Some Challenges of Managing The Millennial Generation And Their Dependency on Social Media
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You all raised many intriguing ideas in the Presence Seminar. The discussion we had about the problem of the "Millennials" and their insistence that they must have their smart phones and other social media technology all of the time stayed with me the most. I have thought about the discussion repeatedly and finished Sherry Turkel's book, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*. (The book would be useful for you to read and many of the following ideas are from Turkel.) That process of mulling over your ideas and reading her book helped me to look at the problem in a new way. Here are some of my thoughts, which I hope will be useful to you.

To set the context for our analysis, here is the basic content of the seminar. We examined what enhances or contributes to executive presence, what kills it, and how to develop it. Incivility was a significant killer of executive presence; and of the 30 listed acts of incivility one was "Checking e-mail or texting messages during a meeting." A significant amount of time and energy was spent on the belief that the millennial generation would never give that up. The feeling was that they are tied to their smart phones and committed to being "connected" through technology.

The easiest answer to the discussion is that those subordinates you described will not develop presence for all of the reasons we explored in the seminar. They will not be civil, which will undermine any positive traits they have that would create executive presence. More importantly, that particular incivility means they will be poor at some of the requirements for positively impacting others. They won't listen adequately, make much eye contact, or be fully present, to mention just a few of the positives they will lack.

If the "millennials" clients want to have smart phones, tablets and other technology ever present, as they claim, then it is a matter of "being a member of their tribe." Even as a member of their clients' tribe, however, they will not have presence. They will not provoke disgust but they won't exhibit the positive attributes that result in executive presence. So, as far as the seminar topic, "Executive Presence" is concerned they either need help or it is a waste of time to try to develop executive presence in them. This, at least is information, which can help you decide where to put your resources.

The problem you raised is much more than cell phones and executive presence, however. It is not just that they won't develop executive presence; it is that they **don't want to develop it**. They fear being out of control and don't know how to listen. For those reasons and others they have problems with **conversations** (versus social media **communications**). Conversations require face-to-face discussions and more. Why would I say they fear many of the things that create executive presence? Let's start with some generalizations.

A few relevant statistics:

- First, let's examine what they were like before going to work for you and what the next group is like. American teenagers:

- o 25% connected to a device within five minutes of waking up;

- o 80% sleep with their phones;

- o 40% do not "unplug," ever; and

- o Most send 100 texts a day.

- For the past 20 years there has been a 40 percent decline in the markers for empathy among college students, most in the past ten years. (Empathy is a part of many of the positive qualities of executive presence.)

- Average American adults check their phones every 6.5 minutes.

- A conference call provider, used by 85% of Fortune 100 firms found what people do during conference call meetings:

  - o 65 % do other work,

  - o 63 % send email,

  - o 55 % eat or make food,

  - o 47 % go to the bathroom,

  - o 6 % take another phone call.[1]

There are many more statistics but those are enough for this brief analysis.

Because of the way the brain functions, when people (not just the "millennials") are on social media and multitasking they feel comfortable and in control. They feel more in control of their time and self-presentation. They feel good in the moment because of the digital reminders that they are wanted, accepted, and exposing only their good side. There is minimal risk of shame. They have a momentary spike in self-confidence. Unfortunately all of this only lasts as long as they are on social media or multitasking. The long-term effects on their personalities are negative.

When using social media, everyone learns to share only the positive—that way they get "Likes." Sharing only the positive leaves people insecure because they don't have experience with being accepted when their "warts" are seen. And everyone has "warts." A big part of growing up is learning how to deal with the unattractive, messy, even uncivilized parts of our Selves. We can only do that if we become aware of them and work on them with other people who accept us even as they are aware of our imperfections.

One piece of evidence for this is that the percentage of college students who feel safe and trusting in their attachments has decreased and the percentage who feel insecure in their attachments has increased. Social media users are also less willing to discuss their views off-line[2] (in the "dangerous," unedited world of live, present people).

Heavy use of social media does not just affect them emotionally. Their capacity for deep thinking and focused attention are diminished. Nicholas Carr noted that the more one lives a life online, the more incapable one is of quiet reverie (and by extension, deep reading and full-attention conversation).

All of this impacts the kind of relationships they will develop. People learn several things from social media. Those include:

- "Instead of promoting the value of authenticity, it encourages performing.
- "Instead of teaching the rewards of vulnerability, it suggests that you put on your best face.
- "Instead of learning how to listen, you learn what goes into an effective broadcast."[3]

The lessons learned from the pleasure and hidden values of social media have some personal and interpersonal consequences. Over time, users only feel comfortable communicating when on social media. It is gradual and the younger people begin the less experience they have of responding any way but the way social media dictates. They begin to lose, or never develop, social skills, empathy, confidence, conversation skills, and the ability to look others in the eye. Not only do they have diminished ability to read emotions, they have decreased self-control.

What professionals who work with relationships (developing them, fixing them, and working with them to get things done) see as problematic the heavy social media users see as only natural. They make themselves less vulnerable to each other and feel less connected with people (either on the net or off line). They are also handicapped because they have difficulty reading human emotions, including their own. When they have to deal with unpredictability (a quality of authentic relationships), they become impatient, anxious, and disoriented.

A further impersonal problem for relationships develops from using technology in meetings and classes. Open screens degrade the performance of everyone who can see them. That undermines relationships and problem solving as a team.

Employers note that those people who grew up with smartphones:

- Come to work with unexpected phobias and anxieties;
- Don't know how to begin and end conversations;
- Have a hard time making eye contact; and
- Talking on the telephone makes them anxious.[4]

Furthermore, social media encourages multitasking. It almost demands it. Multitasking encourages brevity and simplicity, even when more is called for. From a neurophysiological point of view, a multitasking life keeps one in a state similar to vigilance. That means such people are on continual alert and can follow only the most rudimentary arguments.

Those consequences of multitasking will interfere with solving problems. They diminish the person's ability to explore problems in depth and make him or her vulnerable to latching onto simplistic, trendy solutions to problems like mentoring or how to build relationships for selling.

These are a few of the reasons why frequent multitasking is associated with depression, social anxiety, and trouble reading human emotions.[5]

All of those liabilities are in contrast to face-to-face conversations. As a matter of fact, having significant time and experience in relationships without any distractions of

technology can fix those problems and contributes to business success. Face-to-face conversation results in:

- Greater self-esteem;
- Improved ability to deal with others;
- Reduced stress; and
- Higher productivity (for example software teams produce programs with fewer bugs when they talk more).[6]

This "conversation effect" doesn't work the same way for online encounters. What matters is being face-to-face.

If people who are dependent upon social media are told they need to work to improve their face-to-face, unedited, interpersonal skills, they will probably resist. To even consider it will make them feel anxious, frustrated, and defensive (for example, feeling contempt toward the person who suggests it). This resistance will last until they see the worth of long-term goals over short-term pleasure. All personal (not technical) growth requires tolerating anxiety, frustration and other unpleasant emotions. Also, those who get better at relationships and managing themselves will need to learn how to manage shame, not avoid it. They will have to deal with the different ways they are incompetent. Ways they didn't even think made a difference. Thus, they will experience the different forms of shame (embarrassment, self consciousness, etc.).

We all have a challenge if we are to bring along this young group of bright, educated, and technically competent new workers. They don't know what they are missing and their insecurity can make them act arrogantly when they are confronted with their weaknesses. They must learn how to deal with exposed weaknesses. Up to this point in their lives they have been taught to only show the positive side of themselves and always win.[7] To see personal problems as opportunities and learning from failures as the path to better judgment and personal growth seem nonsensical to many of them.

You are experienced leaders and have your own tested ways of developing your sales leaders and their subordinates. This information is intended to support you by giving you more data and some additional understanding. Understanding is the most important element when it comes to working with and changing people.

When we encounter more information we think will be helpful to you we will send it along (unless you tell us you don't want it).

1. Turkel, S., *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*

2. Ibid

3. Ibid

4. Ibid

5. Ibid

6. Ibid

7. Ibid