

## Understanding, Motivating and Leading the Generation Y

by Markku Kauppinen

Some time ago I attended a conference where one of the speakers, Karen McCullough, was talking about Generation Y: the tech-savvy individuals born after the mid-1980s. One of the most memorable comments she made was that Generation Y is “the first generation that has more self-esteem than talent.” The comment resonated well with the audience and elicited a good laugh, at least with the non-Generation “Y”ers.

As I was thinking about my kids’ earlier sports activities with no score keeping, their trophy room and the numerous graduations I have attended, it certainly was easy to see how this could be the case. Overall, Generation Y certainly is well-praised substantially boosting their optimism and confidence. As a result, some have also called them lazy, self-centered and lacking long-term commitment. I have heard others use significantly more harsh adjectives. Whatever your views are, the fact is there are about 70 million of them in the US. Certainly, they cannot be ignored and their role will continue to increase in society and the workforce.

If you have read some of the many articles about the Gen Ys, you know they are being characterized as:

- Questioning authority
- Seeking attention
- Communicating digitally
- Wanting better work/life balance
- Seeking variety
- Expecting a lot from employers (meaningful work, learning opportunities, new challenges)
- Seeking frequent praise

And, yes, having more self-esteem than talent.

There are many good explanations about what has molded the Gen Y. Doting parents, constant encouragement and sheltering from the harsh reality apparently all have played a role. While we can disagree about what the causes are, the

reality is this generation is different. They behave differently and want different things. How can we better understand, motivate and lead the Generation Y?

First, let's remember that we should always be very careful about stereotyping individuals. Everyone is unique. However, from the macro-level, a better overall understanding may help us just a little.

One of the significant trends our organization studies is the changes in the population in terms of its natural, hard-wired, behavioral styles. These changes happen gradually over time, yet impact us all.

One of those clear and important trends is the increase in the I-style population around the world. This development is driven by the growing percentage of the I-style individuals among people who are born after 1985. For example, in the US about 35 percent of this population segment is I-styles. In comparison, only 27 percent of the Baby Boomers are I-styles.

In Sweden, this young age group is made up of 50 percent of I-styles! Even in the notoriously "introverted" country of Finland, the youngsters are represented with 40 percent of I-styles. It just may be a time to stereotype Finns differently.

You may wonder: what in the world does this trend have to do with the Generation Y? Let's briefly look at the I-styles. Among their many attributes, they are characterized as:

- Social
- Spontaneous
- Visible
- Active
- Optimistic
- Impulsive
- Emotional
- Expressive
- Participating
- Energetic

While the I-style characteristics certainly do *not* explain everything about the Gen Yers, I suspect you can see the strong parallels between the attributes of the Generation Y and the I-styles. Both "groups" like to be liked, want variety and flexibility, and dislike routines and formal settings.

Perhaps, rather than separating people into "generations" that result in the famous and often quite challenging "generation gaps", we could observe the issue from the perspective that individuals' styles are slowly changing. Since we know the behavioral styles of people are not "better" or "worse" – they are simply different – maybe we can be more effective in understanding and appreciating these differences.

Also, when we consider what influences and motivates the different behavioral styles, we may be able to better motivate and lead the different "generations". More importantly, when we are aware of how we need to specifically modify our own communication, motivation and leadership style, we increase our chances of being more effective. This may also help us to leave our stereotypes behind. Rather than making value judgments about what we like and do not like about the Generation Y (or other Generations), we could try to understand the issue from the I-style point of view. In the process, we are ultimately reminded we need to always focus on our own behavior and the other individual if we want to become more successful.

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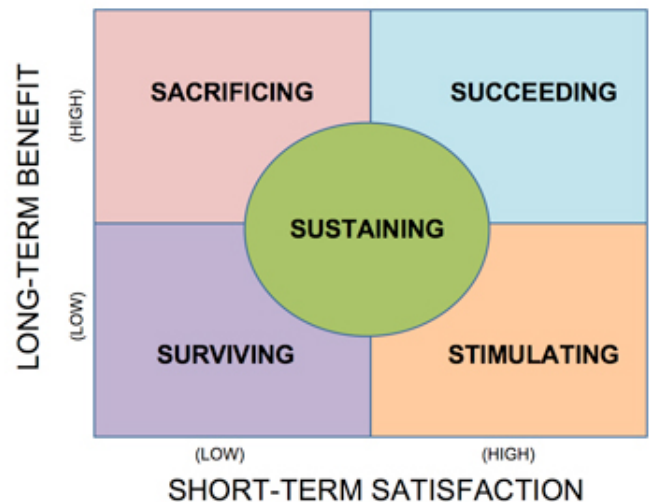
## Are You Living for the Short Term or the Long Term?

by Marshall Goldsmith

In analyzing how we spend our time, whether personally or professionally, it can be helpful to consider two dimensions: short-term satisfaction and long-term benefit. Both have value. It can be disappointing to live our lives with no meaning or pleasure in the here and now, just as it can be unfulfilling to live only for today.

Questions like, "Does this activity make me happy?" or "Do I find meaning in the activity itself?" can help us gauge the degree of short-term satisfaction that we get from any activity. Questions like, "Are the results achieved from this activity worth my effort?" or "Is the successful completion of this activity going to have a long-term positive impact on my life?" can help us gauge our expectations for potential long-term benefit from any activity.

The accompanying graph shows five different modes of behavior and how they can characterize our relationship to any activity—either at work or at home. (See below)



**Stimulating** is for activities that score high in short-term satisfaction but low in long-term benefit. An example of a "stimulating" activity may be the use of drugs or alcohol. While the activity may provide short-term satisfaction, it may be dysfunctional for long-term benefit. At work, gossiping with co-workers may be fun for a while, but it is probably not career- or business-enhancing. A life spent solely on stimulating

activities could provide a lot of short-term pleasure but still be headed nowhere.

**Sacrificing** is for activities that score low in short-term satisfaction but high in long-term benefit. An extreme example of sacrificing could involve dedicating your life to work that you hate because you feel like you "have to" to achieve a larger goal. A more common example might be working out (when you don't feel like it) to improve your long-term health. At work, sacrificing might be spending extra hours on a project to help enhance your career prospects. A life spent solely on sacrificing activities would be the life of a martyr—lots of achievement, but not much joy.

**Surviving** is for activities that score low on short-term satisfaction and low on long-term benefit. These are activities that don't cause much joy or satisfaction and do not contribute to long-term benefit in your life. These are typically activities that we are doing because we feel that we have to do them in order just to get by. Charles Dickens frequently described the lives of people who were almost constantly in the surviving box. These poor people had countless hours of hard work, not much joy, and not much to show for all of their efforts. A life spent solely on surviving activities would be a hard one indeed.

**Sustaining** is for activities that produce moderate amounts of short-term satisfaction and lead to moderate long-term benefits. For many professionals, the daily answering of e-mails is a sustaining activity. It is moderately interesting (not thrilling) and usually produces moderate long-term but hardly life-changing benefit. At home, the day-to-day routine of shopping, cooking, and cleaning may be viewed as sustaining. A life spent solely on sustaining activities would be an O.K. one—not great, yet not too bad.

**Succeeding** is a term for activities that score high on short-term satisfaction and high on long-term benefit. These activities are the ones that we love to do and get great benefit from doing. At work, people who spend a lot of time in the

succeeding box love what they are doing and believe that it is producing long-term benefit at the same time. At home, a parent may be spending hours with a child time that the parent greatly enjoys while valuing the long-term benefit that will come to the child. A life spent in succeeding is a life that is filled with both joy and accomplishment.

The perception of both short-term satisfaction and long-term benefit is dependent upon the individual engaged in the activity. Consider an immigrant who leaves a poor country and come to the U.S., where she works 18 hours a day at two minimum-wage jobs. She may have a great attitude toward her work and be saving every possible cent for her children's education. She may define her life as being largely spent in the succeeding category—filled with short-term happiness and long-term benefit.

At the other end of the professional scale, one CEO could feel resentful and grumpy about her work (and feel trapped) because a drop in stock value means that she will have to work another couple of years to have the \$10 million she told herself she needed in order to retire. She might see herself in the surviving category. Another CEO in a similar situation could feel happy and fulfilled at the prospect of leading a major organization through challenging times and see herself in the succeeding category.

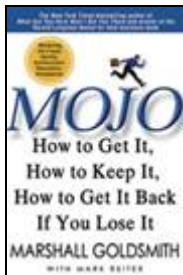
The point is two people could be engaged in the same activity but have completely different perceptions of what this activity means to them. It's because no one can define what short-term satisfaction or long-term benefit means for you but you. My suggestion for you is simple. Spend a week tracking how you spend your time. At the end of the week calculate how many hours you spent on stimulating, sacrificing, surviving, sustaining, or succeeding. Then ask yourself what changes you can make to help you create a life that is both more satisfying in the short-term and more rewarding in the long-term.

While the activities that take up our time can be one factor in determining our happiness and

achievement, our attitude toward these activities can be an equally important factor in determining the ultimate quality of our lives. If we cannot change our activities, we can at least try to change our attitude toward them.

***Dr. Marshall Goldsmith** recently been named by the American Management Association as one of 50 great thinkers and business leaders who have impacted the field of management. His 18 books include the Business Week best-seller, *The Leader of the Future* and *Global Leadership: The Next Generation*. Marshall is a world authority in helping successful leaders achieve positive change in behavior: for themselves, their people and their teams.*

Marshall's latest best-seller, **MOJO**, is now available.



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