentina, Turkey and Ireland.

“Who cares!” you might say. Well, we should all care.

If there's one issue on which corporations and governments are not paying enough attention it is that of population change and the implications for policy development and markets. It's well understood by most economists, business people and academics that human capital development is the distinguishing factor when it comes to competitiveness. Without it technological progress is stunted, and as a consequence productivity growth is limited.

Here's one fact to illustrate the seriousness of the economics of Canada's demographic changes. The [C.D. Howe Institute](#), a Toronto-based think tank,

*At the heart of this is leadership, how it's perceived and practiced within organizations and communities.*

forecasts that the [demographic bill](#) that will hit the federal and provincial governments over the next 50 years will amount to \$1.5 trillion. Health, education and child benefit payments now make up 15% of GDP, but are expected to account for 19% of GDP by 2056.

This is the big picture view, but what of the effects within countries and at the level of organizations?

Let's take a look at the impending pressures on Western society. Elderly people use over six times the medical resources than young people. In the past this wasn't an issue, with an age pyramid that reflected a strong base of youth and working age people. Now the pyramid is getting inverted, moving from a bulging middle as Boomers get older to a top heavy situation.

This demographic flip raises two questions:

- 1) Where are the money and resources going to come from to fund the growing healthcare needs of an ageing population?
- 2) How are Western nations going to address the human capital issue?

It was suggested by one sage at the [World Economic Forum](#) in the summer of 2009 that perhaps in the spirit of saving pension (social security) dollars that the elderly be relocated to lower-cost countries such as Libya, where although the standard of living is much lower, you can really stretch a dollar. Imagine for a moment telling that to your own mom or dad, that the government wants to move them to Argentina to save a few bucks.

When you look at a country such as Japan, one can understand the enormous pressures their government is under. The Japanese government attempted a few years ago to place more of the financial onus for healthcare on the elderly over age 75. This was soundly rejected by the public.

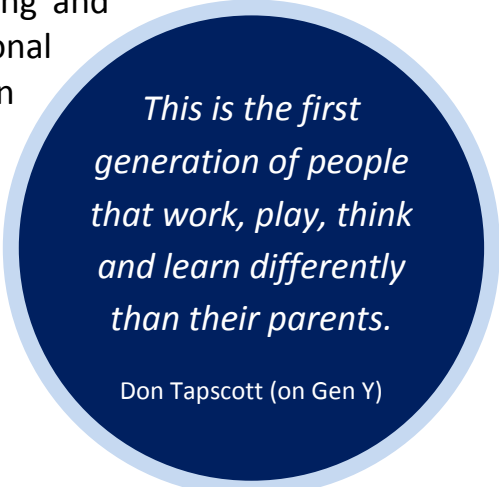
The leadership challenge emerging from an ageing population is enormous—but it's not impossible. Within organizations, managing and leading in the context of a four inter-generational workforce is not for the faint-hearted. Generation Y, creamed by the Great Recession, has Generation Z on its heels.

Definitions of the age spans of the different generations vary somewhat. A general consensus places the age cohorts as:

- Baby Boomers cover 1948-1966,
- Gen X spans 1967 to the late 1970s,
- Gen Y covers 1979-80 to 1994-1995,
- Gen Z began in 1995.

Generation X is about to take over the reins of power from the outgoing (but not-yet-dead Baby Boom generation). The Silent Generation (65 plus) is lingering around, now that their pension plans have been decimated in the United States and to a lesser degree in Canada. In fact, we're actually on the cusp of a workforce spanning five generations as the oldest of Gen Z move towards labor market entry in the next few years.

There are two paths when it comes to how people will work together in the future: either people continue maintaining the fences and silos around their respective generations, or they flatten these barriers and figure out how to



*This is the first generation of people that work, play, think and learn differently than their parents.*

Don Tapscott (on Gen Y)

collaborate. There's an enormous amount at stake, with respect to Canada's and America's collective future and quality of life.

At the heart of this is leadership, how it's perceived and practiced within organizations and communities. Effective leaders tear down barriers to communication and collaboration, articulate a shared vision of the future through enrolling others in its creation, take action to make things happen, and sustain this action over the long-term.

As you proceed through this e-book keep in mind these two questions:

- Where do YOU stand personally on the challenges facing society and organizations from the perspective of an ageing population and the implications for leadership?
- Do you wish to play a role in finding solutions, whether it's dealing with mushrooming healthcare costs, encouraging the elderly to remain an active part of society, coaching Gen Y or becoming an inter-generational barrier buster?



## The Broken Employment Contract

The employment contract has long been broken in North America. This is defined as the reciprocal understanding between workers and employers that the former would remain loyal if they had jobs for life. Baby Boomers were the first generation to be affected. Gen X (named for it being the excluded generation) has struggled to create its own identity in the presence of the Boomers' looming shadow. It is Gen Y that almost seems to have the best grasp that the world is changing and that corporate loyalty, slavish work hours and authoritarian power are becoming long-lost characteristics of organizations.

What's the concern, then, for Gen Y? Is it that this young generation can't cut the mustard in the job market? No, absolutely not. What Gen Y faces is the effects of the Great Recession: last in, first out; organizations not valuing what Gen Y brings; and not providing coaching and mentoring to this new labor force cohort. [BusinessWeek has labeled Gen Y the Lost Generation. Read the article and watch a video of an interview by Peter Coy.](#)

The meter's ticking, but this time the environment is different. The emergence of new global competitors is completely changing the economic landscape. Forget the statistics that China and India have much lower percentages of their respective populations earning diplomas and degrees when compared to Europe and North America. The key here is they collectively have a population of about 2.5 billion people. It's about absolute numbers, not percentages.



When viewed through the organizational lens, it all boils down to this:

If there were ever a need for coaching and mentoring in the workplace, it is NOW.

If there were ever a need for knowledge transfer practices in organizations, it is NOW.

If there were ever a need for shared leadership in organizations and communities, it is NOW.

If there were ever a need for embracing inter-generational differences, it is NOW.

Far too much has been written and talked about over the past decade by policy wonks, economists, politicians and demographers who have collectively enthused that Gen Y will have its pick of the jobs, and that employers will have to adjust their managerial practices and workplace conditions if they wish to have a hope of attracting talented young people.

So where does that leave Gen Y, whose labor market status is still vulnerable and uncertain? Although Canada's situation is not as dismal as that of America's, there are still far too many young people unemployed or underemployed. South of the Canadian border the situation is near catastrophic as America faces a lost generation.

Take moment to look at some recent data included in [The Economist](#) (September 11, 2010 issue), based on data drawn from the OECD's latest survey on education:

For college and university graduates aged 25-29 working in low skill jobs, the percentages compared to total graduates by select countries are (the numbers to the right are average labor cost in U.S. dollars):

Spain:	44%	(\$38,100)
<b>Canada:</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>(50,500)</b>
United States:	32%	(70,900)
Poland:	28%	(14,800)
Britain:	26%	(70,000)
Australia:	24%	(23,000)
OECD Avg.	23%	(49,800)

Canada is in second place, followed by the U.S. This is not a good picture for youth, not just in regard to unemployment but also underemployment. Addressing this issue presents a strategic leadership challenge to organizational leaders in both the public and private sectors.

At a true global level, however, unemployment among young people is becoming a problem stretching across borders, one that will eventually suck in the attention

of *all* national governments. In a follow-up to its Lost Generation feature, [Bloomberg Businessweek's February 7-13, 2011 issue examined youth unemployment as the global economy's "ticking timebomb."](#) The picture is not pretty.

The age pyramids of Middle Eastern countries are typically very wide at the bottom (youth) and narrow at the top (elderly). Egypt, Iran and Morocco are cases in point. As the Bloomberg Business article states: "...the sclerotic and autocratic states of the Middle East are ill-equipped to take advantage of this demographic dividend."

Across the Atlantic, Lisa Kahn, Yale School of Management, estimates that for white, male American university students a one percentage point rise in the unemployment rate at graduation produces an income loss of 6-7 %. Pushing this out 15 years reveals that graduates during a recession earn up to 2.5% less than if they had completed their post-secondary education during a period of growth.

In fact, some researchers and policy experts argue that it's not always preferable to pursue more education. Whether it's Canada, the United States, Iran or Egypt, cranking out degrees and diplomas through "mills" is not necessarily the best choice. Matching skills of employers to those of labor force participants is what actually matters. Check out some of the young people profiled in the BB article:

- Pratin Rathod (21), India, Robotics graduate. Unemployed
- Ceren Ozbasaran (27), Istanbul, Psychology and Criminology. Unemployed
- Robert Harington (23), London, Biochemistry. Unemployed

We live on a shrinking planet. If you don't care, you should. The fluidity of international trade, labor mobility, technology advancement, virtual outsourcing and global security make the issue of youth unemployment both a moral and economic issue. We can no longer hide our heads in the sand. How national governments address and reconcile the issue of the participation of youth in their economies over the coming years will play a major part in their overall competitiveness.



## Gens X and Y Meet Theories X and Y

Much has been written during the past decade about the leadership needs of Generations X and Y. Their value sets are vastly different from the values held by Baby Boomers. Before examining the leadership implications for these generations, their unique value sets will be summarized.

Gen X's values reflect the need for:

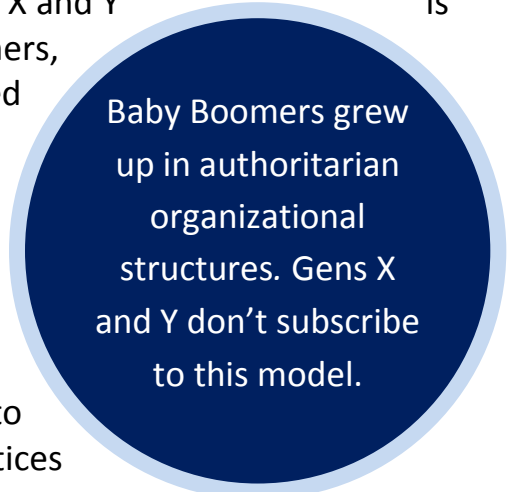
1. **Relationships:** although they desire to build them with others and become known to others, they're also hesitant because of the fear of being rejected. Living in the Boomers' shadow created insecurities.
2. **Uniqueness:** Gen X wants to separate itself from Boomers, emphasizing how it is different, whether through work, play and not following established rules. Creativity is a vital part of this.
3. **Meaningful Experience:** they seek to gain meaning both from their paid work and outside activities, *and* how they contribute to society.
4. **Family Time:** They're hard workers but also demand time to be with their children and spouses. For them, it's about work-life balance. They especially don't want to follow the path of Baby Boomers.
5. **Work to Live:** This is the flip side to how Boomers approached life. Gen X works hard and plays hard. Leisure time is very important to them.

In contrast, Gen Y's values show the need for:

1. **Personal Connections & Loyalty:** Gen Y exhibits a strong sense of personal loyalty, much stronger than their older cohorts. Their daily activities reflect strong interpersonal connections, face-to-face and online.
2. **Environmental and Social Justice:** Doing the right thing for society and the environment serves as a moral compass. This generation is the Greenest of all the generations.

3. **Tolerance and Diversity:** Gen Y embraces racial, ethnic and gender differences.
4. **Collaboration:** Working in teams, physically and virtually, comes naturally to them. Inclusiveness is very important.
5. **E-Connectivity:** Instant communication with their peers is essential and a way of life. Relationships are not only face-to-face but virtual. The ability to research products online makes them savvy consumers.
6. **Self-Confidence:** Their Boomer parents instilled a strong sense of self-confidence through their upbringing. Gen Y believes it is very capable and can do anything. In organizations they expect fast promotions.

Understanding the diverse value sets of Generations X and Y is essential for those leading organizations. Baby Boomers, whose values are very difficult to corral into a defined set, are gradually handing the reins of leadership to Gen X. One thing is clear: Baby Boomers grew up in authoritarian organizational structures, inherited from their parents who accepted this form of management as a given.



Sometimes it's helpful to look back in history to understand from where certain beliefs and practices have come. This is where Theories X and Y meet Generations X and Y. Douglas McGregor wrote "The Human Side of Enterprise" in 1960. The way in which managers interact with their subordinates is based on their assumptions about human behavior. These assumptions begin to be formed when we're young. As we age our various experiences further solidify these assumptions. Organizations possess their own cultures, which are either sustained by passing down managerial assumptions and practices to new managers, or they are blown apart by new renegade CEOs who wish to recreate their organizations.

McGregor described the assumptions underlying Theory X as:

1. People have an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it,
2. Because of this dislike for work, people must be 'coerced, controlled, directed, threatened with punishment' to get them to perform,
3. People prefer to be directed in their work, shunning responsibility and ambition.

#### THEORY Y:

People do not inherently dislike work, instead seeing it as a source of satisfaction.

He believed that these assumptions were not a theory but in reality determined management strategy in organizations. It was about the tactics of control and telling people what to do in order to achieve organizational objectives.

In contrast, Theory Y deals heavily with interpersonal relationships and the creation of a work environment where people are encouraged to commit to the organization's objectives. To live and work in this world requires a very different set of assumptions:

1. People do not inherently dislike work, instead seeing it as a source of satisfaction, depending on the conditions
2. People will direct themselves in working towards organizational objectives, once they have committed to them
3. Committing to these objectives is directly related to the rewards associated with achieving them
4. Under the right conditions, people will not only accept responsibility but will seek it out
5. People will usually exercise a high degree of creativity in attempting to solve organizational problems
6. The intellectual capacities are only being partially used in organizations

McGregor makes an interesting observation on participation, noteworthy because he was writing about organizations in the late 1950s. When management uses the façade of participation to get employees to accept key decisions, and when used repeatedly, the result is cynicism and checking-out from further participatory

exercises. As he states: "...[management] will lose far more than [it] had hoped to gain by 'making them feel important.'"

The dynamic tensions among the four generations in the workforce presents real challenges to those in managerial positions. The Silent Generation (65 plus) has not completely exited the labor force, and in fact a certain portion is staying on and/or returning for various personal reasons. A significant number of Boomers will remain in the workforce for many years.

HR experts and others have noted that increased tensions are expected within organizations as Boomers and the Silent Generation are managed by people half their age. Gens X and Y (especially the latter) fully embrace McGregor's Theory Y; Boomers are split between Theories X and Y with regard to how they have led others in the past.

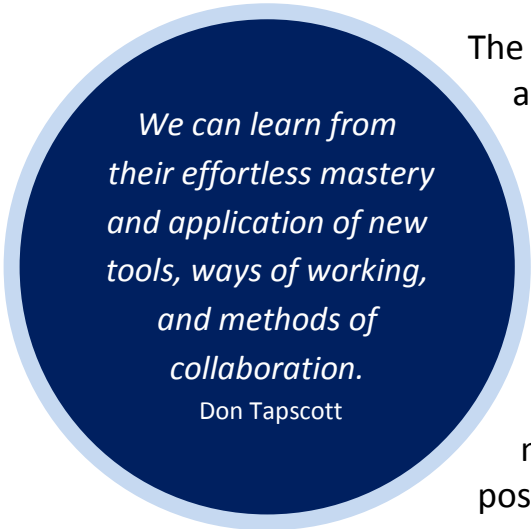
Effectively addressing these tensions will be critical to the productivity and performance of public and private sector organizations in the years ahead. The following sections examine what Gen Y can contribute to organizations and how young people can position themselves for success.



## What Can Generation Y Teach Baby Boomers?

Teaching in the traditional sense has involved a linear power relationship between the “master” and the student. The same principle has applied to organizations, where new employees (usually in their twenties) yield to the authoritarian structure to learn “how we do things here.”

That model worked well in the 20th Century, at least for the most part. However, in a world of increasing complexity and unpredictable events, combined with bursts of technological advancements, the old teaching model is an anachronism. This model stands as an impediment to the ability of North American society to expand its knowledge and innovation capacity.



*We can learn from their effortless mastery and application of new tools, ways of working, and methods of collaboration.*

Don Tapscott

The previous section looked at the differing values across generations and the two generalized management approaches: Theories X and Y. With Boomers moving towards retirement, it's important to take stock and reflect how the leadership torch gets passed to Generations X and Y.

Gen X is already moving steadily into management positions, with many holding senior positions in business and government. This generation has had to figure things out on its own from living in the Baby Boom's shadow. Fortunately, they're the best educated generation in history. With the massive, imminent exodus of Boomers (2012 is when the exodus of Boomers is supposed to accelerate in Canada) Gen X will have advancement opportunities of which Boomers could only have dreamed.

Then there's Gen Y. As explained previously, this generation was told they'd have the world by the tail. Then the economy collapsed. It will take years to restore sustained economic growth, but in the interim Gen Y is hitting the labor market in growing numbers. Many have large student loans. And has already noted, they risk becoming the lost generation.

Before more damage is done to this generation it's vital that governments and businesses figure out how to engage this cohort more fully. This includes what we

can learn from them. Intertwined with this issue is the need to turn the old teaching model on its head and throw out the power relationship mindset, both for the education system and organizations.

[Tammy Erickson](#) is a respected author and consultant on intergenerational issues. In this [Harvard Review article](#) she talks about why she believes that Generation X is up to the leadership challenge. Also [Watch her Harvard Business video interview](#) on Gen Y's needs, challenges and what they offer organizations. And in this [short video clip](#) she shares an example of being asked to help a company that wasn't able to retain new recruits.

Another individual who has done significant research on Gen Y and who believes that Boomers can learn from them is [Don Tapscott](#), internationally respected Canadian author of several books on technology. His latest book [Grown Up Digital](#) talks about how Gen Y is changing the world (Tapscott uses the expression Net Generation).

[In this video interview with Allan Gregg](#) Tapscott discusses how young people are embracing technology and how they learn and work. He also notes the disparity between the top third of this generation, which consists of high achievers, and the bottom third which "lacks ambition;" this poses an engagement challenge for governments.

From his research, Tapscott identified eight distinct traits which he calls "The Net Generation Norms." By understanding these norms Boomers will be in a better position to work with and help Gen Y build their careers. In addition, Boomers will also learn from them. For Tapscott, Gen Y (Net Gen) has much to teach older folks. Here's a summary of the Tapscott's Norms.

- 1. Gen Y wants freedom in everything they do—from expression to choice. They make ample use of technology to achieve this; for example, in creating flexibility in how they work.**
- 2. They personalize and customize everything, whether it's their wireless device, services from government or entertainment.**
- 3. They scrutinize and question the product information they receive from companies.**

4. They expect corporations to operate with integrity and openness if they are to work there.
5. They want to combine play and entertainment in their work, education and social lives.
6. They value relationships and collaboration, and influence one another when it comes to purchasing products and services.
7. They thrive on speed, making effective use of technology to communicate with their peers and to share information.
8. They innovate, seeking out innovative companies and contributing eagerly to improving things.

Granted, since Tapscott's book was written the economy worsened. However, the above norms are very important to helping society better appreciate Gen Y, especially now with the weak job market. To return to the initial point on teaching, here's a short passage from Tapscott's book on which to reflect:

***“We can listen to their views on the world. We can learn from their effortless mastery and application of new tools, ways of working, and methods of collaboration. I believe, by listening, we can envision and enact the new institutional models required for the twentieth-first century.”***



## Can Gen Y Become Untouchable?

During the depths of the recent recession, New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman wrote an intriguing piece called [The New Untouchables](#). Friedman is one of the few journalists who really understands what is happening around the world when it comes to technology and its impacts on the economy and society, and especially when looking at global competition. He's written a number of excellent books, including [The World is Flat](#) and [Hot, Flat and Crowded](#).



So what's Friedman saying?

He recounts one story of a lawyer friend, who explained that the lawyers in his firm who got sacked first were those used to having work handed to them. But lawyers who had demonstrated creativity and ingenuity were kept on—*The Untouchables*, as Friedman calls them. This led Friedman to talk about America's poor international scholastic results and the need to increase the percentage of youth who continue on to post-secondary education. However, he didn't stop there, which is where the usual conversation on education in North America ends.

Friedman urged that the "right education" is desperately needed. One labor expert he spoke to distinguished between the separation of college grads in the top half, who possess "high-end analytical and problem-solving skills," and the bottom half, consisting of engineers and programmers whose work is aimed towards routine, non-creative tasks.

It's the bottom half that's been getting hit the hardest by offshore outsourcing, work that can be done anywhere on the planet and at a fraction of the cost. We sometimes hear about moving up the value chain, in terms of producing higher value-added products and services. Well, the analogy can be made to the labor market, where time is running out when it comes to improving the knowledge, skills and innovative capabilities of North American workers.

Friedman expressed it this way at the end of his piece: *"So our schools have a doubly hard task now, not just improving reading, writing and arithmetic but*

*entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity. Bottom line: We're not going back to the good old days without fixing our schools as well as our banks."*

Yes, his commentary was written for an American audience. There are, however, important messages for Canada as well. Canada continues to have very high illiteracy and high school drop-out rates, shocking for a country with its wealth. There is also an ongoing mismatch between the needs of employers requiring high-end knowledge and skills and the supply resident within the labor force.

Friedman's advice should be well heeded by those in policy-making positions. For Gen Y and also Gen X, which needs to embrace a continuous learning mindset, possessing a good education and technology skills is only part of the equation. Also important is devoting effort to building creative and entrepreneurial abilities. This will help separate North American workers from others in the global labor market.

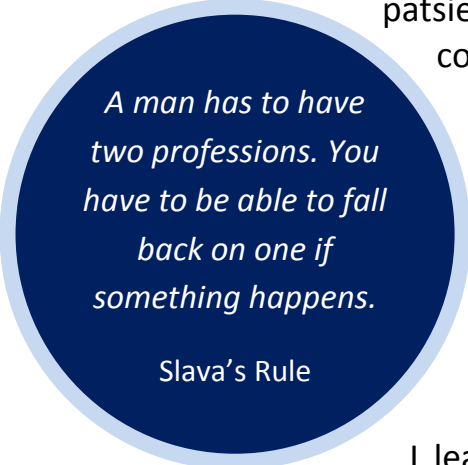


## A Personal Vignette

As the author, I'd like to share a few experiences and perspectives to support the messages contained within.

Baby Boomers will recall the nasty 1981-82 recession, which included very high inflation rates. I had worked in the private sector for a few years in the late 1970s, returning to earn a Masters in economics. Upon graduation I began work with the federal government, working as a labor market economist. I knew full well what young people were going through in the 1980s. It was depressing for them. Tuition rates were steadily rising, the minimum wage had barely budged, and the cost of living was soaring.

Fast forward to today's reality. Tuition rates are much higher, in comparison to wages earned by students. New college graduates face staggering student loan debt levels coupled with punishing interest rates. Boomers have set Gen Y up as patsies for a huge fall. "Go to university, forget community college; that's for dummies." Almost 40 years ago that was the refrain in high school, and it's still being sung for the most part. Yes, community college programs have grown in respect in North America over recent years, but they still don't command the respect they deserve. In particular, building trades and other skilled trades such as machinists, electricians, and tool and die makers still get overlooked.



*A man has to have  
two professions. You  
have to be able to fall  
back on one if  
something happens.*

Slava's Rule

I learned something valuable this summer that I'll share. During August we had a hardwood floor installed in our living room and dining room. I was fortunate to find an excellent installer, who I would call a master craftsman. His name was Slava, and he was from Ukraine. Although he'd lived in Ottawa for over six years his English was quite rudimentary. But over the two days he was in the house doing his work we spent a lot of time talking. I learned that he had been a professional boxer in Ukraine when he was a young man, ranked number one, and also boxed in the former Soviet Red Army.

On one occasion Slava asked me what type of work I did. I don't think he was too impressed with my reply. But he then said something I'll never forget: "Jim, a man

has to have two professions. You have to be able to fall back on one if something happens.”

In addition to having installed hardwood for 16 years, Slava had also been a shoemaker in Ukraine – not just repairing shoes but making them from scratch. We then talked about the problems that Canadian youth were having finding work. To Slava, he couldn’t understand why more young people were not going into the trades. From his point of view trades are an honorable profession. I’m sure he thought that my profession, which involves sitting in a chair all day long looking at a computer screen, was bizarre.



## **12 Tips for Gens X and Y**

This brings the discussion to the challenges that Gen X is facing in a turbulent economy. The following 12 tips are aimed to help this generation adapt and thrive in a competitive labor market. Many of these tips are relevant to Gen X, in regard to how they develop their careers and assume greater leadership responsibilities.

- 1) Realize that this economic mess is not your fault...but don't get a chip on your shoulder over it either.**
- 2) Own your morale and attitude on how you perceive the world.**
- 3) Never stop learning. When you think you've had enough, find another area in which to learn something new. Read a book – don't just web surf.**
- 4) Follow Slava's rule: have two trades or professions**
- 5) Working after high school or taking time off to work or travel during college may be a good idea, but it's a personal decision. Only you can make the final decision once you've checked things out, including receiving constructive advice from family and friends. And tell your parents to chill out if they start to panic.**
- 6) Make this time off a growth experience. Don't rot at home or hang out with friends who are going nowhere.**
- 7) Lower your material expectations.**
- 8) Post-secondary education is usually a good thing, but take the time to assess your interests and passions against what college programs offer.**
- 9) Remember, there will always be 'unknowns' of which you're unaware. Never be a know-it-all. Be humble and curious.**
- 10) Be open to outcome, not attached to it.**
- 11) Create your future by seizing opportunities and then allowing Mr. Luck in.**
- 12) Sacrifice. It's the ONLY way to initiate personal change and to systematically make a long-term improvement in your economic wellbeing.**

## 10 Suggestions for Boomer Managers and Executives

Boomer managers and executives face some particular challenges as they exit the labor market or begin to contemplate retirement, while concurrently attending to their organizational managerial responsibilities. The clash of value sets among the generations presents significant leadership challenges, but they are not impossible.

To assist Boomer managers and executives, here's a list of suggestions to keep in mind when interacting with younger cohorts.

- 1) There *is* life after work. Take a cue from Gens X and Y.
- 2) You don't own all the corporate knowledge.
- 3) Listen to Gens X and Y before speaking. What are they *really* saying?
- 4) Be clear in your communication; don't try to be hip.
- 5) Be who you are—no facades; Gens X and Y will appreciate it.
- 6) NEVER say, "This is how things are done around here."
- 7) Don't provide answers. Ask Gens X and Y for their solutions to problems.
- 8) Be clear on your expectations and accountability.
- 9) Emphasize that the customer/client/citizen is the organization's *raison d'être*.
- 10) Leave a positive legacy with your organization. Mentor an up-and-comer.



# ***Intergenerational Organizational Readiness Assessment***

Please answer the following questions candidly by indicating the number you believe is most appropriate.

*1 = Never*

*2 = Almost Never*

*3 = Somewhat/sometimes*

*4 = Often/frequently*

*5 = Almost always*

## ***In my organization...***

### **Attitudes & Engagement**

- \_\_\_ 1. Gen Y (15-30) is **not** an ego-centric generation.
- \_\_\_ 2. Gen X (31-43) is ready to assume senior leadership positions.
- \_\_\_ 3. We fully embrace intergenerational differences.
- \_\_\_ 4. Gen Y has something of substance to teach Baby Boomers.

### **Communication**

- \_\_\_ 5. We believe in tearing down barriers to communication.
- \_\_\_ 6. We actually **do** tear down barriers to communication.
- \_\_\_ 7. We tailor our communication messages to each generation.
- \_\_\_ 8. We are striving to achieve workplace balance to represent intergenerational needs.

\_\_\_9. We want to share our successes with other organizations.

### **Leadership Development**

\_\_\_10. Employee development is *truly* our first priority.

\_\_\_11. Gen Y's input to decision-making is *truly* valued.

\_\_\_12. We have an active mentoring program for Gens X and Y.

\_\_\_13. Our managers play an active role as coaches on a daily basis.

\_\_\_14. Leadership is **not** positional in our organization but also rises from the grassroots.

### **Knowledge Transfer**

\_\_\_15. Knowledge transfer (KT) is embedded in our work practices, flowing across boundaries.

\_\_\_16. KT spans retiring Baby Boomers to Gens X and Y. We breathe sharing knowledge.

\_\_\_17. When experienced employees leave, action is taken to document their knowledge.

\_\_\_18. Important decisions are made by drawing on organizational knowledge

\_\_\_19. Knowledge sharing flows both vertically and horizontally.

\_\_\_20. Our managers facilitate the capturing and sharing of knowledge from all employees.


### **Scoring:**

80+ Organization is well prepared to meet the challenges of an intergenerational workforce. However, at the lower end of the scale (near 80), care needs to be taken to maintain momentum.

60-79 Organization is showing potential for creating a culture that values intergenerational differences. At the lower end of the scale, considerable work needs to be done to move the organization forward.

40-59 Little is being done in the organization. Better get started!

<40 The organization's future is in jeopardy.



*Instead of distinguishing  
managers from leaders, we  
should be seeing managers as  
leaders, and leadership as  
management practiced well.*

Henry Mintzberg

## About the Author



Jim Taggart is a leadership and organizational learning consultant, offering services to business executives and managers who wish to enhance their effectiveness as leaders. With more than 30 years of personal leadership experience, Jim's knowledge combined with his results-oriented approach will help move your organization to the next level.

Jim worked for three decades with the Government of Canada. His career spanned labor market forecasting and analysis, innovation and competitiveness policy development, and leadership development and organizational learning project management. A recognized thought leader, Jim maintains a website and blog on leadership and management issues. He holds a Master's degree in economics from the University of New Brunswick and a Masters degree in Leadership and Organizational Learning from Royal Roads University.

Visit his leadership website: <http://changingwinds.wordpress.com/>

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