

So What Do They Really Know?

Recently, I met an ex-executive who had resigned from “being in business” in the midst of this recession because he, “just couldn’t stand trying to make top management even begin to understand the expectations of the new generation of employees.” As he put it, “My top management possibly has a greater affinity with a Martian, than a 22-year-old college graduate.”

This – although it is now widely supposed that college kids and Martians dress the same – is essentially true. Indeed the Martian actually has more words and phrases in common with a 55-year-old executive vice president; plus, of course, the same set of values and ethics.

But I think that it is a great pity that my friend had to quit his job over this. Because what he should have done was put together a mind-set list. By that I mean a list that established what any given age group understands as reality.

I was reminded of this the other day, when a long-time friend of mine commented that, “the best piece of your last book Talent Magnet was that list, where it said that Michael Jackson had always been white.” This did not help my ego, as I had “borrowed” that reference, but it did trigger my thoughts. It was time to see what the Mindset List for the Class of 2007 looked like.

To explain. Some years ago, Beloit College in Wisconsin, developed a list to help the teaching faculty understand where their students were coming from – experience-wise. My view is that it is not only excellent, but that anyone who employs different generations or people in different geographies needs to know this stuff. It isn’t just professors at colleges who come face to face with the great unwashed that is the younger generation today. We lucky employers get to mess around with them too.

Think of it this way. A Portuguese twenty-year-old has a lot of different views from a Chinese or Australian his own age, never mind a fifty-year-old American who’s supposed to be his manager. If we can’t understand what these people “know” and take as their memories (and as their facts) we can’t really have much of a relevant conversation.

Now Beloit College is tucked away in the heartland of the good ole’ US of A, and therefore some of their Mindset List is incomprehensible to us Europeans (see what I mean already?) So what I have done is picked out the ones that are likely to make the most sense to the global village we inhabit.

For this exercise, Beloit College has assumed that the graduating class of 2007, was – on average – born in 1985.

- Iraq has always been a problem
- “Ctrl+Alt+Del” is as basic as ABC
- Paul Newman has always made salad dressing
- Ricky Nelson, Richard Burton, Laura Ashley, Orson Welles, Benigno Acquino have always been dead
- An automatic is a weapon not a car’s transmission
- Russian leaders have always looked like leaders everywhere else
- There has always been a screening test for AIDS

- Gas has always been unleaded
- There has always been some association between fried eggs and your brain
- They would never leave a “calling card” on someone’s desk
- They have never been able to find the “return” key
- Computers have always fitted into their backpacks
- Datsuns have never been made
- They have never been excited over a telegram, long distance call or a fax
- They have always “grazed” for food
- Test tube babies are now having their own babies
- Stores have always had scanners at the checkout
- They have always had a PIN number
- Banana Republic has always been a store, not a puppet government in Latin America
- There has always been Lean Cuisine
- They have always been able to fly Virgin Atlantic
- There has never been a dress-code in restaurants
- Michael Eisner has always been in charge of Disney
- They have always been able to make phone calls from planes
- Yuppies are almost as old as hippies
- Rupert Murdoch has always been an American citizen
- Rock and roll has always been a force for social good
- They have never seen a first lady [or a prime Minister’s wife] in a fur coat.

Go on, make your own list. I guarantee it will help you and those doddering denizens of the upper reaches of your business begin to understand something about why those bright young things you need to recruit act the way they do.

Having said that, of course the Beloit College Mindset List has to come up with some nightmares of why you may NEVER, EVER want to employ these people. As they say, “In all fairness it should be understood that students entering college this Fall do have a few items on their own lists that will separate them from many of their mentors.”

So, what could be so difficult. Well here’s a selection

- They have been “dissing” and “burning” things all their lives
- Peeps are not candy, they are your friends
- They know who the “Heroes in a half shell” are
- They know how to pop a Poppo and trade a Pog

OK, OK. To heck with the list, plan B is better: “Ready the recruitment rocket-ship for Mars and tell the CEO to lock himself in his office for the next fifty light years until we get back.”

If you want to see the full list yourself, and get the back issues too, log onto www.beloit.edu and click on Mindset List on the menu.