DON'T MANAGE ME,
#UNDERSTANDME

Leveraging the Gen Y mindset and
making it work within your organization

@JASONSMORGA AND @LANCEJRICHARDS

KELLY®

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YOU'VE READ PLENTY ABOUT GEN Y ALREADY. YOU GET IT. THE GENERATIONS ARE WIRED DIFFERENTLY, THEY WORK DIFFERENTLY AND ORGANIZATIONS HAVE TO ADAPT. GOT IT.

So, you've been working on your adaptation strategies…how's that working out so far? Have you started to see progress within your organization? How about within your department? We know the typical response—it's out of your direct control, right? What about those factors that are within your control? Have you personally made any changes in the way you manage or interact with Gen Ys?

The simple fact is, you don't have much time to change. Improving productivity, reducing turnover and building your talent supply chain across younger age groups is imperative for organizational success as we move into the next decade.

When preparing this paper, we were mindful of just how much has already been published about generational issues in the workplace. That's why we reviewed more than 30 existing papers, studies and surveys—from leading think tanks to Big Four consulting firms—to find out if there really is a consensus on how to manage Gen Y (and beyond).

We consumed a seemingly limitless supply of articles in various periodicals, ranging from *The Economist* to a one-paragraph blurb from patch.com. We also (shockingly) spoke with real, live Millennials—from entry-level employees at a San Francisco-based energy company, to MBA students in Bangkok and undergraduates in Detroit. And, we made good use of the *Kelly Global Workforce Index*, an annual primary research exercise for Kelly, which, in 2012 included approximately 45,000 Gen Y respondents from more than 30 countries. We even had real, live Millennials read drafts of this paper—amazingly we passed.

From all of this research, we can tell you that there are fundamental reasons why organizations, not just HR departments and leaders, must respond to generational issues. We can also tell you why some of the strategies that were supposed to work for Gen Y haven't. Take a deep breath, and prepare to stop 'managing' Gen Y employees, and start 'understanding' them.

JASON S. MORGA   **LANCE J. RICHARDS**

GEN Y FOUNDATION:
CONTINUOUS FEEDBACK AND REINFORCEMENT

Before we start talking about Gen Ys as if they are from another planet (although sometimes, after reading research, we may wonder), you need to understand how they grew up and how this has impacted their approach to working.

One key difference between growing up in the mid-1980s through to the 1990s and the 2000s (as opposed to previous decades), has been the way in which children have experienced self-directed play, and more importantly, risk and freedom.

Many studies and articles have discussed the increased emphasis during recent decades on the following elements of parenting and education:

Risk aversion

Positive feedback

Adult or parental supervision during play, then during school, and now at work (i.e. helicopter parenting)

Fundamentally, these parenting and educational trends have changed the way people now behave in the workplace—and this isn't Gen Y's doing. In fact, many of the complaints about how Gen Y now operates in the workplace come from the very individuals who pioneered these parenting and educational changes. Ironic.

However, we need to stop for a moment here and recognize that there is a big difference between parenting someone and being his or her boss. Simply raising a Gen Y individual does not prepare you for managing one in the workplace. Parenting and managing *are* different.

Instead, older generations must recognize that some of the foundations of their management style, and the messages they have heard from their HR department, are in fact reinforcing (rather than bridging), the generational divide.

Older workers have been trained to focus on issues of fairness and uniformity in their management style. In many ways, they've been asked to provide a homogenous experience of being managed; one where everyone is treated the same way. Yet, this is a recipe for failure in the Millennial workplace.

Instead, older managers need to develop a more individual approach, one that addresses the needs and motivations of individuals, not 'employees', as if they were one homogenous group with the same thoughts and motivations. After all, one Gen Y employee won't be the same as the next, and the real answer lies in finding appropriate ways to treat people fairly, but differently.

In understanding the foundations of Gen Y, we cannot ignore the role of technology. While technology has influenced all of us, Gen Y has evolved with technology as a life center. It has particularly influenced their communication styles—partly because parents have been less inclined to let their children roam the outside world, and instead have allowed them to do so online, in the comfort and protection of their home.

Believe it or not, this hasn't always had disastrous outcomes. Millennials have developed a new version of community, friendship and connectivity. And, the networks they've learned to form are not always superficial, meaningless and disposable—the Arab Spring has proven this.

In October, 2010, we may have argued that these social networks are very broad and very popular, but that they were tenuous in nature. After the Arab Spring, it became clear that they aren't tenuous at all—they are tenacious. And they are powerful.

Gen Y's ability to build, shape, dismantle, evolve and grow networks quickly and easily is one thing. But their ability to create networks that are genuine forces for change is something else entirely. We often minimize social media as pure entertainment. It's not, and proficiency in using it is a skill that has genuine applications in the workplace—one that older generations have yet to fully grasp.

IN THEIR WORDS

Yes, we Gen Ys need constant feedback, that's part of who we are, and it's part of what we're used to when we post things on social media. Tools like Facebook are just so powerful. Through them, I'm exposed to the details of hundreds of people's lives every second of the day. I'm constantly seeing how they're progressing and it makes me reflect on my own life and ask myself, 'How can I be better?'"

FREELANCE DIRECTOR, AUSTRALIA

The foundations of Gen Y are different from the previous generations. They've been parented and educated differently, and the technology that may have influenced all of us has fundamentally shaped them. Broadly speaking, Gen Ys tend to value and expect:

Constant feedback

Connectivity

Self-expression

Opportunity and reward for a job well done

This means that managers and organizations as entities have a new challenge. Instead of 'managing' Gen Ys, they need to deeply study what makes them tick on an individual level. They need to understand them, and this is something no generation ever does easily. However, if you understand the demographics, this time it's non-negotiable.

HOW EMPLOYERS CAN RESPOND

Look at your own foundation: Corporate culture is the key consideration for all employees (regardless of age) when deciding whom to work for. Gen Y specifically looks for organizations that demonstrate strong market leadership and a corporate brand/reputation that resonates with them. So, it's important to critically analyze the way your brand is perceived in the market by all generations—especially by this young cohort. Have you crafted messaging that resonates with them? Or is your employer brand a one-size-fits-all entity? Of the Gen Y members surveyed, 63% said that corporate brand/reputation is a key way that they evaluate potential employers; just 53% of Baby Boomers and 38% of the Silent Generation say they do the same.

Think about different, ongoing forms of performance feedback: Performance discussions and review processes are notoriously difficult to get right. One-size-fits-all approaches are losing favor, and while the process must be fair, it must also be flexible enough to allow the individual to be understood, provided with the right feedback, and enabled to excel. Gen Y favors immediate and ongoing input in a smaller/shorter and more casual format so they know how they're progressing day-to-day and minute-to-minute, not year-to-year. Performance management is an on-going process, not an event.

CORPORATE BRAND/REPUTATION IS KEY TO EVALUATING A POTENTIAL EMPLOYER (% YES)

63%
53%
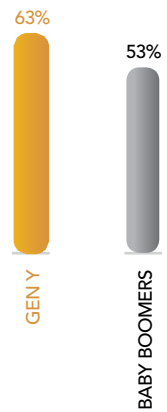
GEN Y
BABY BOOMERS

GEN Y HEART:
IT'S ALL ABOUT CONNECTION

Gen Y places a high value on connections. In fact, a recent Cisco report found that roughly half of students and young professionals surveyed considered access to the internet nearly as important as water, food, air and shelter; and more than half of students felt that they could not live without the internet.

This is really tough for older generations to understand, but from their earliest childhood, members of Gen Y have used technology and devices to connect them with learning, knowledge, information, entertainment—and people.

Think for a moment about how you define a friend. For older generations, this is going to be significantly different, because technology has facilitated a different kind of experience of connection and friendship. For younger generations, keeping up-to-date with Facebook feeds is a way to connect; it is (again according to the Cisco report), a close second to actually spending time with people. Previous generations just didn't have the luxury of connecting with people in these ways—at least not as their ideas of how the world works were forming, and that's why they still don't totally get it.

It was well-educated and tech-literate Gen Xers and young Boomers that infused computing technology into the innovative learning environments of the young, blossoming Gen Ys. As the early 1990s passed, connection was no longer defined within the classroom or Local Area Networks (LAN) of Gen Ys inner circle. Instead, they were empowered to connect their imagination and learning environment with a global resource—the World Wide Web. This enabled Ys to interact with peers around the world on classroom projects, research studies and even extracurricular interests. And, just as many Ys were entering their high school years—when they were laying the foundations of their peer-to-peer relationships—the internet quite quickly transformed into an environment of 'user-generated content' and individual expression.

Today, connectivity is what Ys expect. They are the 'Now' generation because they can be. Instant gratification. Rising expectations for customization. Now. Now. Now. These are the expectations that Gen Y has become accustomed to. From pre-packaged foods to instant feedback on their social media posts, this generation is accustomed to a level of

'now' that previous generations just couldn't have—and it has made Gen Y more open, less concerned with privacy and less likely to keep their opinions to themselves.

As a digitally connected generation, Gen Y has also been afforded the luxury of exploring diversity for much of their formative years. This understanding and appreciation of cultural difference and inclusion has exposed them to social issues and diverse needs. Humanitarian causes, local/community-focused needs and social awareness have been, and continue to be, defining traits of the younger generation. The depth and reach of connectivity they have been able to achieve has helped them create meaning in their lives—shared meaning and commonality in even the most unlikely places.

The Gen Y heart is worn on its sleeve. It's there for all to see (and hopefully to 'like').

HOW EMPLOYERS CAN RESPOND

Promote connectivity: Gen Y doesn't just approve of social media use at work, they often see it as work. It is the new form of relationship building and networking, and companies must learn to use it to their advantage. Find ways to use social media principles and tools for work purposes to fulfill the Gen Y need for consistent, ongoing input and dialogue with co-workers—regardless of rank or location. Crowd-sourcing answers to questions can now yield faster results than Googling a topic—and this is a skill that companies should exploit. Allowing younger workers to use these techniques to increase productivity is part of the solution, not the problem.

Use social media tools built for the workplace: There are many ways to harness the power of social media for the workplace. At Kelly Services, we've used 'Salesforce Chatter', which has proved successful and allowed people to connect across geographic boundaries, as well as across organizational silos.

IN THEIR WORDS

Everyone wants to give back and feel like they are doing something good. Your job should involve helping people in some way, whether directly through the work, or through outside activities. This helps give you meaning."

MARKETING SPECIALIST, MIDWEST USA

GEN Y REACH:
THE ACCESS-ALL-AREAS MINDSET

Hierarchies are great frameworks for organizing ourselves, but Gen Y's are less inclined to get them, or take them at face value. This is something corporate leaders really struggle to understand and it's no wonder—after all, what's the alternative?

For as long as anyone can recall, managers and leaders have been there to check, balance and guide decision making. They have more experience, deeper knowledge and can effectively weigh up a greater number of issues and choices. Right?

Well, we all know that managers differ vastly in their ability, motivations and style. This is the great weakness of hierarchical structures, and Gen Ys are much, much less tolerant of this structural issue within organizations. Instead, they prefer intricately connected, cross-functional ways of operating regardless of location, rank or role. They prefer dialogue and informality, and it's not because they're lazy or disengaged.

Instead, it's because they've had much more experience than the rest of us with making productive connections across traditional boundaries, as well as participating in global discussions about wide-ranging interests. They're generally more participative, and believe this is what organizations want and need from them.

They're not thinking, "It's all about me", they're thinking, "I need to contribute." And this is a critical difference. Baby Boomers might hear a self-centeredness in many of the ways that members of Gen Y speak and interact, but it's inherently about Gen Ys assumption that to be useful they must put up their hands and be heard.

The Gen Y reach is global, 24-7 and it's ready to join any conversation that seems relevant or interesting.

HOW EMPLOYERS CAN RESPOND

Be transparent about opportunities and change: There have been many articles written about Gen Y's FOMO tendencies—their 'Fear Of Missing Out'—and how this decreases loyalty and attentiveness to current tasks/jobs. The constant connection that Gen Ys have to other conversations, knowledge, opportunities and networks makes it possible to always know what else is going on 'out there'. And, this increases Gen Y's anxiety about, and focus on, being involved in the best possible experience available to them. Whatever other generations might think about the FOMO mentality, it's critical to recognize the risk it poses to organizations that do not openly and effectively communicate opportunities that are available, as well as significant changes that are on the organizational agenda. Trying to reduce the FOMO effect is partly about communicating openly regarding the direction of the organization so that younger workers know that their job and their company is constantly evolving too.

IN THEIR WORDS

Some organizations have very rigid rules about whom you can speak to if you have an idea or want to fix a problem. It's frustrating when I have an idea but can't go directly to the person it's most relevant to. As I see it, it's a waste of time for the organization if my direct manager has to get involved to progress a solution. It devalues ideas; they should be taken on merit, not based on who has them."

COMMUNICATIONS ADVISOR, AUSTRALIA

GEN Y FOOTSTEPS:
WHAT MOVES AND MOTIVATES THEM?

In recent PwC research, Millennials talked about 'compromise' in accepting jobs during the recent recession. Then they happily explained that they were looking for alternative employment. Our own research reflects this same trend—at least 50% of Millennials say they are 'always looking' for alternative employment, even when they are 'happy' with their current role.

So, if they're looking even when they're satisfied, what exactly are they looking for?

In a nutshell, Millennials are looking for 'meaning' in their job, and this is primarily about their ability to grow, develop and expand their skill base. In fact, four out of every 10 members of Gen Y (41%) say that personal growth/advancement is the main reason they choose one job over another, compared to just 25% of Baby Boomers. And, 25% of Gen Y members say that "lack of opportunities for advancement" is the primary reason they would leave their current organization, compared to just 13% of Baby Boomers.

Most importantly however, more than three-quarters of Gen Y members (77%) feel that the ability to excel is fundamental to deriving meaning from their work, compared to just 67% of Baby Boomers and 57% of the Silent Generation. Unfortunately, less than half of Gen Y members (47%) feel that they actually get this 'meaning' from their work. Clearly, something about the way we think about 'growth' and advancement in most organizations simply isn't hitting the mark for Gen Y.

The issues of growth, career paths, workplace responsibility, and promotion, frequently arise for Gen Y. While their Silent Generation and Baby Boomer predecessors had a laser-like focus on the career ladder, the Millennials are intently focused on what Deloitte terms the 'career lattice'—lateral movement, new opportunities, continual development, and intellectual challenge rather than a simple 'climb to the top.'

Here's where life gets complicated.

PERSONAL GROWTH/ ADVANCEMENT IS THE MAIN REASON TO CHOOSE ONE JOB OVER ANOTHER (% YES)

Gen Y: 41%
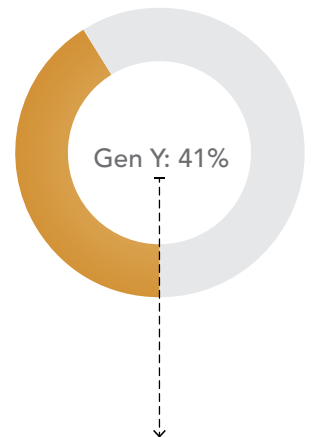
COMPARED TO JUST 25% OF BABY BOOMERS

This will shock many seasoned organizational leaders, but this focus on meaning requires managers to manage. It requires them to manage individuals, not just tasks. And, frankly, many of our managers haven't figured out how to do this yet. Actually, many of our managers haven't managed in years. In many instances, organizations have stopped asking them to manage and have instead asked them to just 'do'.

This evolution has created a major issue for organizations seeking to motivate the newest members of their workforce. If we're looking at a generation that is seeking meaning in their work, and we know that meaning is different for everyone, managers need to be encouraged to understand what that 'meaning' looks like for everyone on their team. This is going to put the focus back on the ways that managers do their jobs, and it's going to require HR to provide significant support to help managers develop a tailored, yet consistent, approach that actually works for Gen Y (as well as everyone else).

Performance indicators and work-in-progress meetings keep the focus on the tasks that people are doing, and while this is obviously important on one level, it doesn't address the issue of motivating Gen Y employees to do their best work at an individual level.

Members of Gen Y are loyal to their career or professions first—organizations come second. For companies focused on just-in-time talent supply chains, this works well. So, the effective leader will take the time to understand what motivates and inspires the Gen Y employee and will will use that knowledge when devising motivating and challenging work or tasks.

In addition to creating these career-building challenges, effective managers will also be mindful of the need to demonstrate to Gen Y workers that their contribution is valued.

We found that younger workers were significantly more likely to believe that they should be rewarded or recognized in some way for a job well done than their older colleagues. In fact, according to the *2012 Kelly Global Workforce Index*, just 11% of members of Gen Ys said "no reward" is necessary for a job well done, compared to 19% of Baby Boomers and 30% of the Silent Generation.
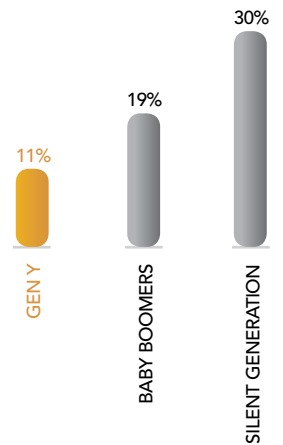
IN THEIR WORDS

A manager is more of a consultant in a way. It is important to keep things exciting and different. We get bored easily and while there are tedious things that have to be done, it's the projects that let us use our imaginations and create our own ideas that keep us interested."

MARKETING SPECIALIST, MIDWEST USA

But it's important to see this need for reward in context. Gen Y workers want reinforcement, not because they're impatient, needy and self-centered, but because they're looking for signposts that tell them they're on the right path, and that you approve of how they're progressing. This is a subtle, but profound, difference.

The Gen Y mindset is more about the journey than the destination. It's about what's happening right where they're already standing, rather than what might be promised further down the road. They aren't necessarily interested in a decades-long career with your company, but they are very focused on interesting and challenging work that will stretch/ grow their skillset this quarter.

HOW EMPLOYERS CAN RESPOND

Communicate the big picture, reward the small wins: Gen Y wants to know how their work fits with the big strategic picture, just as much as older generations do. However, they require recognition for the steps achieved along the way. Remember, it's a journey for them. Make it worthwhile by providing signposts along the way. HR has been saying that we must treat all employees consistently. But, line managers won't survive with blind obedience, and HR isn't supporting business with this blind assessment. Generation Y is different. And, organizations must adapt to get the most out of this difference. For decades, organizations have been focusing on standardization, and now they need to adapt to do the complete opposite.

Help them excel: Gen Y workers are far more likely to derive 'meaning' from their work by their ability to excel and develop in their field, yet this sometimes has more to do with a career 'lattice' than the career 'ladder.' So, find ways to provide career-building opportunities, even if that doesn't mean an immediate promotion straight away.

NO REWARD IS REQUIRED FOR A JOB WELL DONE (% YES)

GEN Y: 11%
BABY BOOMERS: 19%
SILENT GENERATION: 30%

GEN Y HEAD:
WHAT ARE THEY THINKING?

Welcome to the experience economy. This is where Gen Ys live—
and this is what shapes much of how they think.

In the experience economy, we don't deliver goods or a service, we deliver an experience. This can be *part* of a product or service, but it has a distinct value in, and of, itself.

Just as the act of unpacking your latest i-device is an experience Apple has deliberately 'created', the experience of a workplace must also be deliberately built and delivered on a daily basis. A large percentage of this 'delivery' falls in the lap of the manager/supervisor.

The flow of information, the ease and quality of connections and collaboration, the facilitation of self-expression and feedback—these are all experiences that directly impact the way Gen Y workers feel about their workplace, and their place within it. How are you managing this experience within your department/team? Getting this right for younger workers isn't always easy. It often requires challenging specific traditions and entrenched ways of operating, but it's non-negotiable if building a talent supply chain across this age group is a genuine goal.

Another aspect of the Gen Y mindset is that they are heavily informed and influenced by the opinions of those that they trust—and this increasingly includes total strangers. It's not naiveté that drives this, it's their ability and desire to connect with people based on similar interests and ways of operating.

Our research—empirical, experiential and anecdotal—suggests that Gen Y may have the most highly refined BS detectors ever. In fact, one of the Gen Y workers we spoke to said this about the way her generation interacts with the proliferation of information and messages from advertisers, employers, media and everything in between: "We are so overwhelmed with different sources of information, particularly advertising, that we tend to ignore it as much as possible. Being able to get information from a variety of sources has taught us to not trust the direct source, or not only talk to one person. If we hear it from multiple places, we are more likely to believe it."

Ignore this advice at your peril. Members of Gen Y are far less likely to believe what you say unless they can verify it independently via other sources. Trying to hide, ignore or gloss over negative media coverage or customer feedback about your organization's activities or products is a sure-fire recipe for disengagement and distrust. Gone are the days when the CEO could put out an internal statement (written by the PR department) about an issue in the media and expect the workforce to accept it. Organizations now need to engage in dialogue about negative media coverage or contentious internal issues—'motherhood statements' and platitudes simply will not suffice.

Members of Gen Y make it their business to seek out people they trust and relate to. They don't always assume this will be their direct manager. They take personal responsibility for finding information and people through their networks—and this can sometimes be misconstrued as undermining authority, or an inability to work within assumed processes. But often, that's not it at all.

'Thinking' and 'experiencing' are what Gen Y workers are good at. And sometimes this just makes everyone else a little bit uncomfortable. Keep in mind, if you allow them to use their strength in this area, it just might lead to an innovative approach or experience that your internal team would have never considered. Diversity of thought and diversity of networking is what they bring to the table.

IN THEIR WORDS

I don't want to sit around and wait for a bunch of other stuff to happen. I'm all about taking as much or as little time as needed to get something done, and do it well. There is no need for wasted time."

MARKETING SPECIALIST, MIDWEST USA

HOW EMPLOYERS CAN RESPOND

Evaluate the experience of working at your organization: This doesn't always mean adding services within the building such as dry cleaners and bowling alleys, but it might. As long as the experience reflects your brand and has clear links back to productivity, engagement and talent retention, nothing is a dumb idea. Ask your Gen Y employees what changes they would like to see in their workplace. Chances are, if they are involved with the ideation, it will stick and make a difference. When in doubt, ask.

Find ways to promote positive dialogue about generational issues: Where you sit in the organizational hierarchy dictates where you stand. In other words, it's difficult for the generations to know and understand why they have different approaches and values unless they get to know each other. Providing specific forums where the issues of not just managing, but understanding, the needs and approaches of the generations will help to bridge the divide. Training courses may be part of the solution, but also finding ways to enable different generational perspectives to be discussed by the individuals themselves is just as important.

IN THEIR WORDS

We need a free environment, where once the work is allotted, and a timeframe decided, we should be left alone. But, we should be given the confidence that we can come back to the supervisors for a solution if we get stuck."

EXECUTIVE RECRUITER GURGAON, INDIA

THE WORKPLACE COLLISION

From the traditional employer point of view, work hasn't changed all that much in the past five or six decades. Work is work, and that's how it will be for the foreseeable future—just as soon as younger generations get with the status quo, that is.

But the reality is, that work has changed, the workplace has changed, and so has the workforce. The progressive employer already understands this. The problem is, they are in the minority. The traditional employer, then, sees EVOLUTION.

As far as the Millennial sees it, work is in flux, just as the rest of the world is. Nothing is stable, static or long-term, nor should it be. Here's a staggering thought—the redefined workforce has redefined the workplace. And they dig it. So, Gen Y sees REVOLUTION.

And here we have the makings of a great (perhaps perceived) productivity collision.

WORK AS THE TRADITIONAL EMPLOYER SEES IT	WORK AS THE MILLENNIAL SEES IT
The office	The Third Place
Offices to cubicles, back to offices again	Laptops, iPads and iPhones. All information you need is on the internet, and working is 24/7, not 9–5
From suit and tie to business casual (and at some firms, back again)	Self-expression, not conformity. The person and their outcomes, not the clothing or title
Flexibility is required, but not ideal. It's harder to manage large volumes of people telecommuting, job sharing etc.	They chose their classes and timetables and submitted assignments online, now they choose where to work and submit work via VPNs. It's not just practical, it's more efficient
'Face time' means meetings in the office	'Face time' means Apple 'Facetime', messaging, virtual collaboration
The attitude of workers is changing work (not always for the better)	The changing nature of work requires a new way of working
Fear of loss of control	Question the effectiveness of, and need for, traditional, hierarchical control
Clear distinction between 'work' and 'not work'	Blurred line between 'work' and 'personal lives'
Social networking leads to decreased capacity and productivity	Social networking is capacity-building and leads to innovation/better perspective
An inability to adapt to the current structures is due to immaturity, lack of discipline and avoidance of doing the hard yards	Adapting to current organizational structures is a waste of time because they don't make sense

CONCLUSION

Managers and organizations have a new challenge. Instead of managing Gen Y workers, they need to deeply study what makes them tick—something they've been resisting for far too long already.

Rather than hoping Gen Y workers are simply going to grow up and realize their older colleagues were right all along, leaders need to understand that the differences are here to stay. They're hard-wired and fundamental to the way members of Gen Y live and work—and understanding them is now non-negotiable (if you understand global workforce demographics).

Members of Gen Y value connection and rely on networks. They seek dialogue and input regardless of location, rank or role. They search for meaning and the ability to excel—and they want to be rewarded when they're heading in the right direction. They take personal responsibility for finding the information and people they need to do their job, and this makes for a big challenge for most traditional organizations and hierarchies. It's just not how we do things...yet.

Lurking within all this misunderstanding is a huge opportunity.

Thinking and experiencing are what members of Gen Y are good at. And, if you allow them to use their strengths in these areas, it just might lead to a new, innovative approach or experience that would otherwise never have been considered. After all, innovation, creativity, collaboration and flexibility are the very characteristics that many organizations are striving to increase, right?

Diversity of thought is what Gen Y workers bring to the table, and as long as leaders learn to understand and harness its value, there is a light at the end of the tunnel for organizations experiencing the bitter divide we all know as 'the generation gap.'

The choice is yours. You can continue managing Gen Y workers, but for the leader who wants to harness their full potential, it's time to #understandgeny.

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ABOUT KELLY

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