

Habitudes™ : The Habits & Attitudes of a First Year Student

Dr. Tim Elmore / www.GrowingLeaders.com / www.Habitudes.org

“One primary problem schools face is they teach from a Gutenberg world, with textbooks and syllabus. Our students enter college from a Google world, with technology and images.” (Dr. Leonard Sweet, Futurist)

The State of Students Today

Every generation of youth share some common characteristics. However, each generation is defined by some specific shared elements that differentiate them from past generations. Primary elements tend to be:

1. Shared music
2. Shared experiences
3. Shared crises
4. Shared television programs
5. Shared celebrities (people of influence)
6. Shared new technology

Let’s take a look at this new generation of students on campus, and compare them to the previous four generations who walked through the doors of our schools.

FIVE GENERATIONS

THE PEOPLE & ISSUES	SENIORS Greatest Generation	BUILDERS Silent Generation	BOOMERS Pig in Python Gen	BUSTERS Generation X	MILLENNIALS Generation Y
1. Era they were born	1900-1928	1929-1945	1946-1964	1965-1983	1984-2002
2. Life paradigm	<i>Manifest destiny</i>	Be grateful you have a job	You owe me	<i>Relate to me</i>	<i>Life is a cafeteria</i>
3. Attitude to authority	Respect them	Endure them	Replace them	Ignore them	Choose them
4. Role of relationships	Long term	Significant	Limited: useful	Central; caring	Global
5. Value Systems	Traditional	Conservative	Self-based	Media	Shop around
6. Role of Career	Loyalty	Means for living	Central focus	Irritant	Place to serve
7. Schedules	Responsible	Mellow	Frantic	Aimless	Volatile
8. Technology	What’s that?	Hope to outlive it	Master it	Enjoy it	Employ it
9. Market	Commodities	Goods	Services	Experiences	Transformations
10. View of future	Uncertain	Seek to stabilize	Create it!	Hopeless	Optimistic

Changes Over Time...

1. With each new generation, time becomes more valuable.
2. With each new generation, expectations of convenience and service rise.
3. With each new generation, the demand for work to have meaning intensifies.
4. With each new generation, the hunger for options grows.
5. With each new generation, the sense of entitlement increases.
6. With each new generation, the need for speed and space goes up.
7. With each new generation, the desire for customization expands.

Meet Generation iY

I now call this batch of students: Generation iY—because of the impact of iTunes, iPhones, iChat, iPods, iMovies, iBooks, iPhotos...and that fact that life for them is pretty much about: “I”. The first five years of research on this generation turned up different results than the last five years.

For a little more than five years, social scientists were elated with their findings on this new generation of kids—Generation Y, the Millennial Generation. The stats on them were very positive:

- Teen pregnancy was down
- Drug abuse was lower than their parents
- Violent crime was at its lowest in twenty years
- Education and civic involvement was at a record high
- The students were optimistic about their prospects of changing the world.

Now, however, we have seen the dark side of this generation. After the first half of this generation grew into adulthood, and technology expanded for all of them, we began discovering some new characteristics. They began to be “echo boomers” sharing some of the same traits as kids in the 1960s. In short, over-indulgence plus over-protection equals a sense of entitlement. We’ve created a generation of “screenagers.”

Life in Neverland

Adults have created a different world, a sort of “Neverland,” like the one we saw in the story of Peter Pan. It’s a place where the “lost boys” were mischievous, they wanted a mother figure and they refuse to grow up. What are the reasons for this exchange of the real world for the “virtual world”?

1. Video games

These addictive activities disengage kids from the world. Especially boys. Some young men even seem to prefer on-line pornography over healthy intimacy with another human being. There is no need to work at a relationship. When the boy is ready to stop, he needs only to click a button. Further, kids reading and learning abilities are being damaged by computer games and television. Eye specialists warn they impair the development of a child’s vision, leading to nearsightedness.

2. Damaging Parenting Styles

Helicopter, Karaoke, Dry Cleaner and Volcano Parents have unwittingly delayed responsibility in their kids. Most parents mean well and damage unwittingly. But their children are their trophies. Some will do anything to make them succeed. They hover over their child, they want to be their child’s “buddy” and they drop them off at school expecting good grades since they’re consumer.

3. Prescription drugs

Hyperactive, frustrated boys are increasingly being medicated. The U.S. makes up 5% of the world population but consumes over 90% of drugs for ADD and ADHD. Dr. Leonard Sax, MD writes that these drugs shrink the motivational centers of the brain and the effect of this lasts years, well after these kids stop taking their meds. If they were around today, Charlie Brown would be on Prozac and Dennis the Menace would be on Ritalin.

4. The Media: Television, Movies and Music

TV dilemmas are resolved in thirty minutes. The Internet can be manipulated at will. Students can log off Facebook—and visit Second Life. “American Idol” beckons them to become rich and famous overnight. If they’re bored, they can just turn it off. This has created a disparity between the real world they live in and the virtual world they enjoy for hours each day.

5. Endocrine disruptors

Chemicals from plastic bottles, canned food linings and some shampoos mimic natural estrogen, the female hormone. This has impacted the hormone balance in kids today, especially males. Boys' testosterone levels are half of what they were in their grandparents' day. Another effect of these disruptors is that boys bones are significantly more brittle today.

6. Teaching Methods

My concern is that school is preparing them for more school not for life. Because of the pressure teachers feel from the state—lesson plans are reduced to producing higher grades instead of better people. Further, girls develop intellectually up to two years ahead of boys. Boys in grade school are naturally energetic. They need ways to express their native energy. They are not ready to learn in the manner girls do so early. Most teachers prefer compliant, dutiful girls.

7. Affluence and social liberation (Over the last fifteen years).

Perhaps this one may change. Parents invite their college grads to return home, rather than help them out of the nest. 60% of graduates return home after college. We postpone maturity. We expand adolescence. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that one third of young men, ages 22-34 still live at home. This represents a 100% increase over the last twenty years.

In Short, We Have a Paradox

By the time students reach their adolescent years, they are a picture of paradox. Students transition in four basic categories as they move from childhood to adolescence:

1. **Biological** They experience puberty; their body changes and develops physically. Their voice changes, they grow hair in new places and take an adult body type.
2. **Cognitive** They mature intellectually; their intelligence moves from concrete thinking to abstract thinking. They can comprehend things conceptually.
3. **Social** They begin viewing relationships differently and value them for different reasons. They process interactions with others in reality instead of possibility.
4. **Emotional** Their view of “self” changes as well as their capacity to function independently. They become stable and their self-awareness increases.

Students: A Sort of Dr. Jeckell and Mr. Hyde

My research on these four areas of maturity reveals some very clear conclusions:

1. Students today are advanced biologically. They are growing up physically faster than ever. Puberty hits both boys and girls one to two years earlier than it did for teens thirty years ago.
2. Students are advanced cognitively. They are exposed to so much information so early; they can handle multiple messages rapidly and assimilate visual information more quickly than adults.
3. Students advanced socially. They have friends they connect with in person at school, then hundreds more they connect with via the internet. Their social capacity is huge—they multi-task.
4. However, when it comes to emotional maturity—they are not advanced. In fact, our studies show they are behind. A huge percentage are backward. This explains their baffling Jeckell and Hyde demeanor. They're ahead of schedule in so many categories, yet backward in others.

Emotional intelligence is the number one need of a first year students.

The Need of the Hour: New Habits and Attitudes

This is why we believe an effective First Year Experience must include: building robust values, strong character, positive attitudes and leadership habits.

Why Teach Character-based Leadership to First Year Students?

There are thousands of schools attempting to cover hundreds of issues each year with their freshmen students. So—why teach character and leadership? Based on research done by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, we believe a case can be built for its importance. Here are some of the conclusions from their research:

1. Every student has leadership potential.
2. Leadership can no longer be the possession of the exclusive few.
3. Character and ethics are the foundation of any successful venture.
4. We cannot separate leadership from values.
5. Moral intelligence can be developed through repeated exposure.
6. In today's world, every student will need leadership skills.

Connecting with an EPIC Generation

According to futurist Leonard Sweet, this generation of students are EPIC:

THE TRUTH

OUR APPLICATION

E – EXPERIENTIAL (Offer lab experiences for them to observe, explore and learn from)

P – PARTICIPATORY (Let them discover truth through discussion and participate in outcomes)

I – IMAGE-DRIVEN (Provide images through narratives, symbols and metaphors)

C – CONNECTED (Utilize technology and furnish a safe environment for community)

HABITUDES: Images That Form Leadership Habits and Attitudes

The “Habitudes” series is a simple, profound way to connect with students and teach them character and leadership. Within the series, they cover self-leadership, connecting with others in community, leading others and changing organizational culture. They're being used by a number of corporations across the U.S. and internationally, but their greatest potential for impact lies in next-generation leaders. Here is why...

1. Habitudes™ enables you to teach leadership in a simple and brief period of time.
2. Habitudes™ can spark discussion that goes as deep as the maturity of your students.
3. Habitudes™ provides an image, relational discussion and an exercise to participate in together.
4. Habitudes™ offer you a set of transferable concepts that students can teach as well.
5. Habitudes™ is a series of four discussion guides based on a 360-degree leadership proposition.
6. Habitudes™ furnishes you with a shared language for your community.

Some Habitudes™ Examples...

Image: _____

The iceberg represents your leadership. The 10% above the water is your skill. The 90% below the water is your character. It's what's below the water that sinks the ship. Much of our influence comes from qualities we can't see on the outside. It's below the surface: self-discipline, emotional security, core values, and a sense of identity.

Notes...



Image Two: _____

This principle reminds us of a common occupational hazard of leadership. It's the baker who spends so much time baking bread for others, he forgets to eat himself. For them, the job comes before personal development. Wrong. Leaders must feed themselves for personal growth—before they feed others.

Notes...



Image Three: _____

This principle teaches us that leaders cannot perform well if they fail to see the gold inside of them. Good leaders take personal inventory of their strengths. This shapes their self-image and consequently, their results. We must align our self-esteem with our potential—not too much, not too little. What you see is what you get.

Notes...



Image Four: _____

This is a picture of leadership: people are either thermometers or thermostats. They will merely reflect the climate around them, or they will set it. Leaders develop values and principles to live by and set the tone for others. They're pace setters.

Notes...



Remember These Realities When Communicating with Generation iY...

1. Students learn on a “need to know” basis.

Don't just jump into your topic, take time to explain the relevance of it. Why should they listen? We must create incentive for them to believe they need to know what we are communicating.

2. Remember that “schemas” frame their world—so use them.

When students encounter new information, they attempt to relate it to something they already know. They process new data via their present experiences and understanding. Get familiar with their schemas.

3. The less predictable your words, the more memorable they will be.

Once you summarize your point, ask if it is a cliché? Find a fresh way to say it, with a new twist. Spend as much time on the “how” of your delivery as you do the “what” of our content.

4. The first four minutes must grab their head or their heart, if you want sustain their interest.

Be quick to get to some content, or reveal your own heart. Provide a reason for them to listen. Share your story. Be transparent. Take them on a journey—enlist them quickly to join you on this journey of learning.

5. The best learning occurs in a social context.

Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky held the theory of social constructivism. He confirmed that people learn best in community and relationship with the mentor or fellow students. Worldview emerges from interaction.

6. The more “in your face” your words are, the more trust you will earn.

They love to “speak their mind” and tend to believe communicators who are blunt in the same way. Don't be afraid to be forthright and truthful. This earns trust.

7. If you challenge the status quo, they will hunger to take a journey with you.

They have high expectations of themselves and of anyone “up front.” Challenge the norm. This doesn't mean you're a rebel or renegade—but simply that you're re-thinking assumptions from the past.

8. They grew up loving images, so give them a metaphor.

They're world is MTV, video games, photos, DVDs, and the internet—you must have a picture, too. Dr. Len Sweet suggests that images are the language of the 21st century, not words.

9. Utilize proximal development by pairing them with coaches.

Students accelerate their learning by associating with a more capable partner, peer or mentor. By learning together, they experience growth first-hand but can also learn through observing an advanced partner.

10. Once you prepare your message, you must find a way to twist it to exceed their expectations.

Think about movies that stick, or popular novels; they excel by adding another layer of story. The story becomes great because it includes an unexpected layer to exceed our expectations.

11. For your message to be remembered, keep the pace of change high, and call them to change.

Change is key. Their world is changing fast. Students don't sit still for very long and they long to change and improve their world. Your communication must reflect this. Your talk must be full of changes.

12. It's best to teach less for more.

Although this sounds contradictory, it isn't. To be remembered, plunge into one central theme. Don't attempt to deliver a large variety of topics. Students have a filter and will screen out most of it.

13. Remember, students today are both high-performance and high maintenance.

Walk the delicate balance between nurture & challenge. Help them “own” your message via relationship. If you can earn their trust through feedback and support, they will perform in extraordinary ways.

14. Students hunger to participate in projects that are very important and almost impossible.

Their greatest incentive for learning may be the challenge of a project that is very important and almost impossible to accomplish. They love growing toward a goal when it is significant.