

# Leadership FAQs

A newsletter from LeadershipTraQ "Empowering Leaders to Live Life On Purpose"

Missive 25

## Are You "X" On The "Y's"?

By Chip Espinoza, Executive Vice President LeadershipTraQ

In 1960, Douglas McGregor published a book entitled *The Human Side of Management*. He proposed a management concept referred to as "Theory X Theory Y." While the theory is quite simple, it has had a profound influence in modern management practice. McGregor believed that managers could be categorized into two perspectives. *Theory X* managers operate on the belief that employees are basically lazy, unmotivated, and will avoid work unless they are closely supervised and made to perform. Conversely, *Theory Y* managers operate on the belief that people are basically motivated to do a good job, are willing to accept greater responsibility, and will perform when given training and support.

If you pause for a moment and reflect on your work life, I am sure you can easily identify the *X* managers and the *Y* managers in your experience. McGregor's point is simple but powerful. Your perspective will influence the way you interact with the people you manage and lead. It has been said, "We don't see people as they are—we see people as we are." Mick Ukleja, Craig Rusch, and I have been working on our upcoming book entitled *Generational Rapport Leadership: Your Biggest Headache Just May Be Your Competitive Advantage*. We have spent the past few years

studying the perceptions managers have of their young employees. We refer to the young employees as *twenty-somethings*, but as a generational cohort you also may have heard them referred to as Generation Y or Millennials (people born approximately between 1978 and 1998). It is important to note that it is problematic to make generalizations about any group of people. However, we are not saying "who they are" only how they are perceived in organizations. If perceptions influence how we act, then we have to examine our perceptions.

We asked human resource professionals from a number of sectors (service, manufacturing, technology, entertainment, government, non-profit, etc.) throughout the United States to provide us with three managers who they perceived to be good at managing *twenty-somethings* and three managers who were struggling with the population. Ironically, out of hundreds of interviews, both groups of managers experienced the *twenty-somethings* similarly. Here are a few things we heard in our interviews:

- They want a trophy just for showing up.
- They need constant affirmation.



- They want to have a say from day one.
- They think they work smarter and faster than the rest of us.
- They want to know what I am going to do to help them get promoted.
- They don't give themselves to projects that they don't find interesting.
- They don't seem interested in what I know.
- They think any excuse will make being late okay.
- They seem to have a short attention span.

If both groups of managerial-leaders had similar observations, then what separates them? In HR's mind the good managers experienced higher productivity,

lower attrition, fewer complaints, and were able to create a positive work environment. But they did not know what the good managers did differently from the managers that were challenged at managing the *twenty-somethings*. When we went back and looked at the interviews we reverse-engineered management competencies that emerged in the good manager group. While their perceptions were similar to their counterparts, their perspective was not. The challenged managers were emphatic that the *twenty-somethings* needed to change if they were to make it in the real world. The good managers were just as emphatic but talked about how they themselves have had to change to effectively manage in today's world. Outside of positional authority, the challenged managers felt helpless when it came to managing *twenty-somethings*. We learned that the good managers felt they had much greater control of their situation because they sought first to manage themselves. They were much more comfortable engaging and building rapport with their *twenty-something* employees. In our findings, rapport is foundational to the trust and respect required for transferring knowledge, redirecting behavior, and negotiating shared expectations. Needless to say, the good managers were "Y" on "Y's."

We will be presenting more of what we learned through our research at this year's LeadershipTraQ Breakfast (January 10, 2008, Hyatt Regency Long Beach, CA). You will learn about the 10 competencies required to effectively manage *twenty-somethings*, and you may be

surprised to find out that you are already practicing *Generational Rapport Leadership*. In addition, you might identify areas of improvement that can help you to become an even better managerial-leader. You can sign-up for the LeadershipTraQ Breakfast online at <http://www.leadershiptraq.com> or call Kathy at 714-761-1380.

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