

WHAT  
STUDENTS  
WISH  
TEACHERS  
& PARENTS  
KNEW ABOUT  
TEACHING



TIM ELMORE

MOST TEACHERS AND PARENTS WANT TO SEE THEIR KIDS SUCCEED. Likewise, most students want to excel and achieve their goals. In many classrooms and homes, however, there is a broad disconnect. Too many adults are attempting to teach kids in the same way they were raised. In contrast, today's generation is growing up in a culture that is vastly different.

This educational discrepancy has caused adults and kids alike to scratch their heads and wonder what's wrong with the other party. Teachers and parents wonder why kids won't embrace their educational methods. Kids wonder why their teachers and parents cannot see that something is missing from their instructional style. For instance, here's a sample of what students wish their teachers and parents knew about teaching:

- *We want to see or do something, rather than just hear a lecture.*
- *We want to express ourselves, learn by dialogue, and participate in the outcomes of what we are learning.*
- *We think in images, and we want our communication to be either image-based or image-enhanced.*
- *We hate to work, learn, study, or exercise alone. We want to accomplish tasks in a social environment.*

After working with educators and students for over 30 years, I frequently hear adults describe today's generation as a "different animal." They have reason to use this description. Consider these facts about students:

- *They never watched a TV without a remote.*
- *They've never known a world without the Internet.*
- *They never rode a bike without a helmet.*
- *They never rode in a car without a seatbelt.*
- *They've always cooked popcorn in a microwave.*
- *They own a cell phone that doubles as a mini-computer.*
- *Iraq and Afghanistan have always been front-page stories.*
- *To them, George Foreman has always been a barbecue-grill salesman.*
- *They can't remember when America's Funniest Home Videos wasn't on TV.*
- *They think of hip hop as a "classic" music form.*
- *Bono and Madonna are aging singers.*
- *They don't remember when "cut and paste" involved scissors.*
- *The terms "roll down your window" and "you sound like a broken record" have to be explained.*

Because of these differences, we must initiate the process of connecting with today's students if we're going to lead them. Let's face it. Adults must learn the "care, feeding, and grooming" of this new generation. We need to consider what students wish their teachers and parents knew about teaching.

## **An EPIC Generation**

So how do we do it? In this resource, I'd like to guide you as you attempt to connect with this generation of young adults. I can only scratch the surface in a single eBook, but let me begin by suggesting a strategy for gaining an audience and becoming relevant with this batch of kids. In Chapter 3 of my book *Generation iY*, I mentioned that futurist Leonard Sweet calls today's students an EPIC generation.<sup>1</sup> He uses EPIC as an acronym to describe how this generation learns and receives information best. They respond best to input that is:

### **E—Experiential**

Forget the lecture unless it is accompanied by an experience that enables them to remember the point you are making. This means they want to *see* something, or *do* something, not just *hear* something. Communication, in other words, must be more than two-dimensional. It must include other senses.

Why are kids this way? They're accustomed to many messages competing for their attention. Their filters are strong, and only memorable experiences get through. Schools that understand this incorporate outside activities



(such as field trips), artistic expressions, and creative projects to help students experience what they need to learn.

Educator Edgar Dale is famous for his “Cone of Experience,” a visual representation demonstrating that people learn and retain information better when the learning moves from mere words to pictures, symbols, and experiences.<sup>2</sup> His research told us that retention and learning increases in this order:

1. Verbal symbols (i.e. text)
2. Visual symbols (drawings, etc.)
3. Recordings, radio, still pictures
4. Motion pictures/TV
5. Exhibits
6. Demonstrations
7. Contrived experiences
8. Dramatized experiences
9. Direct, purposeful (real world) experiences

I believe Dale’s ideas have never been more relevant than they are today with students.

### **P—Participatory**

This generation has been invited to upload their own thoughts all their lives. They expect to do it at school and work as well. They want to express themselves, to learn through dialogue, to participate fully in the outcomes of where a program is going.

Case in point: When *American Idol* shot to the top of TV ratings several years back, it quickly became clear that this generation watched *Idol* (and similar shows) differently than the adult generation. Adults would sit passively on the sofa hoping their favorite singer would win. But kids would actively text in fifty votes to make sure their favorite singer won. That’s just the way today’s students operate. They will support what they help create.

In June of 2009, MTV launched a program, *It’s On with Alexa Chung*, that took participatory television to a new level. The stars not only invited viewers to follow them on Twitter and Facebook; they incorporated the interaction with viewers right on the screen — in effect, making the viewers stars as well. An audience member could tweet a question or a comment to a person on TV and get a response in real time. Viewer’s homemade videos are part of the show, and some will even appear on the show.

Why do this? The short answer: because today’s viewers are participatory.

The meteoric rise of social media, in fact, is convincing evidence of the power of the participatory in the life of the average person today — especially the average kid. In January of 2010, Facebook passed four hundred million users. If it were a country, it would be the third largest country in the world behind China and India. In that same month, 1.2 million tweets were sent. That’s just one month. It seems that this generation is teaching all of us to participate a little more.

### **I—Image-rich**

This generation is definitely a visually oriented generation. They grew up with MTV, videos, digital cameras, the Internet, VH1, DVDs, and cameras on their cell phones. They think in images, and they want their communication to be either image-based or image-enhanced. One professor recently told me that his students watch thirty-five movies for every one book they read. Leonard Sweet believes that images, not words, are the language of the twenty-first century. In fact, he suggests that companies create “image statements,” not mere mission statements. The power of the images sticks in the minds of people so much better.

Growing Leaders developed our *Habitudes*<sup>®</sup> material for this very reason. *Habitudes*<sup>®</sup> are images that form leadership habits and attitudes. The books and videos convey timeless principles using the power of a picture and conversation. We at Growing Leaders have found that when we use only words to communicate with kids, we engage the left side of the brain only and may invite an argument. When we use images, however we engage the right side of the brain as well, and we invite story and conversation. In the words of Socrates, “The soul does not

think without a picture.”

Ellen Pate, a program director at the University of Alabama, was kind enough to do some research for me. As she dug further into history, she reported to me that images may be humankind’s oldest form of values education. Pictures carved on the walls of caves or pyramids in ancient Phoenicia and Egypt tell stories that communicate values and record cultural history. Jesus taught using the power of images (parables), and those mental pictures have stuck for millennia. During the Middle Ages, stained glass windows shared stories with parishioners who couldn’t read. Even during the American Revolution, images of snakes, stars, and trees were used to spark patriotism among citizens in our own country.

Today, because of our media-rich society, images may be the perfect stimulus to help students grasp and retain valuable information. Just as important, kids today may have trouble even hearing us if we try to communicate without images. Now, more than ever before in history, a picture is worth a thousand words.

### **C—Connected**

This generation is constantly connected — socially and technologically. Most young people don’t want to work, learn, study, or exercise alone. One NCAA coach told me recently he can’t get his athletes to do their workouts unless they do them with a friend or a cell phone.

So how does this affect us as we lead them? Most students I have interviewed say that utilizing technology is vital if your message is to be perceived as relevant and current. In addition, I have found most of them would agree they need to connect with each other to truly engage in learning.

Not long ago, I put this reality into practice. Our team did an all-day assembly for middle-school students. We called it “A Habitudes® Experience.” From nine in the morning until three that afternoon, we taught kids about character, discipline, focus, self-esteem and leadership — all with the power of images, conversations, and experiences.

We knew connection with peers would be a huge part of the kids’ engagement, so we started each Habitude® segment with an activity. Next, I taught a bit using an image and a video. I had three students hop up on the platform for me to interview. Then I drew some diagrams on the white screen before allowing the students to gather in small groups for discussion and feedback. After that we had some music, then we pulled together a student panel to give feedback. All day, students were connected to technology and each other — and they definitely retained what was taught. At the end of the day, one by one, the students stood up and relayed the principles they had learned throughout the day.

So, here’s my question for you: Is your communication EPIC? I believe more and more parents, leaders, employers, teachers and coaches will need to revolutionize the way they communicate if they plan to stay relevant. The simple reality is this: EPIC communicators get through to the widest audience, and this is especially true for students today.

#### **What a Difference a Generation Makes...**

- Baby Boomers asked: **Why?**
- Generation X asked: **Why ask why?**
- Generation iY asks: **Why not?**

### **Left-Brain Schools in a Right-Brain World**

When we were elementary age, my sisters and I used to play school. We’d get out the chalkboard, the chairs, and the map, and one of us would be the teacher. Sometimes, we’d get the G.I. Joes or stuffed animals involved, just to enlarge the class size a bit. Even when we didn’t know what we were doing, we never lost our passion. We just got creative and made something up. It was a blast.

And the thing is, I felt that way about my real school too. I liked the crayons, the games, and even arithmetic—when I was little, that is.

Over time, however, my whole perspective changed, and school became somewhat of a drudgery to me. I stopped playing it at home, and I stopped looking forward to going to school.

Sadly, I was like most kids. School was fun when we were young, but eventually school came to mean boredom and irrelevance — or worse.

For today's students, this dynamic has become critical. The disconnect between how schools “feed” and how kids “eat” has widened, and they're just not swallowing what the schools are dishing out. In many cases, they're not only bored; they've completely checked out. There are a number of reasons, but the biggest one is that traditional teaching methods just can't compete with their EPIC expectations. They would never “play school” because for them *school* and *fun* just can't coexist.

But education isn't meant to be fun, you may be thinking. That's not its purpose. Education is not entertainment. Agreed.

The purpose of school is not pleasure and amusement. However, according to our research, education that sticks in the minds of students — especially students today — is usually connected to three elements:

- *A healthy, trusting relationship with the teacher.*
- *An interactive learning community.*
- *A creative and innovative approach that stimulates the right brain.*

Daniel Pink has written some helpful insights about this last element in his book, *A Whole New Mind*. He convincingly argues that “a seismic...shift is now under way in much of the advanced world. We are moving from an economy and a society built on the logical, linear, computerlike capabilities of the Information Age to an economy and a society built on the inventive, empathic, big-picture capabilities of what's rising in its place, the Conceptual Age.”<sup>3</sup>

In other words, the future will increasingly reward what we commonly think of as “right brain” thinking. And this generation thrives on this kind of thinking. They are nonlinear. They prize relationships. They love to make connections between people and ideas and to get their hands on what they're learning about. They thrive on pictures and stories, and their eyes glaze over when requested to just sit still and read or listen.

So here's the problem I see with education as it's commonly practiced today: First, we are preparing students in left-brain schools to enter a right-brain world. In other words, the school does not resemble the world they will enter after graduation — if they graduate at all. And students, who are already tuned into that world, tend to tune out input that to them seems totally irrelevant to their needs.

The left brain is about *knowledge*. The right brain is about *creativity*. The left brain is calculated and definitive; it's about data. The right brain is innovative and dynamic; it's about art. Certainly both are necessary. But more and more, our world is driven by right-brain thought: imagination, story, music.

Now, consider what's happening today in schools. More and more, teachers are forced to teach in a left-brain manner. Students must memorize information. Faculty must teach for the test. Standards must be kept. No child is left behind. Schools become concerned with downloading the facts, stats, and dates.

What's more, with a struggling economy in recent years, budget cuts are being made all over the country. The first courses dropped by public schools are the “unnecessary” right brain courses: art, music, and drama. Sadly as the world shifts toward right-brain thinking, schools are focusing more and more on left-brain learning.

Albert Einstein once said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge.” What he meant was that knowledge is finite, but imagination can take a person into the infinite. Knowledge includes only what has already been developed. Imagination is about our dreams, which have no limits. Unfortunately, our educational institutions tend to revolve around self-contained “silos” of existing information. They're about lecture, drill, and test. Testing involves students regurgitating facts they have heard from instructors that semester. Not much more. Not much less.

Not long ago, I had the privilege of conducting a leadership session with the Georgia Teachers of the Year. After our time together, I realized one of the chief reasons these faculty members were chosen as the best was that they included a balance of right-brain and left-brain methods. In conversations, several of them confirmed my suspicions:

- *Schools often teach and test for questions that aren't relevant to life.*
- *Schools drill for memory rather than critical thinking.*
- *School departments function independently and don't collaborate, communicate, or look at the big picture.*
- *Schools prepare kids in a twentieth-century style for a twenty-first century world.*

Increasingly, our schools are coming to resemble George Santayana's cynical statement, "A child educated only in school is an uneducated child." And this has to stop. Those of us who teach and train students must turn a corner and transform the way we deliver our content. Lesson plans cannot be taught the way we did in 1989 or even 1999.

The culture has changed. If we are to have any hope of leading this next generation effectively, the way we teach them must change as well. How should it change? Let me suggest the following:

- *Teaching must supply not only information, but also inspiration for students.*
- *Teaching must do more than measure a kid's memory; it must motivate a kid's imagination.*
- *Teaching must cover not just the facts of history but the feelings that history produced.*
- *Teaching should not just be about increasing intelligence, but also about increasing innovation.*
- *Teaching cannot only be about **what** to think, but **how** to think.*

## Download Style with Upload Students

The disconnect between left-brain institutions and a right-brain future is not the only problem with the way we "feed" our students today. A second issue is a growing disconnect between the methods we employ to teach young people and what actually gets through to them. I already touched on this in other chapters.

For many adults, "download" is our default teaching method. We get impatient and want to pursue the shortest distance between two points. Our straight line to them is to simply download our information. We lecture. We direct. We preach. We give them books and articles to read, and we like to control the content we dish out to them.

In other words, we insist on teaching in the exact ways these students have trouble learning.

Students today are more geared to learn through uploading. As I've mentioned repeatedly, they want to express themselves, and frequently, they find out what they believe by hearing themselves talk. They grow through participation. And they're used to the free flow of information with multiple sources, so they expect to interact with those sources. "Just listening" to a single voice is not only boring to them; increasingly, it doesn't make sense.

My colleague, Holly Moore, and I had lunch with Jennifer Martin, who heads up digital public relations at CNN. She candidly shared how much this emerging generation is affecting her work at CNN, the largest news broadcasting company in the world. A nineteen-year old blogger named Brian Stelter began blogging and tweeting the news he picked up on CNN — basically, uploading his comments to his followers like a reporter. There was no criminal involvement; he was just reaching out to his mushrooming network of people all over the world.

The legal department at CNN felt they should step in and stop the whole thing. But Jennifer (just beyond a twenty-something herself) saw a whole new opportunity. She got in touch with Brian and began to collaborate instead of compete. They decided it was a good thing to utilize his uploads. In fact, shortly thereafter, Jennifer launched a new division for CNN called iReport that took the idea to a whole new level. The Web site iReport.com provides the opportunity for ordinary people to upload their own eyewitness news and video to CNN in real time.

This is all difficult for the adult generation because control and centralization are evaporating quickly. If we want to influence our future leaders, wise adults need to steer the conversation. We must rethink what our message is and how we're transmitting it to the next generation.

## Mind the Gap

While visiting England, I have often traveled by train and subway. During my last trip, I found myself listening with fresh ears to a phrase that is used hundreds of times each day as passengers board: "Mind the gap." It's a

reminder to travelers that there is a space between the platform and the train, and they need to be careful as they board to avoid falling.

This is my sentiment exactly when it comes to how we lead the next generation — we must “mind the gap” between our world and the world our young people experience. The chart below shows this gap clearly and suggests why typical education methods often fail to engage students today:

<b>The Gap</b>	
<b>Students today...</b>	<b>Schools today...</b>
Typically are right-brained thinkers	Typically use left-brained delivery
Learn by uploading; expressing themselves	Teach by downloading lectures
Are experiential by inclination	Are passive by nature
Are helped by music and art to retain information	Are having music and art programs cut back or eliminated
Desire to learn what is relevant to life	Teach for the next test
Are driven by creativity	Are driven by curriculum

Keep in mind that schools are not the only culprits here. Companies, nonprofit organizations, military bases, and other government agencies are also slow in keeping up with the shift to the Conceptual Age. We insist on communicating information the way it was communicated to us years ago. We stick with what’s familiar, not what is most effective. This is part of the reason we experience such disparity between college graduates entering the marketplace and the Baby Boomers supervising them.

Once again, I’m not just saying we need to make everything “fun.” I’m certainly not suggesting that we dumb down our curricula, adopt a touchy-feely approach that sacrifices content for “relevance” or employs technology for technology’s sake. I’m just suggesting we put thought into how we can best bridge the gap between how we teach and how this generation learns.

No doubt, the young people who make up the next generation need to grow up and become adults. They even need to get used to work that isn’t always fun. Company executives and college professors remind me of this all the time. The future success of today’s students will be based on whether they can transition to a grownup world that’s not always glitzy, glamorous, or entertaining.

I get it. However, all good communicators follow a rule we’d do well to remember: Begin where your audience lives. We must start with a method they are familiar with and build a bridge to a place they are not yet familiar with.

To do this, I think it might be helpful to pay attention to precisely how young people learn and how we can best teach them.

## **The Learning Journey**

Have you ever wondered what happens inside of a young person when she really discovers something new? What enables a kid to be captured by an insight or remember an important truth?

These are questions that leaders, parents, and teachers must take seriously if we intend to connect with students today. To help answer them, I’d like to describe the stages of the internal learning journey as I’ve come to understand it. Based on my research and my own experience, this description follows what happens in a student’s brain when he or she is confronted with a new idea or input from somebody else.

I’ve also tried to show how adults can most effectively steer students through this journey—basically, how we can help them learn. If you’re a leader, you can apply this to your next team meeting. If you’re a teacher, you can apply this to your next lesson plan. If you’re a parent, you can apply this to the wise counsel you plan to share this week.

Note that for each stage, I pinpoint the internal status of the reader — the mental and emotional response to what is happening. Note also that while I’ve listed this as a measured, step-by-step process, it rarely works that way

in real life. Some stages happen quickly, almost instantaneously, while others will take some time.

### **Stage 1: Incentive**

*Internal Status: Desire (“I Have a Need and Must Find a Solution.”)*

Youth have strong filters and screen out most messages coming at them. Leaders and teachers who want them to listen must first provide them a reason for tuning in — convince them that the information is relevant and nurture an internal desire to receive it. One way of doing this is to create a dilemma that your input will address.

### **Stage 2: Disequilibrium**

*Internal Status: Resistance (“This Is an Uncomfortable, Unfamiliar Situation.”)*

Once we’ve created an incentive to learn, leaders/teachers must welcome the idea that young people may experience a period of discomfort or awkwardness. They may resist at first, especially if the new data opposes what they assume to be true. Most genuine learning happens after this period of resistance.

### **Stage 3: Schema**

*Internal Status: Urge for Connection (“I Must Relate the Unfamiliar Concept to a Familiar One.”)*

A schema is essentially a mental file, a way of organizing information in our minds (if you were an education major in college, you probably recognize this term). We all make use of schemas when we learn something new and unfamiliar. Usually we compare it to the familiar we already embrace. An effective teacher helps the learner make these connections through the use of metaphors or analogies.

### **Stage 4: Emotion**

*Internal Status: Ignition (“My Neurotransmitters Spark Feelings and Emotions Inside.”)*

Once a young person grasps a concept and connects it with previous understandings, his neurotransmitters begin to fire. This process sparks emotions as well as thoughts. Leaders/teachers should acknowledge this reality and give encouragement. When both the mind and emotions are ignited, real learning takes place.

### **Stage 5: Social Integration**

*Internal Status: Processing (“I Need to Respond and Interact.”)*

Learning is enhanced when young people are permitted to process the data they’ve just received and integrate it socially with others. It may be their peers or with a mentor, but at this stage, they both share with and listen to the responses of others. This stage occurs best when there is abundant interaction and debate and when many angles are examined.

### **Stage 6: Filters and Pushback**

*Internal Status: Conclusion (“My Filters Screen Out the Illogical and Produce Ideas.”)*

Young people hear and process others’ responses to the data, then perhaps push back against many of them until they can figure out what fits their rationale or worldview. Then they draw their own conclusions. At this point they may agree and disagree with the viewpoints of others. Educators commonly call this stage “dendrites” after the brain cells that grow and branch during the process of learning.

### **Stage 7: Active Involvement**

*Internal Status: Action (“My Grasp Increases as My Experience Reinforces What I Have Learned.”)*

Learning is sealed when young people move beyond simply discussing information, and they get to experience firsthand what they have learned. This is commonly called experiential learning, and it’s all about reflection and practice. Students learn best when they are allowed to act on what they’ve learned and confirm the information through application.

## **The Learning Journey in Practice**

I recently watched a twenty-something experience each of these stages. Justin (not his real name) is sharp, but a little cocky and self-confident. Consequently, he’s not always open to the idea that others may know more than he



does. He tends to live in his own little world, and he's quite comfortable being "king" of that world.

In a mentoring meeting a few months ago, I shared some insights with Justin that I felt would be helpful to his budding career. He had taken a job with a growing company but wasn't enjoying the day-to-day grind, and he wanted to quit. I shared some steps he could take to test if that was the right decision. Unfortunately, my insights went against his assumptions. He felt I was asking him to compromise who he was and to "kiss up" to his supervisor.

Instead of getting defensive or impatient, I decided to ease into stage one by creating a dilemma in his mind. I convinced him that the issue we were talking about represented a principle he would face many times over the course of his career. He started to listen.

After that, I shared a management principle and gave him the supervisor's point of view. Because he didn't see things that way, we entered stage two: disequilibrium. I allowed for some silent awkwardness as he considered his situation. In a few minutes, we were ready for stage three.

I suggested a schema and shared one of our *Habitudes*<sup>®</sup> with him. It made sense to Justin, but now he had to experience the next two stages: emotion and social integration. I told him to take some time and bounce his thoughts off of other people, but I suggested he do that with a variety of people of different ages.

He agreed. Over the next week, he experienced the next stage: pushback and filter. He had to determine what he agreed with and what he didn't. I gave him time to do this.

Finally, Justin tried out my advice. He entered stage seven and acted on it. The good news is, he gained a bigger perspective through the whole experience and stayed at his job. I may have won the debate, but Justin was the real winner in that situation.

### Are You Getting Through?

It's time that all of us who are involved with leading young people today take a good look at our leadership and teaching methods. Ask yourself:

- Am I primarily a left-brain or a right-brain communicator?
- How can I balance my approach to engage both sides of the brain?
- Am I preparing students in a relevant way for their entrance into the real world?
- Can I find more creative ways to deliver content?
- Do I allow enough time for my students to respond creatively?

## A Reality Show for Adults Who Want to Communicate

We all want our young people to grow and achieve, to live both happily and responsibly. That means we should give serious attention to the way we lead, teach, coach, direct, inspire, and help this generation. And to do that, we need to face certain realities about what works with them and what doesn't. We must intentionally "feed" them in ways they can swallow.

To that end, I'd like to relay a set of realities that guide me whenever I prepare to lead or speak to young people. Based on the learning process I have previously described, these simple ideas help me connect with my own two kids as well as with the young people I teach worldwide. Perhaps they'll work for you as well.

1. **Students today learn on a "need to know" basis.** Don't just jump into your topic when you communicate. Take time to explain the relevance of what you're teaching. 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.** Don't forget: 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. An effective leader uses what is cultural to say what is timeless.
3. **The less predictable your words, the more memorable they will be.** Spend as much time on the "how" of your delivery as you do the "what" of your content. Will they miss what you're saying because it's old news shared

in an old way? Find a fresh way to say it, with a new twist. Avoid clichés like the plague.

4. **The first four minutes must grab their head or their heart if you want to sustain their interest.** Be quick to get to some content or reveal your own heart. Provide a reason for them to listen by stimulating their minds or their emotions. Share your story. Be transparent. Take them on a journey; enlist them quickly to join you on this adventure of growth.
5. **The best learning occurs in a social context.** Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky is famous for confirming this. A student's worldview emerges from interaction with others.
6. **The more “in your face” your words are, the more trust you will earn.** Students love to speak their minds and tend to trust communicators who are blunt in the same way. Don't be afraid to be forthright and truthful. You don't have to be rude, but be straightforward.
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 a renegade, but simply that you're rethinking assumptions from the past. Demonstrate you are open to change.
8. **They grew up loving images, so give them a metaphor.** This is just another reminder. This generation's world is MTV, video games, photos, DVDs, VH1 and the Internet — you must have a picture too. This will help them retain your message. I try to give them a point for their left brain and a picture for their right brain.
9. **Accelerate learning by pairing students with a partner, peer, or mentor.** By learning together, they experience growth firsthand but can also learn through observing an advanced partner. So provide a guide when possible. Again, relationships are key. Students tend to learn better in circles than in rows.
10. **Once you prepare your message, you must find a way to twist it to exceed their expectations.** Movies and popular novels stand out when they add another layer of story. The story creates buzz because it includes unexpected elements and delivers more than was promised. Adjusting communication in this direction can really help you connect with students. Once you know your message, get creative on your delivery.
11. **For your message to be remembered, keep the pace of change high and call students to change.** *Change* is the key word here. Students know their world is changing fast, and they don't sit still for very long. They also plan to change their world. Your communication must reflect this. Your talk should be full of changes. Try to engage different learning styles in a single message.
12. **It's best to teach less for more.** Even while you're changing approaches, keep the central message simple and focused. Although this sounds contradictory, it isn't. To be remembered, don't attempt to deliver a large variety of topics. You need a strong, focused message to get through these students' strong filters. Use creative elements, but stick to your point.
13. **Remember, students today are both high-performance and high maintenance.** Walk the delicate balance between nurture and 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. **Include a challenge.** Students today hunger to participate in projects that are very important and almost impossible to accomplish. They love moving toward a goal when it is significant and others may feel it cannot be done. Make use of this tendency whenever possible. Engage students by appealing to their love of challenge.

## Teaching Kids to Change the World

Chris Hughes may just be a prime example of this generation's response to adults who give young people the opportunity to participate in a cause.

You may have heard of Chris. As a cofounder of Facebook, this Harvard student helped changed the way the world connects through a Web site. Interestingly, that wasn't enough for him. During the 2008 presidential campaign, he attended a rally and heard Barak Obama. Like many twenty-somethings, he was intrigued by Obama's message.

If you stop and think about it, the Obama campaign was run much like an SGA campaign at a university. It was about a cause to buy into, and it was about hope and change. It felt very grassroots at the beginning, much like a college campus. So Chris felt right at home with the campaign and offered his services. The campaign leaders were receptive but reserved. They had no idea what a kid could do to transform a political campaign, but they did give Chris a cubicle and computer. That's when he set about changing everything about the way people got involved in politics.

Chris created multiple Web sites to register voters, enlist volunteers, set up local town-hall meetings, ask for ideas, and put people to work. People were given the opportunity to weigh in and express their opinions on the issues as well as on how they felt the campaign could work in their community.

The online community Chris created made a difference. The young adults who responded to Chris's innovations helped determine the way the Obama campaign reached its goal (remember, young people support what they help create). In a sense, Chris mobilized a generation to elect his candidate. *Fast Company* magazine called him "The Kid Who Made Obama President."<sup>4</sup>

You may not agree with what Chris did or what he stands for. You don't have to agree. I am only asking you to look at what happened when someone in the adult world paid serious attention to what a student could do. Chris's accomplishment is a picture of the vast potential of this rising generation.

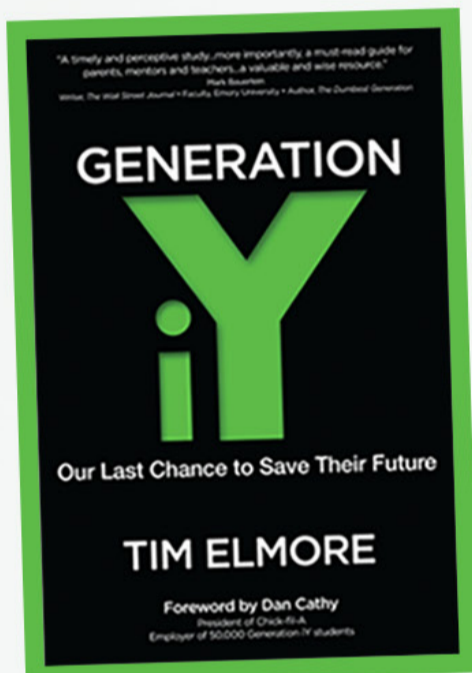
They can do so much if we let them. And we can learn so much if we just pay attention to how they think and how they learn. Once we learn to "feed" them appropriately, we might be surprised at how they grow.

## Citations

1. Leonard Sweet introduced this acronym in the book, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000). Growing Leaders has expanded on this idea over the years and applied it directly to leadership training.
2. The Cone of Experience was first published in Edgar Dale's book, *Audio-Visual Methods in Teaching* (New York: Dryden, 1948) and revised slightly in the 1969 edition. Since then, many others have adapted his ideas. My list here is based on Dale's revised list with my own parenthetical explanations.
3. Daniel H. Pink, *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future* (New York: Riverhead, 2005), 2.
4. Ellen McGirt, "How Chris Hughes Helped Launch Facebook and the Barack Obama Campaign," *Fast Company*, April 1, 2009, <http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/134/boy-wonder.html>.



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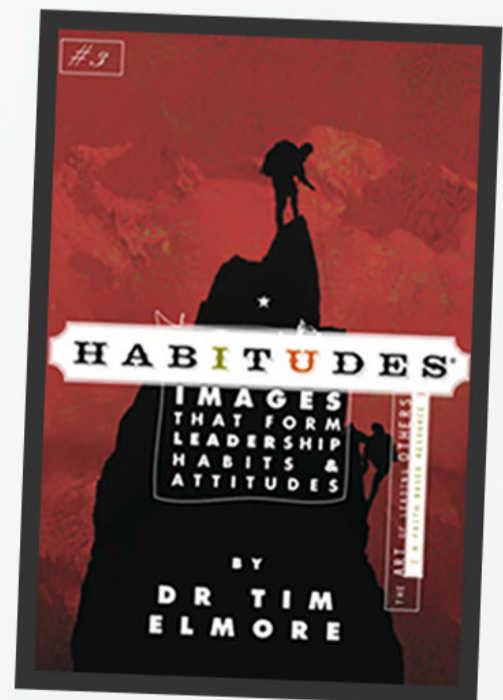
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