

2

Adjusting the Sails

A Closer Look at Generation iY

I SAW A MASTER SAILOR AT WORK IN JANUARY OF 2010, when I was part of a team that trained youth workers in Egypt. During our stay in Cairo, we got in a felucca (sailboat) for a tour on the Nile River. It was interesting to watch our guide navigate his way down the river. He struggled at first, attempting to figure out which way the winds were blowing at the time. Once he did, some turns were fast, and others—not so much. It was work. Twice he stopped to rest, and we almost drifted into the banks of the river. Needless to say, he stayed quite busy—but he did get us there.

In one sense, this new generation of young people is like the wind. They are gusting in all directions, causing quite a stir in the workplace, their schools, and at home. Sometimes their overconfidence or impatience can burst out of them with hurricane force. Yep, the generational winds are blowing hard.

Now, let me ask you a question. Wouldn't it be strange for an experienced sailor to sense the wind blowing in the wrong direction and begin to yell at it? Please indulge me for a moment and imagine this scenario. Picture a sailor who gets so upset at the changing winds that he stands up in his boat and begins to shake his fist and scream in anger, lecturing the wind about proper direction and how it ought to help sailors while they are out at sea? Or wouldn't it be pitiful for the sailor to simply throw up his hands and sit down, surrendering to the wind? Or worse, what if he told his crew that since the wind wasn't cooperating, they were helpless; they couldn't do a thing but let the wind take the boat wherever it wanted?

As ridiculous as this sounds, this is what many adults have done with young people today. They have shaken their fists at the wind, or they've given up trying

I have spoken to employers who told me they will never hire another recent graduate. I have heard teachers say they can hardly wait for retirement since they can't do a thing about kids today. I've had parents confide in me that they don't know what to do with their kids except scream at them. Often they are uncontrollable and confrontational with little respect towards authority.

Because I am a parent, a teacher, and an employer, I can identify with each of these reactions. But I've come to understand that the youth population is a bit like the wind on the sea—and good sailors know what to do with that wind. In fact, they actually use it to propel the boat where it needs to go.

They don't change their goal. They just adjust the sails.

And that's my whole point in writing this book—not to vent anger at kids today, but to illustrate how the winds have changed for young people and how we, as adults, must adjust our sails if we have any hope of taking our society where it needs to go. I believe there is a potential for crisis if we don't make some adjustments. But there is also incredible opportunity, and there's plenty that we adults can do—that we *must* do—to make it happen.

Let me get personal with you. I am deeply concerned—as a dad and as a leadership trainer who is in front of fifty thousand students every year—about the iY generation that's just beginning to enter the adult world and working world. I believe in these young people, but I meet far too many adults who have given up on leading them well, and this scares me. These students have far too much confidence and far too little experience to be left to their own devices.

Generation iY has so much to offer, but they need direction—mentors who engage them in a relevant way, channel their energy, and provide them with the challenges they need.

Who Is Generation Y (and iY)?

They're the children of the late Baby Boomers and the early Gen Xers—born between 1984 and 2002. And while experts differ on what to call them, all agree they're bound to change the way we approach life. Here are some common names for this powerful generation.

- The Digital Generation
- The Internet Generation
- Nexters
- Screenagers
- Mosaics
- Sunshine Generation
- Bridgers
- Millennials

Portrait of a Generation

I don't know why you picked up this book, but I do know one thing: the subject of this book will affect you and everyone you know in the next fifteen years. The year 2030 is not that far away. Even if you have no interest at all, or no connection at all with this next generation of kids—you will be affected by how these kids turn out.

Generation Y is the largest population in earth's history, and iY kids are the largest portion of that generation. (For example: more babies were born in 1991 than any year in American history). Already, nearly half the world's population is under twenty-five years old. That represents about three billion people. In America, Generation Y (95 million) has outgrown the Baby Boomers (76 million), and with immigration—which is a wildcard—their population may grow as large as a hundred million, nearly a third of our total population. Today, more people from Generation Y (Millennials) fill the workplace than any other generation.

Generation iY is also the most eclectic and diverse in our nation's history, as well as the most protected and observed. They're the first generation that doesn't need leaders to get information, with access to every piece of data you can imagine.

All this will either turn out to be good news or bad news as they migrate into adulthood. In fact, let me tip my hand now at the beginning of this journey. My research reveals there are four words that describe the reality of Generation iY:

An Overwhelmed Generation

In 2007, the American College Health Association surveyed the largest randomized sample of college students since its inception. Their study revealed that:

- 94 percent of students reported feeling overwhelmed by their lifestyles.
- 44 percent said they felt so depressed it was almost difficult to function.
- Almost 10 percent had considered suicide in the past year.¹

The TD Canada Trust conducted a study in 2013 and noted that:

- 30 percent of Generation Y struggle to support themselves.
- 44 percent find it difficult to pay for education.
- 40 percent of them are unemployed, yet 79 percent hold college degrees.
- 38 percent are overwhelmed with student loan repayments.
- 51 percent still live at home.²

The stress comes from both internal and external sources. Many of them grew up with parents who put the pressure on them to perform. After all, the child is a reflection on their parents who want a trophy to show off as their offspring matures.

On the other hand, stress can also stem from a lack of healthy pressure growing up. Children who lived with undue comfort through high school may experience a shock when they enter college and face demands that are a little closer to adult life as they enter the workforce. The transition from the life of ease to a more demanding adult world can lead to stress.

Another source of stress, however, can be self-imposed. Children over the last thirty years have internalized a fierce competitive sense. They want and expect to be the best. And from the time they're small, they've been told that they *are* the best—they are special, they have unlimited potential. Trying to live up to those expectations is inherently stressful. They are used to everyone adapting to their needs. Now entering adulthood, they've had to adapt to the world around them—for the first time. For many, it is also the first time they have had to think for themselves.

I met Nate at the hospital a few years ago. He was released with instructions to stay on his medication. Nate had admitted himself when he had a panic attack and began to entertain thoughts of suicide. He was only nineteen years old.

When we conversed over a latté that day, Nate told me why he'd decided to check in to the hospital. He felt pressured and overwhelmed. He had no job and really needed one. His dad had been out of work for four months due to the failing economy. Nate's GPA had dropped, and so had his chances at getting into Georgia Tech—something both he and his mom wanted desperately. In fact, his mom was counting on it, and Nate couldn't imagine disappointing her. But whenever he tried to focus on his studies, he got grief from his girlfriend and friends on Facebook because he rarely had time to hang out like he used to.

Nate had finally buckled under all that pressure. He is among a large population of teens who feel this way.

According to researchers Howe and Strauss, 70 percent of teenagers "worry a lot" about finding a good job when they get out of school, whereas only 37 percent of adults think that teens worry about that. Four times as many high school students worry about getting good grades as worry about pressures to have sex or take drugs, and six times as many complain they don't get enough sleep.³

Perhaps sixteen-year-old ice skater Sarah Hughes said it best. After winning her gold medal at the 2002 Olympic Games, she reflected, "Sometimes I feel more pressure than maybe I should, because I know there are so many people

What if this generation grows up and never finds a healthy way to handle all this pressure? What if, as adults, they continue to seek and find artificial ways to cope? Will America have a large percentage of adults with chronic depression? Will the majority of adults in twenty years be addicted to prescription drugs as a means to handle feeling overwhelmed? What if they perpetually yearn to return to their adolescent years—to escape marriages, job commitments, and legal obligations? What if adult life just doesn't suit them well because we didn't prepare them to be adults? What if as adults they return home to live?

I wonder if we'll see normal responsibilities today reduced to bite-sized chunks in the future: McJobs. McMarriages. McCommitments. Marriage licenses may have three and five-year contract options. According to 2014 Pew research just 26 percent of this generation is married.⁵ Perhaps their children will have six fathers, because each successive "dad" was only able to commit for three years. Jobs may be reduced to serial contractual projects and internships—partly because of changes in the job market, but also as a manageable response to feeling overwhelmed.

Young people tend to respond in one of two ways to being overwhelmed. One, they push back and get lost in a virtual world of online fantasy, online gaming or a social world of texting, Instagram, and Twitter. It's a coping mechanism. They survive by escaping reality and becoming someone else. Or, option two, they respond by trying to measure up. They push themselves to be a "super-kid." They fall into a performance trap. They strive for perfection. They try to exceed their own accomplishments. With either response, we may have a train wreck ahead of us.

An Overconnected Generation

Some call this generation the "connecteds." Instead of using their youthful years to discover who they are and develop a lasting set of values to live by, they may become adults who can't make it unless they are constantly on Twitter with their friends. Noise. Busyness. Connection. Talk. Volume. Speed. Selfie. When will they ever unplug and discover their own identity? Will they ever experience the solitude that enables them to think or reflect on their lives? Will they become a generation so connected that they just parrot what peers are saying in their social network? Or will they be individuals who can think and act on their own without consensus from others?

The train wreck may also take the form of miserable relationship skills and low

young people can fail to develop face-to-face people skills. Texting, for instance, just doesn't prepare them to interact in real relationship dilemmas. Durable and lasting relationships cannot be reduced to a few words on a screen. And trying to resolve a conflict or "breaking up" on a screen is a lazy person's solution. In my opinion, screens are for information—not emotion.

The lack of people skills has become such a phenomenon it has become a sitcom on ABC. Eliza is extremely active and obsessed with social media with Twitter and her Facebook profiles. She realizes that she has no friends in real life. So, she hires Henery to teach her how to be a real person.

Our focus groups have shown that young people are short on patience, listening skills, and conflict resolution. Call me the Master of the Obvious, but it appears their generation is better at interacting via technology than face to face. We've let them become socially isolated and lethargic. Peter Eio of Lego Systems reminds us: "This is the first time in the history of the human race that a generation of kids has overtaken their parents in the use of new technology."

I met Rachel when she was a sophomore in college. She is adorable, but she's also a product of the age in which she grew up. She told me about a crisis she faced on the day she had a big paper due for a class. Her cell phone and PC crashed—and she crashed too. With both of her prized sources of technology down, she plunged into despair. More than that, she became paralyzed. It didn't dawn on her to borrow a friend's phone to call for help or walk over to her professor's office to negotiate a new deadline for the paper. She felt she had no options. So she took an incomplete in the course. Rachel never finished college and is now looking for work.

With each passing year, Generation iY continues to flock to new technologies, quickly becoming masters at interfacing with them 24/7. Smart phones have become pocket TVs and pocket PCs. Twitter took off in 2009. That year fourteen million folks began tweeting, many of them posting hourly updates on their life.

A common theme in all these technology advances, according to author Neil Howe, is to invite Generation iY to do something faster while also inviting them to spend more time at it. It's an interesting paradox. Most new technology claims it will save the user time. Usually, however, it beckons them to actually spend more time using it. In this sense, many of the devices that Generation iY depends on are addictive—psychologically if not physically. The very process of using them promotes dependence.

If the trend of overconnectedness continues, Generation iY risks trading the

by speed and quantity. Technology without maturity can be hazardous. They believe since they have mastered the virtual world, they have mastered the real world—creating artificial maturity.

An Overprotected Generation

We have given Generation iY safety seats, safety belts, and safety policies on everything. They can't ride a bike without a helmet; they've been discouraged from going places on their own; they've been shielded from financial realities; and they've spent much of their childhood inside, in front of a screen. (Some even call them "screenagers.")

Safety is certainly important. But for Generation iY, safety has often been allowed to trump growth. As parents, we don't want them out of our sight or out of communication range. As educators, we're concerned about liability and feel we need to avoid risk. We believe we are protecting our future by protecting them. In reality, we may be harming the future. Because of our overprotective parenting and education methods:

- *A large percentage struggles with obesity.*
- *A large percentage experiences nearsightedness.*
- *A large percentage finds it difficult to fulfill commitments.*
- *A large percentage wrestles with depression after eighteen years old.*
- *A large percentage discovers life is hard to cope with after leaving home.*

Let's be honest. Even when kids mess up, parents believe they are supposed to step in and bail out their children. This is a slippery slope and can create a dependent adult-child. The evolution of rescuing children looks like this:

- *Early on, it's taking a forgotten backpack or a permission slip to school.*
- *In middle school, it's helping complete a class project at the last minute.*
- *In high school, it's calling a teacher and making an excuse for your kid.*
- *In college, it takes the form of negotiating a grade with a dean.*
- *As young adults, it's sending money when they've made poor choices.*

This generation has been so sheltered by their parents, teachers, counselors, and an overregulated government that many have trouble developing strong, independent coping skills. Authors Neil Howe and William Strauss write, "Overly

So what does this look like in a real-life kid? I've known Kelli since she was in middle school. She recently graduated from college. Her entire story is a picture of overprotection. While none of the turns in her life were inherently bad, together they produced a young adult who is unready for life in the real world.

When Kelli was in elementary school, her mother pulled her from public school and chose to homeschool her. I certainly understand that. My wife and I chose to homeschool our teenage son so he'd have a more flexible schedule as he prepared for his career. For Kelli's mom, however, homeschooling was more about protecting Kelli from school pressures and controlling what she was exposed to rather than about preparing her for life.

And then, as Kelli grew, her mom also tightened the reins. In middle school Kelli was not permitted to go on a trip to Florida (just one state over) with friends because of too many variables her mother couldn't control. In high school, Kelli wanted to go on a one-week mission trip overseas with her church youth group. She was not allowed to go because her mother worried about the safety of being in a developing nation. When Kelli started looking at colleges, the only options her mother would consider were universities two hours or less away from home.

Now that Kelli is a graduate, her mother has seen the value of cutting the apron strings, but the damage is already done. Kelli took a job four states away from home and was unable to perform. She called her mom several times a day, crying, because she was homesick. Not surprisingly, this didn't sit well with her supervisor. Later, when Kelli broke up with her boyfriend, she was devastated. Her employer insisted she make sales calls instead of texting her boyfriend through the day. Eventually the situation became more than she could handle. Kelli quit her job at age twenty-two and moved home.

Let's face it. This happens millions of times over each year. America has become obsessed with protecting children at all costs, and this generation has suffered from that obsession. We will not let our precious children do anything without a helmet, cell phone, warranty, insurance policy, knee pads, or a guarantee. And we do it out of love (as well as media-generated fear). But what kind of adults will our preoccupation with safety produce?

America was built on risk. Opportunity. Free enterprise. Failure and determination. Will these ideas be found only in our history books?

More to the point, will our overemphasis on safety and security produce a

Five Generations

Ready or not, Generation Y is entering adulthood. A new breed has entered our campuses and workplaces, and they are already influencing their worlds. Although they have evolved from previous generations, Generations Y and iY have their own distinct identity.

	Seniors "Greatest Generation"	Builders "Silent Generation"	Boomers "Pig in the Python"	Busters "Generation X"	Generations Y & iY "Millennials"
Birth years	1900-1928	1929-1945	1946-1964	1965-1983	1984-2000
Life paradigm	"Manifest destiny"	"Be grateful you have a job"	"You owe me"	"Relate to me"	"Life is a cafeteria"
Attitude to authority	Respect them	Endure them	Replace them	Ignore them	Choose them
Role of relationships	Long term	Significant	Limited, useful	Central, caring	Global, 24/7
Value system	Traditional	Conservative	Self-based	Media	Shop around
Role of career	Loyalty	Means for living	Central focus	Irritant	Place to serve
Schedules	Responsible	Mellow	Frantic	Aimless	Volatile
Technology	What's that?	Hope to outlive it	Master it	Enjoy it	Employ it
Market	Commodities	Goods	Services	Experiences	Transformations
View of future	Uncertain	Seek to stabilize	Create it!	Hopeless	Optimistic

Where Do We Stand Today?

Now that five years have passed since I published this chart, Millennials (Gen Y) have become the largest population in the workforce, as young professionals. They have brought a new mindset to their job, regarding social media, relationships, perks, and work ethic. Most of the changes have to do with communication at work. They have also had to learn a few realities about life after school and home. In a nutshell, those who lead multiple generations quickly learn that attention spans are shorter and communication must be more engaging. Kids today have attention spans that lie somewhere between 6-8 seconds.

I believe the issue is not a six-second attention span. The issue is that kids have well-developed filters because they digest so much information on any given day

Over 1,000 messages daily. Their brains are quicker than mine was at their age, as they've been conditioned to process more information, more rapidly. Below, I summarize the communication preferences of the four adult generations most influencing our world today, including Generation Z, following Generation Y and iY. (Gen Z are the youngest kids being measured today, and the subject of an entire chapter at the end of this book).

Communicating to Various Generational Preferences:

- *Baby Boomers – Give me the bottom line*
- *Generation X – Keep it real*
- *Millennials – Make it interactive*
- *Generation Z – Keep it short*

How Communication Is Evolving at Work

	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y	Generation Z
Birth years	1946-1964	1965-1983	1984-2000	2000-2018
Life paradigm entering career	You owe me	Relate to me	Life is a cafeteria	I'll learn to cope
Communicate with me	Give me the bottom line	Keep it real; don't sugarcoat it	Make it fun and interactive	Use symbols; keep it short
Feedback evaluations	Annually with documentation	Continuous; please share all pros and cons	Immediate and frequently	Instant and on a screen
Valuable rewards	Position, title, corner office	Freedom to work on my own or not work	Meaningful work or service	Let me do it my way
Technology	I will master it	I will enjoy it	It will entertain me	I will employ it

An Overserved Generation

We live in the age of the "wanted child." That's not a bad thing in itself. The problem comes when we give our young people an overinflated idea of their own importance.

Sixty years ago, Dr. Benjamin Spock told parents to allow kids to express themselves and build a strong self-esteem. Today, we have taken this approach to an extreme—and it has worked. These kids most assuredly have developed a strong self-esteem. According to a nationwide high school survey, more than eight

treatment as they enter the adult world. They know that they are in the spotlight and all eyes are on them.

As this generation absorbs the parental message that they dominate America's agenda, they have come to believe that their problems are the nation's problems. They feel very special and are sure that the "key" to the future is in their hands. When asked which demographic group will most likely be the one to help America toward a "better future," teens rank "young people" second only to "scientists."

Where would they get this idea?

- *From Mom and Dad, who dote on them.* Parents of the iY generation often need special orientation sessions to help them "let go" when they drop their kids off at college.
- *From TV networks who've created entire channels just for kids—like Disney, Disney XD, Nickelodeon, Boomerang, Discovery Kids, and The N.*
- *From retailers and marketing campaigns that create products like Kids' Aqua-fresh, Pert Plus for Kids, Dial for Kids, and Ozark (bottled) Water for Kids.*
- *From nationwide programs, sponsored by state and federal governments, like No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top and Common Core Standards.*

Adults have chosen to focus on and serve this generation of young people more than any in recent history. And what has being overserved done to them? Let me get practical. I just turned off the radio in my car, after listening to a pop radio station. Three of the song titles I heard were:

- "Because I'm Awesome!"
- "The World Should Revolve Around Me"
- "Don'tcha Wish Your Girlfriend Was Hot Like Me?"

Those three songs are just the tip of the iceberg. They help us see the side effects of being overserved. In general, Generation iY is a narcissistic or me-centered generation. (Another reason the name fits—because it's all about "I.")

A lag-time study by Dr. Jean Twenge of San Diego State University between 1975 and 2006 showed a measurable climb in narcissistic tendencies among American students (two of six scored very high in this category) and a growing number who actually have Narcissistic Personality Disorder.⁹ The majority of them believe the world would be a better place if they were in charge. The slogan

Dr. Twenge writes in *Generation Me*:

In the years after 1980, there was a pervasive, society-wide effort to increase children's self-esteem. The Boomers who now filled the ranks of parents apparently decided that children should always feel good about themselves. Research on programs to boost self-esteem first blossomed in the 1980s and the number of psychology and education journal articles devoted to self-esteem doubled between the 1970s and the 1980s. Journal articles on self-esteem increased another 52 percent during the 1990s, and the number of books on self-esteem doubled over the same time.¹⁰

Accordingly, as social scientists Howe and Strauss state, the kids of this generation tend to be truly "self-conscious"—intensely aware of themselves. More than 90 percent feel "very good" about themselves.¹¹ But even those who don't like themselves are still hyperaware of (and often consumed with) their social standing—what their friends think of them, how they look in their Facebook photos, and so on.

One could argue, of course, that teens have always been self-absorbed. Perhaps this is true for the last three generations, but it is not true historically. We will discuss later how adults have permitted adolescents to be narcissistic far longer than they did one hundred years ago. But just one simple piece of information—one I alluded to earlier—will show the increase in generational self-consciousness.

"In the early 1950s," Dr. Twenge writes, "Only 12 percent of teens aged fourteen to sixteen agreed with the statement 'I am an important person.' By the late 1980s, an incredible 80 percent—almost seven times as many—claimed they were important."¹² Such numbers have led Dr. Twenge and her researchers to conclude that the Millennial generation (including Generation iY) is the most narcissistic generation in history.¹³

How did they get this way? We just wanted our kids to feel good about themselves. Well, they do. Kids can now go to www.Celeb4aday.com to hire a fake paparazzi to follow them around and take photos of them. Hmm. Is all of this helping or hurting?

In the first edition of this book, I wrote about 17-year-old Seth who had just quit his job. This is hardly unusual. Folks across the country quit their jobs every day. What makes Seth's situation unique? It was the fourth job he'd quit *that month*.

Seth attended a private, well-endowed prep school. He buys his clothes from Lucky Brand Jeans and Abercrombie and Fitch. He owns an iMac, an iPhone, and an iPad. He's your typical smart, good-looking, connected iYer.

I know his parents. They are good people, but they are baffled at why their son just can't hold down a job. I think I know why, though. Life has just been too easy for Seth; for most of his life he has been served instead of taught and challenged to serve. When he needed his clothes washed, Mom did it. When he needed his bed made, Mom was happy to step in. When he needed money, Dad had it for him. When he needed a car, Dad bought it.

All of Seth's needs were met by loving parents. But did they really demonstrate love for him? It depends on your definition of love. Seth's parents have not prepared him for life because they have served him so well.

Now Seth is entering a world that doesn't share his parents' desire to meet his every need. He's expected to work for what he gets; it's not just handed to him. And Seth has no idea how to deal with those expectations. No wonder he wants to quit. Quitting is now in vogue for a young generation.

What kind of adults will lead our world if they have been raised in this manner? No one can tell for sure, but I have watched this scenario for years now. As they move from teenagers to twenty-somethings, they're often impatient, demanding, self-centered and short-tempered, with a poor work ethic and minimal sense of long-term commitment.

And here's something that really saddens me: These kids really do desire to change the world; they just don't have what it takes to accomplish their lofty dreams. When the work becomes difficult, they change their minds and move on to something else. The new term for them is "slacktivists"—they are both slackers and activists. Consequently, for most of them, their involvement in causes is limited to buying a wristband or signing a petition on a Web site.

Two Big Questions to Ask as You Develop Them

Consider the evolution of our culture. Do you know why belonging to a gym or a fitness center wasn't popular a century ago? The majority of Americans didn't need one. They were active bailing hay, working on a farm, or working in factories, where they stood all day and remained active. Fitness centers were unnecessary because physical fitness occurred naturally in their daily lives. Gyms became necessary as our lives became more sedentary. It makes sense.

The same is true for our emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual growth as well. As technology, social media, and medications expand, we find ourselves

needing to create new avenues to develop mature, well-adjusted students who are ready to graduate and take their place as contributing citizens. In my book, *Twelve Huge Mistakes Parents Can Avoid*, I offer a diagram illustrating how kids today are growing up in a world that hinders them from maturing holistically. I call it the Generation iY SCENE. This is the scene kids experience today, as well as the unintended consequences we didn't see coming:

The Generation iY SCENE	
Their World Is Full of:	Consequently, They Can Assume:
S – Speed	Slow is bad.
C – Convenience	Hard is bad.
E – Entertainment	Boring is bad.
N – Nurture	Risk is bad.
E – Entitlement	Labor is bad.

Note the list on the right. It seems to me that the ideas of slow, hard, boring, risk and labor are the very realities that enable me to mature into a good man, a good leader, a good husband and father. I am suggesting that our world of speed and convenience actually hinders the natural development of the very virtues we need to develop into strong adults. When things come quick and easy, I fail to develop the emotional muscles I need—muscles that require intentional exercises to fully mature.

I remember exactly when and where I learned the life skill of conflict resolution. I learned it playing outside with a dozen or so friends in a big field in back of our house. After we did our homework, we'd grab our baseball bats and mitts and play ball. We'd choose sides and umpire our own games. In the process, I learned interpersonal skills and conflict resolution.

Today, kids get less and less time outside to do such things. And when they do, I often joke that there are usually four mothers outside doing the conflict resolution for them.

The Formula

The fact is, we must become more intentional about student development in certain areas, especially as fewer life skills are cultivated naturally. In short:

The less natural life skills are cultivated during childhood, the more intentional

we must be as we lead them into adolescence and young adulthood.

A Prescription

So—before we know what to prescribe for student development today, we must ask two simple but profound questions as we observe them:

What social or emotional muscles seem to be weak?

What practices can we introduce into their lives to develop those muscles?

Just like a fitness center enables us to develop physical muscles, specific social and emotional activities enable us to grow internally:

- *It is in waiting that I build patience.*
- *It is in face-to-face collaboration that I build interpersonal skills.*
- *It is in attempting risky ventures that I build courage.*
- *It is in struggling that I build perseverance.*
- *It is in boredom that I have margins to imagine and think creatively.*
- *It is in challenging labor that I build appreciation for work ethic.*

Here's to asking these questions as you plan programming for your students.

Avoiding a Rude Awakening

There is still debate on what conclusions we should draw on this emerging generation of young people. I have simply furnished a portrait of them based on my experience and research. The portrait is not a flattering one. As a group, Generation iY is overwhelmed, overconnected, overprotected, and overserved.

That's not the whole picture of course. Generation iY can also be energetic, confident, resourceful, creative, and capable. They dream big, they care about their friends, they thrive on activity. They do not accept the way things are done just because that is the way it has always been done. I can honestly say that some of my most meaningful relationships are with iYers!

But I also believe it's time for a wake-up call when it comes to Generation iY. It's time that those of us who care about these kids—parents, teachers, coaches, youth workers, employers—pay attention to the way we're shaping them.

While on the road recently, sleeping in a hotel, I had an experience I don't care to repeat. The alarm clock in my room went off early in the morning, rousing me from much-needed sleep. I turned it off, but just as I was drifting off again, a wake-up call came from the front desk.

The trouble is, I had never set the alarm and never asked for the wake-up call. In fact, it was one of those rare mornings when I could sleep in a bit before I caught my flight home.

Evidently one of my friends (and I use that term loosely here) believed it would be funny to pull a little prank. But there was nothing funny about it for me. I would much rather set my own wake-up times—and know when they are coming.

I believe we're due for a wake-up call when it comes to Generation iY. It will either be a rude awakening that comes at an unexpected time and shocks us all, or it will be one that we set ourselves—today.

It's our choice.

And it's time to act.

3

Aftershock

Responding to the Cultural Shift

TERRY WALLIS WAS NINETEEN YEARS OLD, with his whole life ahead of him, when a tragic 1984 car accident put him in a coma. His family was devastated. But Terry's mother was not about to give up on her son. She opted to keep him alive through hospital technology and wait it out, hoping that one day he would regain consciousness.

The good news is, he did. The stunning news is, he woke up on June 11, 2003—after being in a coma for almost two decades. The part of Terry's story that intrigues me most was that his mom remained at his side for several days afterward, just filling him in on the major news that had happened between 1984 and 2003.

Can you imagine what that was like? The United States, not to mention the world, had experienced incredible change during that time: four presidents (two of whom served two terms); space shuttle tragedies; the fall of communism in the Soviet Union and Europe, the introduction of cell phones, DVDs, and iPods; presidential scandal; four wars; a crisis at Columbine High School; several natural disasters and three major terrorist attacks.

Like Rip Van Winkle, Terry Wallis had slept through a revolution. When he woke up from the coma, he didn't even recognize his own mother.

I must admit that sometimes I feel like Terry, even though I've been mostly conscious for the past few decades and have actually kept up with the news. Change happens so fast these days that I often feel like someone has pushed the "fast forward" button on our culture and left me in the dust. Sometimes I feel like