

- **Explore their possibilities**—to hone in on their gifts and passions.
- **Experiment with roles and tasks**—through volunteer work, part-time jobs, even school courses. *Nothing beats firsthand experience.*
- **Examine how they felt as they explored and experimented.** *Did the tasks feel natural? Did their work add value to anyone's life? Did anything make them feel uncomfortable?*
- **Expect feedback from others about where their gifts most fit.** *Confirmation from people further along than they are can be invaluable. So can honest criticism—but learning to listen can be a challenge.*

Time to Act: A Plan for Launching Leaders

Generation iY has enormous potential to build a positive future if parents, teachers, coaches, youth leaders, and other adults can help them leverage their influence and take their place as leaders. In the final pages of this book, I'd like to suggest some ideas for doing that.

1. **Let them be different from previous generations.** Generation iY is motivated to create new realities. They have boundless energy and creative spirits. It's important to encourage these qualities while helping iYers be themselves and define their own identity. (It may be far different from their older siblings).
2. **Work with them to develop strong personal values.** They live in an eclectic and pluralistic world. If they are not value-driven, they will shift as they encounter pressure from the culture. They must come to see themselves as individuals who possess a solid set of values and can collaborate with each other and with other generations to create something new.
3. **Help them learn to make and keep short-term commitments.** Young men and women accustomed to "instant everything" may well need some specific training in deferring gratification and keeping commitments. Help them put legitimate wins under their belt—not contrived "everyone wins" accolades! Succeeding at such short-term commitments could lead them into attempting longer, deeper commitments. If they commit to a team or a project, for instance, and later want to quit because they didn't get a lot of playing time or the project got boring, challenge them to stick to it until the end of the season. (Remind them they don't need to recommit, but they must follow through with what they started.)

4. **Work with them to simplify their lives and deal with stress.** As we have seen, Generation iY students feel a lot of pressure...and they can put pressure on themselves. They have a passion to make a difference and get all they can out of life, and many have perfectionist tendencies. They must learn to simplify, to figure out what really matters, to set realistic goals and organize their time. They may need help turning their lofty dreams into bite-sized objectives with doable deadlines. In the process, they will learn to set short-term, achievable goals and maintain momentum toward their long-term goals. At the same time, it's important to realize that for an iYer, multitasking isn't necessarily stressful, and simplifying life doesn't necessarily mean "one thing at a time." In fact, forcing an iYer to stop multi-tasking by forbidding cell phones, music, and so forth may actually add to his or her stress. If a kid is doing well in school, relating well to others, and getting enough sleep to be healthy, having lots of "i" input may not be a problem.
5. **Communicate that there is meaning even in the small, mundane tasks.** Give them a sense of the big picture and how all the little things they do fit into the big picture of history, or at least into the big picture of the organization. Provide a macro view in their present micro world. (As an educator, for instance, I have asked students to set up chairs—a quite menial task—but I've taken time first to share how that simple job helps us achieve the strategic objective for the student body.) As much as possible, provide consistent feedback, at least at the beginning of a task. Help young people determine personal achievement goals, and stick by them in a mentoring role while they work to achieve them. And don't forget to celebrate even small wins.
6. **Help them to focus.** As we have seen, Generation Y tends to spread themselves too thin and go wide instead of deep. Work with them to focus on one meaningful objective at a time. You might sit down with a kid and list all the goals she has for the week. Then help her prioritize, challenging her to do first things first and not proceed to a new item until she has completed the item before it.
7. **Work with them to appreciate strengths in others.** Generation iY already embraces diversity. In fact, they may be able to teach adults a thing or two about that. But they might need a little encouragement to recognize other people's strengths. Highlight individual differences and point out how each person's gifts and skills adds value to a team. In addition, help them become willing to function independently of their friends. Work to build

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8. **Create opportunities for face-to-face interaction so they can learn to interact in the non-virtual world (other than school).** For instance, my wife, and I have had our kids host parties where they learn how to initiate face-to-face relationships. We worked to position them in social settings where they interacted with people outside of their peer group, both younger and older. By the time they turned twelve, we also worked with other parents to prepare them to resolve conflict with friends (peers) on their own, when possible. We felt it was important for them to learn to communicate and work out differences as well as enjoy being together.

9. **Provide opportunities for kids to participate in a cause that's bigger than they are.** Challenge them to expand their horizons and give their time and money sacrificially for a cause that speaks to them. Give them the chance to invest their lives in something truly worthwhile. I have done this with teens and college students for years, and more recently I have done it with my own kids. Trips to a local rescue mission or to a developing nation can give young people a chance to serve and see how most of the world lives with less. (One in six people in the world live on a dollar a day.) Even work days at local social service agencies can offer kids the chance to be involved. Encourage them to bring their friends if it makes the experience easier. Their lives will be richer when they learn that fulfillment comes not from personal pleasure, but from global purpose.

10. **Enable them to take control of their lives, to boss their calendars.** Young people tend to be reactive, not proactive, when it comes to their time. They don't have a plan; they just let things happen. Work with them to set their priorities and require them (within limits) to live with the consequences of their decisions. Let them see that failure isn't final and poor judgment does not necessarily reflect poor character. Help them slow down and make sense of what goals they really want to pursue. Balance schedules and allow kids to ease into challenges that are beyond a parent's ability to shelter them.

11. **Resource them with your network.** Their dreams will require your assets. In other words, you can accelerate their growth by exposing them to the social networks you've established. Help them pursue internships at organizations you're a part of and invite them to gatherings where they can meet potential mentors. For the last few years, I've taken my kids to meet adults who do what they've dreamed of doing in their careers. Over dinner, they can ask questions they've prepared to learn more about the people and their professions. If nothing else, such outings give kids practice in interacting

12. **Challenge them to take their place in history.** Do what you can to give them a sense of destiny and a desire to make a long-term contribution. Talk to them about heroes from history (historical mentors) and give special focus to ones from their grandparents' generation. In my experience, Millennials young people long for mentors who are genuine and accessible. In fact assessments we've done at Growing Leaders indicate that mentor communities are their preferred method of learning. They don't want a sage on the stage, remember, but a guide on the side. Know anyone who could fill this role?

Transforming the Future

I wish you could meet Taylor. He just wrote me an e-mail to say thanks for helping him launch into his adult life after college. These kinds of e-mails are always encouraging, but Taylor's was the epitome of what I am talking about in this chapter.

I met Taylor four years ago. He had begun his college years as a shy, cautious self-absorbed freshman. He had come from a small town and had no real goals except to survive college. The last thing he expected to do was to make an impact on the world around him.

During his first year, Taylor attended an event that we hosted in Atlanta to caught a vision for being a leader. Although it didn't fit his self-image, he decided to join a mentoring community that met on a weekly basis. And week by week, he did this, his perspective was transformed.

In his sophomore year, Taylor joined a city outreach program and began serving underprivileged children. His vision grew. He wanted to get other students involved, so he took over the leadership of the city outreach during his junior year. By the time he was a senior, he was so convinced of his calling to make an impact on his world that he decided to run for student body president. Believe it or not, this shy young man won the election.

When he wrote me later, he actually said that our organization had "saved" his life." He also said that during the spring semester of his final year, he was being trained his successor, so that the leadership virus he had caught would remain contagious. Taylor is now in Los Angeles, serving underprivileged kids.

The good news is—if Taylor can do it, anyone can do it. I believe this is a Taylor somewhere near you. This may be your chance to transform the future—and our future. Remember, "If you want happiness for a lifetime, help the next generation."

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