



Chapter Six

Where Mixed Generations Work Well Together

Not all generationally mixed workplaces are awash with strife and tension. More than a few organizations are tapping into the positive potential of their generationally diverse workforces. They are harnessing the power in the convergence of diverse viewpoints, passions, and inspirations.

There are two keys to creating a successful intergenerational workforce: aggressive communication and difference deployment.

In *aggressive communication*, generational conflicts and potential conflicts are anticipated and surfaced. Generational differences are based primarily on unarticulated assumptions and unconscious criteria; therefore, surfacing them takes a giant step toward resolving them. The energy of behind-the-back complaining, passive-aggressive behavior, and open hostility is rechanneled to projects that can profit from different points of view, particularly the fresh perspectives of the young

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and the wisdom of experience. In the best and brightest intergenerational companies, overcommunication is the rule. These organizations are rife with ad hoc small group discussions, generationally integrated staff meetings, e-mail messages, and water cooler chats, conversation rich with talk about differing viewpoints and perspectives on vital issues of the day. And there's as much listening going on as there is talking. Unfortunately, many organizations continue to stagger along amidst the wreckage of intergenerational warfare with constant passive-aggressive verbal attacks and veiled accusations, just hoping the problems will somehow take care of themselves. But the companies profiled here have chosen to address generational issues head-on and to validate the differing points of view. They take the time to talk openly about what the different cohorts and the individuals within them are looking for on the job; what makes work rewarding . . . which environments are most productive . . . what types of work load, schedules, and policies contribute to a workplace that attracts and retains people of differing needs, viewpoints, and expectations of job and work.

Difference deployment is, simply, the tactical use of employees with different backgrounds, experiences, skills, and viewpoints to strengthen project teams, customer contact functions, and, at times, whole departments and units. In generationally "blind" organizations, managers and human resource departments labor mightily to homogenize employees; to fit them to a single template of the "good employee" (and to make employees as alike and easily predictable as possible). But as the head of employee selection research at a large mainframe computer manufacturer succinctly put the problem for us: "We spent years and millions learning to hire people just like the people who were already here. We never bothered to ask whether the people who could best fit in today would be able to help us survive tomorrow . . . until it was almost too late." It is an approach, a system, whose time is well past.

Generationally savvy organizations value the differences between people and look at differences as strengths. Generationally balanced workgroups—balanced not in the arithmetic but in a psychic sense—respect and learn from yesterday's experiences, understand today's pressures, dilemmas, and needs, and believe that tomorrow will be different still. They are comfortable with the relative rather than absolute nature of a situation, knowledge, skill, value, and, most of all, solutions to problems.

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In generationally dysfunctional organizations, where generational uniqueness—as well as other important, individual differences—are subjugated by a desire to create one culture that requires individuals to "fit in," the result is pasteurization and placation. Although pasteurized organizations think of themselves as harmoniously diverse, they are paying a premium in stagnant thinking, lost creativity, and an absence of diverse opinions. Pasteurized organizations may look harmonious and productive in an outside-in snapshot, but the "glue" of that harmony is an expensive adhesive. It is based on strong adherence to peace and harmony over the outcome and the necessary innovative demands of the contemporary marketplace. Friction-free interpersonal relations are more immediately important than present and future productivity potential. Typically, younger workers are squirreled away in creative departments, new product and design groups, and the secretarial pool. Although on some level individuals feel they are cared for and "accepted," they are usually on the lookout for a workplace where they can fit in unconditionally and where their uniqueness will be seen as valid and acceptable, not simply as tolerable oddities.

The Way They See the World

	Veterans	Boomers	Xers	Nexters
Outlook	Practical	Optimistic	Skeptical	Hopeful
Work ethic	Dedicated	Driven	Balanced	Determined
View of authority	Respectful	Love/hate	Unimpressed	Polite
Leadership by	Hierarchy	Consensus	Competence	Pulling together
Relationships	Personal sacrifice	Personal gratification	Reluctant to commit	Inclusive
Turnoffs	Vulgarity	Political incorrectness	Cliché, hype	Promiscuity

The ACORN Imperatives

As we've gotten to know the companies featured in this chapter and other successful cross-generational friendly companies, we've been struck by five specific similarities or common approaches to making

their environments generationally comfortable and focusing their people's energies on the business of the business. We've come to think of these as the ACORN imperatives, five potent precepts or operating ideas that these companies are using to grow oak-strong organizations.

As you peruse the profiles, be aware of why these organizations accommodate differences, build nontraditional workplaces, exhibit flexibility, emphasize respectful relations, and focus on retaining talented and gifted associates. More specifically, be on the lookout for the variety of ways these companies:

1. Accommodate employee differences. With employee retention at or near the top of the list of corporate "must meet" measures, the most generationally friendly of companies are treating their employees as they do their customers. They are learning all they can about them, working to meet their specific needs, and serving them according to their unique preferences. They have painstakingly figured out what their employees' preferences are and have done everything they can to create a friendlier workplace in tangible and symbolic ways. There is real, not hypothetical, effort to accommodate personal scheduling needs, work-life balance issues, and nontraditional lifestyles. Each generation's icons, language, and precepts are acknowledged, and language is used that reflects generations other than those "at the top"; see, for example, West Group's Café.com as a smallish environmental accommodation and acknowledgment that nonetheless has meant much to the company's employees.

2. Create workplace choices. The companies profiled here are a far cry from the stereotypical corporate environments of the 1950s and 1960s where everything was predictable and regimented from the executive boardroom to the way secretaries greeted executives in the morning to the standard memo format. Generationally friendly companies allow the workplace to shape itself around the work being done, the customers being served, and the people who work there. Dress policies tend to be casual. The height and width of the chain of command tend to be foreshortened, and decreased bureaucracy is taken on as a clear goal. "Change" is

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not so much the name of a training seminar or a core value listed somewhere in the mission statement as it is an assumed way of living and working. All hands have a shared understanding of the temporary nature of "hot ideas" and the danger of emulating *Fast Company's* business of the month. They understand that leadership in an industry or a product area doesn't come with an insurance policy, nor does the accompanying organizational prosperity. In all these companies, the atmosphere could be described as relaxed and informal. There's an element of humor and playfulness about most of their endeavors.

3. Operate from a sophisticated management style. You will notice the managers interviewed in the following profiles are a bit more polished than the norm; they operate with a certain finesse. They tend to be more direct. Generationally friendly managers don't have much time for circumlocution, "B.S.," as one put it to us, although they are tactful. They give those who report to them the big picture, specific goals and measures, then they turn their people loose giving them feedback, reward and recognition as appropriate.

There are seven attributes that characterize their flexibility:

1. Their supervisory style is not fixed. How closely they monitor and manage, for instance, is a product of each individual's track record and personal preferences. Control and autonomy are a continuum, not solitary options.
2. Their leadership style is situationally varied. Some decisions are consensually made; others are made by the manager, but with input and consultation.
3. They depend less on positional than on personal power.
4. They know when and how to make personal policy exceptions, without causing a team riot.
5. They are thoughtful when matching individuals to a team or a team or individual to an

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6. They balance concern for tasks and concern for people. They are neither slave drivers nor country club managers.

7. They understand the elements of trust and work to gain it from their employees. They are perceived as fair, inclusive, good communicators, and competent in their own right.

4. Respect competence and initiative. The old "manufacturing mode" of business was based on the precept that people are inherently "sliders" who are not all that interested in putting their best efforts forward without fairly close supervision and monitoring. The companies profiled here are very much a part of the knowledge and service economy. They assume the best of their people. They treat everyone, from the newest recruit to the most seasoned employee, as if they have great things to offer and are motivated to do their best. It is an attitude that has, in these companies, become a self-fulfilling prophecy. These companies hire carefully and do much to assure a good match between people and work. But they seem never to forget that they hired the best possible people for a reason—so that they will endeavor to do the best possible job.

5. Nourish retention. Many organizations are yet unaware there's a labor shortage, or at least they act that way. They expect employees to bend to the company's will and to adapt to meet the demands of the company culture. Then the executives complain about their high turnover, the difficulty of finding good people, and the skyrocketing costs of replacing those who've left. Generationally friendly companies are concerned and focused, on a daily basis, with retention, and on making their workplaces magnets for excellence—not employee-toxic. They know that keeping their people is every bit as important in today's economy as finding and retaining customers. Therefore, they offer lots of training, from one-on-one coaching opportunities to interactive computer-based training to an extensive and varied menu of classroom courses. Not only do

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they encourage regular lateral movement within their organizations, but they have broadened assignments. No longer do insurance claims adjusters, for example, process only a small part of the claim. Today they take it from the initial call to the settlement check, which provides variety and challenge, and it allows employees to develop a range of skills.

You may notice something else unusual: these organizations market internally. In other words, they spend time learning how to become the employer of choice in their industry and region, and they continually "sell the benefits" to retain the best and brightest of their employees. Not a disingenuous internal public relations program, but a clear, conscious effort to remind employees of the good things the company offers.

Read any or all of the following profiles and see if these five principles don't shout their presence and importance to you.

FIVE THAT SUCCEED	
Chevys Fresh Mex	TGI Friday's
Ben & Jerry's Homemade, Inc.	
West Group	Lucent Technologies

From Food Service to High Tech

Nowhere is the potential for generational conflict more obvious and prevalent—and more in need of positive management—than in the food service business. It is an industry highly dependent on the youth of America for both its labor force and its market. And it is, all too often, a business fraught with "kick the cat" employee and customer relations. When the manager has a bad day, be the genesis of that sour mood personal or professional, employees have a bad day. This, in turn, is passed right along to the customer with the salad and sandwich, at no extra charge. The net effect is a customer turned off and turned away, and an employee rethinking the option of a career in land mine

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removal. Increasingly, and especially in a tight labor market, it is a behavior pattern that is costing people in the food service industry the services of perfectly competent employees. A study by the Foodservice Research Forum found the factor that most often turns young people off to the food service industry was neither pay nor the kind of work involved. Rather, it was—and is—the behavior of managers toward employees, particularly employees like themselves.¹

Making the mixed generational workplace work is imperative to both the operational and marketing success in the food service business. These businesses need employees from all generational groups, from Veterans to Nexters, to succeed. Turn off too many of these employees and labor costs go out of control. Keep on the payroll too many disaffected but options-limited employees who take their dissatisfaction out on customers, and those customers will abandon you for more pleasant environs.

The first two of our five profiles of companies with generationally friendly environments and successful accommodation efforts come from the chain restaurant business. The first is San Francisco-based Chevys Fresh Mex, a full-service restaurant chain with ninety locations and a straight-up growth curve. The second is the older, larger, and much more corporate TGI Friday's, a brand of Dallas-based Carlson restaurants. Both depend on youth and vigor to make their concepts work, and both have focused intensively on ways of making their workplaces cross-generationally friendly. The third profile, also in the food business—this time the food processing business—is a company of a very different stripe: Ben & Jerry's Homemade, Inc., is a company founded on different philosophies with a different vision. But like Chevys and Friday's, it is a mixed generational friendly company as well.

Tempted to dismiss Ben & Jerry's as a bit odd and "way out," and Friday's and Chevys as organizations that of necessity must cater to younger employees' expectations and demands? Okay. Not an unusual or unexpected reaction. But it is a bit harder to dismiss the cross-generational efforts and successes of West Group and Lucent Technologies, two companies in the mainstream of buttoned-down corporate America. Both of those organizations have indeed focused on, and succeeded at, creating effective mixed-generation workplaces, and they have done so for a very similar, very pragmatic reason: to bring the best of all their employees to bear on creating a high-performance workplace and highly competitive

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organizations. Both of these companies have made major efforts to be more generationally friendly and are seeing those effort pay off. If nothing else, they demonstrate the seriousness of the need.

In all of these real-world examples, you will notice something conspicuously absent: efforts to accommodate the Boomers and the Veterans aren't all that evident. Maybe you've already figured it out. But accommodating the generational preferences of these two groups falls under what we call the "status quo-efficient." That means that because the Boomers now dictate the corporate culture, and Veterans did so until very recently, very little adaptation to these cohorts' preferences needs to occur. They have created the status quo in their own image of the workplace. Like the new house on the block or the new building downtown, the companies in these profiles stick out from the structures around them. The rest of the buildings and houses around them may be perfectly constructed and even beautiful pieces of architecture, but we are accustomed to seeing them and they consequently don't attract our collective eye.

That said, there are aspects of some of these companies that are obvious products of a Boomer culture. Check out Thompson University at West Group, IdeaVerse at Lucent, and the whole culture at Ben & Jerry's if you want to see rampant Boomerism in action. In most cases, a Veteran vision of the workplace is part of a fading status quo-efficient. Companies trying to "embrace change" are discarding the old ways of working, whether they were effective or counterproductive, in favor of new organizations and remodeled corporations. You still see the Veteran's work preferences in many companies and, in some places, it's still the predominant way to work.

Nevertheless, the challenge for progressive companies, now and in the future, will be to keep enough of the "old ways" of working while cementing the new Boomer-centric status quo-efficient and accommodating Xer needs and expectations. Now more than ever, organizations will need to make older employees feel like they are part of the company's future. Wise companies will need to be more explicit about which parts of the work ethos they will never discard while changing their cultures to embrace the new corporate culture.

Boomers invented the concept of niche marketing, and they may be forced to turn that same lens on their own corporate culture. Maybe then this dominant generation can do an even better job of accommodating the various cohorts they must now manage.

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Chevys Fresh Mex

	Founded:	1986
	Headquarters:	San Francisco, California
	CEO:	Scott Bergren
	No. of stores:	100+ stores
	Sales (million):	\$2-4 /store
	Distinctions:	Everything prepared fresh, every day

When Kevin Bradley, director of training for Chevys Fresh Mex, was coming up through the ranks of the restaurant industry, there wasn't much talk about work-life balance. As little as a half dozen years ago, if you were a young restaurant manager, you worked nights. You worked weekends. You closed the restaurant, slept a few hours, and turned around to open it again the next morning. Fifteen-hour shifts were common if your store was short a manager. To get ahead you had to live, eat, and breathe your job. That's just the way it was.

Climbing your restaurant's corporate ladder, you could count on this: Every Mother's Day, you'd be seating happy families ready to enjoy a nice meal. New Year's Eve, Fourth of July, Christmas Eve, Easter—name a holiday and you, as a young manager, would certainly work it. As your children's school plays came and went unattended, as their soccer tournaments were fought and won uncheered, as your spouse waited not-so-patiently at home night after night, and as your friends enjoyed those long weekend vacations, you were helping servers out of the weeds—pitching in when they were overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of customers and orders—seating hungry diners, and doing spread sheets.

And throughout, you were thinking one thing: "When I'm general manager, I won't have to do this anymore. It will be someone else's turn to pay their dues."

Wrong. Welcome to the age of "Get a life!" The rules have changed.

There are big changes swirling around in the restaurant industry, driven by the juggernaut of Generation X servers and managers who make up much of that industry's growing employee base. Many restau-

rant companies, like the San Francisco-based Chevys Fresh Mex, are finding that the old ways just don't work with this new breed of worker.

It's about quality of life, and the unmitigated gall of Generation X restaurant employees to insist that they have some; and that when they are at work, they be treated with dignity and respect.

Chevys has had to make some major changes in its training and in its culture to come to terms with its Generation X employee base. It all started when Bradley began looking for new ways to attract, train, and retain good people. That troika—attract, train, retain—has motivated change in the restaurant industry, and at Chevys, as never before. Turnover in Chevys' segment of the industry average runs well over 100 percent a year; some insiders would argue 200 percent is a more truthful figure. Traditionally, getting good people wasn't a problem for Chevys. The opportunity of working on the ground floor of a fast-growing company was a great draw for talented servers and managers. As with most restaurant companies, keeping good employees was always the tricky part. And in today's lush economy, it has become even trickier. There is always something better, or at least different, on the other side of the fence, says Bradley, and good people were indeed being lured away by the competition.

"We just wanted to shut the back door," says Bradley. "We were even letting good managers leave. We had to stop that."

The migration was caused only partly by the economy, he says. It also was driven by the nature of this new breed of manager and server. "Our managers—and all the good managers in this industry these days—are getting cold called every day by headhunters and managers of other restaurants," he says. "We absolutely need to slam that back door shut and pay attention to what we weren't doing to keep these people." It boiled down to quality, he says. Quality of life and quality of work.

"We're fighting the restaurant reputation of eighty-hour, six-day workweeks," he says. "We needed to make changes or we were going to lose more good managers, not only to other restaurants, but to other industries that don't require such crazy schedules." (This, of course, addresses the *nourish retention* section of the ACORN imperatives outlined earlier.) Chevys is certainly on the front lines of the current labor shortage and understands the bottom line of heavy turnover combined with wage competition. This philosophy also is echoed in its approach to training its workers, as we will see later in this chapter.

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In the restaurant industry as a whole, he says, people just aren't happy with the quality of their work life and the quality of their scant off-hours. This quality of work life can only be met through a flexible management style. Chevys was culturally ready to face the challenge.

Chevys decided they were going to change that. Now, instead of three or four managers per store, Chevys is striving to hire six, seven, or even eight. In addition, the company is now focusing on keeping enough hourly staff on hand so the managers working any given shift can actually manage, instead of filling in for the server who called in sick or helping out in the kitchen when the cook walked off the job. "One thing we found was that our managers were getting absolutely burned out by doing fill-in for short-staffed shifts," he says.

By hiring more managers and staff, Chevys is consciously trying to cut down on the hours its managers are expected to work, which is in direct response to the needs of Generation X managers.

"We really want to say we can guarantee every manager a five-day workweek," he says. "We're not quite there yet, but it's coming. Our managers have lives. Their jobs are not the most important thing in their lives. We have to recognize that and do something about it."

Training at Chevys also has taken a turn in the Gen X direction, says Bradley. "Our Generation X managers, they're all interested in what's in it for them. It has definitely changed the way I train our people. The old ways just don't work anymore." Formerly, says Bradley, "Managers would start out by chopping vegetables all day. Then when they had learned that, they'd go on to the P & L report." Now Bradley says he has to begin by training his Gen X managers on things like career development and other big-picture information that spells out, clearly, what exactly is in it for them if they choose to stay with the company. When the big picture is clear, then they can move into store operations.

Consultants who deal with restaurant companies see that as a smart course of action. They contend that Gen X management trainees, unlike their Boomer predecessors, place a high value on a predictable advancement path and potential. They do not equate hard work with job security. They've seen the fallacy in that claim and want the future spelled out for them before they put shoulder to grindstone.

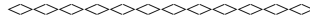
That tentativeness to commit, Bradley has found, means the training and development of new managers from the new workforce must be different than the training Boomers went through and found acceptable. Because of those differences, Bradley says "Our Generation X em-

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ployees just don't go in for the traditional industry training in which you learn and work every position in a restaurant before you manage it. They won't put up with that. We need to treat these managers differently, and make them feel that we really respect and value their intelligence and contributions or they'll just walk away."


In the training classroom, Bradley's style has changed as well. He's gone from telling to asking. He focuses on group interaction rather than "teacherspeak." They talk more about team building these days, and he asks trainees if they have better ways of doing whatever it is he's teaching them. "They question everything," he sighs.

But in dealing with Gen Xers, managers are finding it's not all bad. These new young workers have much more to bring to the table than simply a "what's in it for me" attitude. They have surprising technological savvy. And they are more independent and self-sufficient. A product, experts contend, of having to learn to fend for themselves growing up in a two-job, two-income family, they learned to adapt and improvise. A beneficial skill for the manager of an outpost in the far-flung empire of a food service company.



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TGI Friday's

	Founded:	1965
	Headquarters:	Dallas, Texas
	CEO:	Curt Carlson
	No. of stores:	500+ stores
	1997 Sales (million):	\$6,600 (Carlson Cos.)
	1997 Employees:	68,530 (Carlson Cos.)
	Distinctions:	Casual dining restaurant featuring a wide variety of trendy cuisine

TGI Friday's started life as a one-store wonder in 1965 on New York City's trendy Upper East Side. Created as a fun place for swinging-sixties singles to meet and mingle, there are today more than 500 TGI Friday's in 380 cities and 45 countries.

Friday's is arguably the oldest and definitely one of the largest casual dining chain restaurant companies in the world. On top of that, it is part of one of the largest, privately held, family-owned corporations in the world. On the surface, at least, a sure formula for organizational stodginess and rigidity, and a store-level culture where generational conflict could thrive. A clear potential. But not an inevitability, or at Friday's an actuality. Friday's is as new workforce friendly in the 1990s as it was "Summer of Love" fashionable in the 1960s.

How does it do it? By listening, and responding to, the needs of its employees with the same intensity it applies to listening and responding to customers.

Imagine you're a young person, given the opportunity to pick up stakes and travel around the country for six months without having to quit your job or give up your income. Imagine: Trying new cities on for size until you find one that hugs you like a chenille robe. Imagine: The freedom to go anywhere, anytime. Los Angeles this week. Seattle the next.

Unlike the hippies of the 1960s who prowled the corners of the world with nothing but a backpack and a belief in the kindness of

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strangers, you're doing it with the safety net of a regular paycheck. You've found that the open road is littered with cash machines.

It's funded exploration, and it's enough to make anyone with the solid, gnarled roots of spouses and children and mortgages and minivans yearn for the carefree, unfettered days of their youth. And it's one of the many things keeping younger employees happy at TGI Friday's. It also embraces two important factors of the ACORN imperatives: *create workplace choices* and *operate from a sophisticated management style*.

It's called the Passport Program, and it is part and parcel of the benefit package of Friday's. The program was designed with the wanderlust that is seemingly inbred in the immediate postcollege Xer mind today. Young people lucky enough to have the funds revel in getting a taste of the world before settling down into a serious job. By working for Friday's, even those without a silver spoon can take the grand tour, and the company doesn't lose its good employees in the process. (A great example of the *nourishing retention* ACORN imperative.) It's a win-win situation.

"Our employees love this program because it gives them the flexibility to stay with the organization while they're getting a taste of other cities," says Anne Varano, Friday's domestic vice president of human resources. "For us, it works because we don't want to lose good employees. And with this program, we don't."

Here's how it works: Whether you're a front-of-the-house employee like a server or host, or a back-of-the-house worker like a cook or dishwasher, you can get a "passport" to travel around the country for six months and work at other Friday's restaurants along the way. Because the Dallas-based Carlson Restaurants currently operates, franchises, and licenses some 500 restaurants in more than 380 cities nationwide (including TGI Friday's, Friday's Front Row Sports Grill, and Friday's America Bar), employees can likely find a restaurant in every major city, wherever they go.

As a traveling employee, you relinquish your passport to the general manager of the store you're entering, along with a written address to which your paycheck will be mailed. At the end of your stay, whether it's a month, a week, or just a shift, the general manager signs, dates, and stamps your passport, gives it back to you, and you're on your way. You have a paycheck coming in a couple of weeks, tips in your pocket, and that long ribbon of highway ahead.

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The fine print of the program looks like this: Passport holders stay on their home store's payroll logs and health plan. They are encouraged to arrange their itinerary well in advance by calling stores and setting up work schedules. They must keep in close touch with their home store by notifying them of their location every two weeks. The company does not provide travel expenses, nor does it arrange for accommodations. That's up to the traveler.

Not just any Friday's employees can get a passport. To qualify for the program, employees must work full time and have at least six months' tenure. They must be well trained and "validated" (Friday's term for certification of successful training) in all positions to be worked at other stores, and they must have no record of unsatisfactory performance. Tipped employees like servers must have been rated in the top third of their department staff for the previous three evaluation periods, and kitchen personnel must be validated in a minimum of two stations.

The Friday's passport serves as verification of who they are and where they've come from, signed and dated by the general manager in their home store. By carrying it, managers at other Friday's restaurants know the person appearing at the door asking for shifts is a legitimate, well-trained Friday's employee.

And that certainty is important, according to Troy Reding, another Friday's general manager. The thought of hiring a person off the street, with no interview process, would be a bit daunting to any manager and a bit appealing to anyone planning to criss-cross the country on the lam. But this program ensures the quality of the people who come through the door. This directly taps into the *respect competence and initiative* imperative. By giving a passport to employees it's an explicit declaration that the company trusts them, believes in their skills, and is unafraid to expose them to a variety of workplaces and work styles. This is a level of trust and confidence some people spend whole careers trying to achieve.

"I wouldn't send someone on the road that I wouldn't want working in my store," says Reding, who began his career thirteen years ago as a bartender. "So I don't have a problem giving shifts to anyone who has a passport. I know they're good employees."

Reding says that three to four passport-holding employees pass through his store each year. "They stay anywhere from a couple of shifts to a couple of months," he says. Reding's permanent employees tend to

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extend warm welcomes to the traveling passport holders, he says. It's exciting to work with someone new, even for a little while. It pumps a bit of vitality into the workday, and it breaks up the routine. As far as he's concerned, the program is a win-win situation with no risk on either side of the passport. His store gets the services of a verifiably great employee, and the employee gets the great benefit of traveling with the security of a paycheck.

Friday's Anne Varano echoes Reding's feelings about the program. It is a reward for an employee's loyalty and good work, she says, but the company is rewarded with a high level of employee retention as well.

Do the Passport Program and other benefits really increase the retention of employees? Varano says Friday's employees tend to stick with the company a long time. (Reding's thirteen years with the company is just one example.) That's unusual in an industry that seems to have a revolving-door philosophy of employee retention.

"Within our company, if you're not here five years, you're new," she says. "I have lots of people tell me that Friday's has been their one and only job."

The Passport Program, along with Friday's other benefits and thorough training process, does indeed account for the high level of employee loyalty, but it wasn't always that way. Varano has been working to increase the level of employee retention at Friday's. She began by analyzing at what point the company was losing their hourly employees. "It was ninety days," she says. "We were losing lots of new people. We found that most of the people we were losing just didn't like the restaurant industry, period. They didn't like the schedule or the hours, or working weekends. It's not that they didn't like Friday's."

So what keeps employees on the payroll? Varano says delving into what makes the new workforce tick has been a big piece of the puzzle. She found that the Friday's culture, as it was evolving, was moving directly toward the needs of Generation X workers. "I conducted research, asking both front- and back-of-the-house employees nationwide what they needed in a work environment," she says. The information she found isn't surprising or out of the realm of experience of other companies. "Generation X workers are definitely different than their predecessors," she says. "This group wants to be involved. They want a say in what goes on. They want to be asked their opinion. And they do not deal well with authority."

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Varano found that Generation X workers at Friday's want their supervisors to look at them as individuals—as whole individuals with lives and families and problems and concerns—not simply as employees. They want a personal relationship with their supervisors, someone who will ask how their sick mother is coming along before assigning them a station for the day.


"These young people need a sense of belonging, they need to share parts of themselves that maybe their predecessors wouldn't have shared," she says.

In addition, Varano says training plays a large role in keeping young Friday's employees on the payroll. "We have a strong training program that we say provides our employees with competence so they can gain confidence," she says. "It's not negotiable; employees must go through the training before they're allowed to serve customers."

Young workers like that, she says. They want to feel confident and in command. They also want to know how they're doing. Friday's system of regular reviews and employee feedback matches your workers' need to hear progress reports early and often. Praise, rewards, or gentle guidance toward the right path. It's almost like parenting, a step or two removed, naturally.

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Ben & Jerry's Homemade, Inc.

	Founded:	1978
	Headquarters:	Burlington, Vermont
	CEO:	Bob Holland
	1997 Sales (million):	\$174.2
	1997 Employees:	736
	Distinctions:	Unique ice cream flavors and public image as a company with a conscience

There may be no stranger, incorporated, stock-issuing company in the United States than Ben & Jerry's Homemade, Inc. Founded in 1977 in Burlington, Vermont, in a vacant gas station by two quasi-hippie childhood pals, this maker of quirky named (who hasn't heard of Cherry Garcia?), outrageously rich, exorbitantly expensive ice creams is a hotbed for gen spanning organizational experimentation. Today, their products are marketed through supermarkets and food service operations in all fifty states, as well as through licensed, franchised, or company-owned scoop shops. The company is currently extending its reach, with scoop shops in Canada, Israel, and the Netherlands.

You know you're working for a different sort of company when the corporate Joy Gang announces a "Corporate Dress-Up Day." It comes but once a year, the day when employees are encouraged to wear corporate attire like a suit and tie to work, just for the novelty of it. "Sometimes somebody wears a tie on a normal day," laughs Sean Greenwood, "and they're taunted unmercifully."

And then there's the matter of Greenwood's title. He is, officially, the Grand Poobah of Joy. Greenwood and his Joy Gang work at making fun. The schedule of events like Elvis Day, when everyone is the King, and the Dog Daze of Summer party, in which the company's employees at the corporate headquarters bring their dogs to work. "The Dog Daze of Summer has gotten a little out of hand," Greenwood laughs. "As we grew and moved into a new facility, we decided we didn't really want 170 dogs here. So we've had to change the party a bit."

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It's almost an understatement to mention that Ben & Jerry's strives to *create workplace choices*, the second of the ACORN imperatives. In so many ways, this company has written the book on how to run a company by a whole new set of rules. Consequently, it will attract iconoclasts from all the generations. Your typical Xer will be drawn to it by its very "uncorporateness," whereas Boomers will want to work here because it reminds them of the kind of company they may have hallucinated during the Summer of Love. Veterans who tended to buck authority will love this kind of corporate culture, and we can only wait and see how the next generation will react to this kind of company. In some ways, the business iconoclasm of Ben & Jerry's almost transcends the generational differences and brings together people whose common disdain for formal corporations transcends the tension that generational work preferences cause in other companies.

But there's method to all this madness. It adds up to happy, satisfied employees working together in a harmonious, fun environment. The generation gap? What's that? Greenwood reports that the company workforce is made up of Gen Xers and Baby Boomers, but the kinds of intergenerational problems that have plagued other companies haven't worked their way into the Ben & Jerry's corporate Eden. He's heard about such problems elsewhere, he says. They just don't exist here. What does exist is a rather smallish company filled with mostly long-time employees (not more than 750 nationwide, and 670 in the corporate headquarters), working hard to create a big measure of success. Doesn't sound so much like madness now, does it?

The Joy Gang officially began its mission of fun in 1988. "We were selling so much product that we literally couldn't keep up with the demand," Greenwood explains. "We were doing everything we could just to make ice cream. People were working twelve-hour shift after twelve-hour shift. It took its toll. We were putting great demands on people, and asking a lot of them." The company brought in massage therapists to help relieve the tension and bought pizzas for lunches, but it didn't feel like enough. "Jerry (Greenfield, one of the company's founders) decided we needed an official team that would infuse joy into the workplace," says Greenwood. He felt, "If it's not fun, why do it?"

A balance of hard work and rewards was important back then and still is, says Greenwood, who was with the company at the time. As the business grew, so did the demands it made on employees. There simply needed to be rewards for all the hard work; a payoff was essential if Ben & Jerry's was going to keep its good people.

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So, Greenwood, who also plans special events and marketing, went to work. The Joy Gang is a team of representatives from departments throughout the company. They work with the rest of the staff to devise fun, entertaining diversions.

"It's important not to just foist obligatory fun on people," he says. "We don't just say: 'Okay at 3 p.m. today we'll be having ice cream in the lounge. Come and have fun.' Instead, we work with people and have them participate in the events somehow." Instead of a forced ice cream social, the Joy Gang might plan a potluck lunch, where someone from each department volunteers to bring a dish. That way, he says, people feel a part of the planning. They're helping. They're part of the fun.

Another now legendary Ben & Jerry's event began as a staff party after the company's annual stockholders meeting. Someone had the idea to hire a local band to play at the party. Over the years, this event has grown into an annual music festival featuring popular acts like Blues Traveller and Buddy Guy. Some fifty thousand people attended it last year. Everything at Ben & Jerry's closes down during the festival.

"When you're working seventy hours a week, you need to have fun doing it," Greenwood says. And he's not talking about the kind of fun that bonuses or hefty paychecks can buy. Ben & Jerry's pay scale, is, in fact, pretty low, says Greenwood. "When you look at what corporate America is paying people for jobs like ours, it's easy to see that most of us could be making more money working elsewhere, even here in Vermont," says Greenwood.

Let's see; long hours, hard work, low pay. Not exactly the formula that will bring reams of resumes to your door. But Greenwood disagrees. Even in this economy with, seemingly, more jobs than there are workers, people are literally lining up to work at Ben & Jerry's. "We recently opened a new manufacturing plant near our headquarters," he says with a laugh. "We had less than fifteen positions open. We got something like one thousand resumes."

Exactly what's in that ice cream, anyway? It's integrity, says Greenwood. It's walking the talk. Practicing what they preach. The ideas of the company—social responsibility, giving back to the community—are what attract people to Ben & Jerry's, he says. The reality of working there is what keeps them. The Joy Gang is only a small part of it.

Ben & Jerry's is known for both its creative ice cream flavors and mission statement and company philosophy. The mission avows that the company is dedicated to making the best products it can, profiting economically from these products, and doing so in a socially responsi-

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ble way. Ben & Jerry's is committed to initiating innovative ways to improve the quality of life of a broad community outside its doors.

To that end, the company gives away 7.5 percent of its pretax earnings in three ways: the Ben & Jerry's Foundation, employee Community Action Teams at five Vermont sites, and corporate grants made by the director of social mission development. The company supports projects that are models for social change, projects that exhibit creative problem solving and hopefulness. The Foundation is managed by a nine-member employee board and considers proposals relating to children and families, disadvantaged groups, and the environment.

"People want to work for us because they believe in the company," says Greenwood. "They believe in the social responsibility."

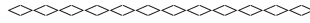
But, he says, what keeps them (many Ben & Jerry's employees have been with the company for a decade or longer, and it's the only "real job" they've ever held) is the corporate culture and the atmosphere at work.

"One of the biggest pieces to this is the attitude of acceptance here," he says. "People are accepted for who they are. If they want to wear sandals and shorts to work, so be it. They're here because they're good at what they do. Period. We are a company in which people are going to have a good time at work," he continues. "If you come to our corporate headquarters, you'll hear people laughing." A great example of how they *accommodate employee differences*.

But, Greenwood is careful to stress an important point: Ben & Jerry's isn't a company filled with people wearing tie-dyed T-shirts listening to the Grateful Dead all day long, although some might get that impression with all this talk of fun and acceptance. It is a company of people working hard and succeeding in a competitive industry, he says.


"We're much smaller than our competition," he says. "Haagen-Daz is owned by a multibillion dollar conglomerate. We just can't spend the same kind of money they do. So we've had to be creative in order to be successful."

It's that same sense of creativity that makes the workplace fun, makes people want to work at Ben & Jerry's, and makes the company a success. In turn, it helps create happy, satisfied employees, a sense of acceptance for everyone, be they aging hippie Boomer or a what's-in-it-for-me Xer, and not a whisper of "My boss doesn't understand me." What a tidy circle. And so simple a formula when you think about it.



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West Group

	Founded:	1872
	Headquarters:	St. Paul, Minnesota
	CEO:	Brian Hall
	1997 Sales (million):	\$1,383
	1997 Employees:	8,000
	Distinctions:	Leading supplier of legal information in the world

There may be no better example of a company's culture shifting and evolving in sync with its generations than West Group, the leading provider of legal information in the United States. Walk into any legal office in America and you see shelf upon shelf of leather-bound legal tomes, most of which come from West Group. As legal research turns more and more toward computers, West Group has gone "online," something they did before most people even knew what online meant, back when a fast modem collected data at 1,200 baud.

Although the company, then called West Publishing, kept its information delivery on the cutting edge, it was still firmly rooted in very traditional methods, emulating the environment of a law firm—albeit a very large law firm—more than anything else.

Founded in 1872 by John West to print and sell law treatises, legal dictionaries, and legal forms, West Publishing became *the* power in legal publishing by 1996 when it was acquired by The Thompson Corporation, a company with its own legal publishing business. Along the way, West Publishing created a notation system for cross-referencing legal opinions that is the heart of online legal research, and amassed a legal research capacity of 120,000 databases. The merger of the two companies precipitated a stunning culture change that today has West Group positioned as a legal publisher quickly evolving into a total legal information content provider with its fingers in some very cutting-edge technological pies.

But the technology isn't the story; it's just a factor in West Group's story, one that pushed it firmly onto the cross-generational radar

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screen. The real story is the successful transformation of a company from a Veteran management structure to a company run by Boomers. Down came the hierarchies. Down came the barriers between departments and functions. Down came the plush and unapproachable corner offices replete with wood and leather.

It was all replaced with a team-oriented, cross-functional, total quality, customer focused, participative management culture that has come to typify everything that Boomers have been implementing in companies across America. We've seen all of this before, in bits and pieces, but rarely do you get to see such a total and explicit transformation of a company's culture as you can see just by wandering around West Group's headquarters. You feel it in the air. You see it in the subtle changes going on in the halls and in the offices.

Patrick Sexton, public affairs officer for West Group, took us on a tour of the premises. As we walked past a vast array of beige cubicles, all in neat little rows, all precisely the same size, Sexton points to the small city and says one word that sums it all up: "Dilbertville." He explains that this particular suburb is a relic of the past and already on the schedule for renovation. Then we wander into a newly renovated section of the company. Again we see what could only be called cubicles, but in a variety of sizes, shapes, and colors. Some of the walls are higher, over there an arch decorates a passage, and generally you get the idea that someone with an eye for design went at the cubicle motif with a set of magic crayons. If Dilbertville was Kansas, the newly renovated sections looked more like Oz—fully in color and much more animated.

As we walked further, we comment that everyone looks pretty casual. Yes, says Sexton, they were trying out business casual during the summer months, but he is pretty sure it will stick. He can't imagine going back to business formal.

But Boomerism isn't the only thing happening at West Group. As it evolves its Boomer corporate culture, West Group is also reaching out to Generation Xers. Because more and more of the company's business is shifting toward technologically delivered information, young, high-tech workers are at a premium, not just to run the internal computer networks, but to actually deliver the product. Like everyone else, the scarcity of these techno-Xers is hitting the business hard and putting recruiting and retention issues on the front burner.

Enter Café.com and you won't wonder for very long whether West Group is serious about appealing to Generation X workers. A local

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chain of coffee shops, Caribou Coffee, has opened a retail store inside of the company's headquarters and is the centerpiece of Café.com. This may be the first time a retail store has established itself inside a company in a place where the general public really doesn't have access. But Café.com is more than just a bunch of tables situated around a fashionable coffee boutique. In fact, the coffee shop is only part of this central gathering place. As you examine it more closely you notice other oddities. In one corner, eight Internet workstations are open for general use. At about half the tables, you'll find outlets and modem jacks for people who want to drop their laptops down and get some work done outside of their cubicle. So much for being chained to your desk.

In another corner of Café.com, you find overstuffed chairs and couches organized into small lounge areas. Here too you'll find modem jacks and outlets, but these nooks look less like a place where you would perch behind your computer and more like a collaborative space where you could sit and mull things over with a few friends or coworkers. Chiat/Day, the Los Angeles-based ad agency, set up similar lounge areas so its most creative minds could have a place to relax and think literally and figuratively outside of the cube.

If Café.com is an Xer sanctuary, you don't have to wander too far to find a Boomer playground. Thompson University is the training function of West Group, and it's so much like stepping into your local Barnes and Noble that you might have to do a double-take. The place is floor-to-ceiling wooden shelves filled with the latest business best-sellers. The huge tables and check-out area will make you pine for your university library. There is an entire section of bookshelves dedicated to holistic thinking and self-actualization. Here you'll find everything from Steven Covey to Deepak Chopra, all clearly designed to help people become whole both at work and at home. Thompson U's main room is surrounded by a series of high-tech meeting rooms where they can hold traditional classes and video conferences.

Of course, you're never going to compare West Group to Ben & Jerry's in terms of the ACORN imperative to *create workplace choices*. But West Group is going in that direction. It's making the effort to reach out and accommodate employee differences, the first of our ACORN imperatives, and is thereby looking very different from the inside out. It will probably always "look" like a traditional corporation in many ways. After all, West Group is churning out legal information, not ice cream. But, from the inside, this company has come a long way in its

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efforts to create a nontraditional workplace, and that's what counts with the employees.

When you walk around and talk to people, they often refer to the "old West" and the "new West." Everyone is very aware of the dramatic changes that have occurred since the merger. The old West Publishing, as we've mentioned, was very hierarchical and dogmatic. Brian H. Hall, president and CEO of West Group and chief change-agent, is reshaping the culture. And true to Boomer methodology, his efforts started with a vision. Fortunately, unlike a lot of vision statements, this one is short, to the point, and easy to comprehend at a glance. "We support the system of justice in the U.S.," says Hall. No more. No less. Such a vision is vaguely reminiscent of NASA in the 1960s, where anyone could ask any employee—even the janitor—what his or her job was and the answer would always be, "I'm helping to send a man to the moon."

Likewise, supporting the system of justice in America is something most people can understand and rally behind. But there's more to it than just a good vision. Hall is trying to create a new culture from the two existing environments and the *C* word (Change) is a big part of that. "In the past, the culture tended to put a lot of value on the status quo and didn't value change all that much. We wanted to create a culture where change is embraced as a value, so we made available to everyone who worked here a change management program where they began to look at change a bit differently," says Hall.

Change is great, but if change doesn't lead to growth, people can feel like they're left spinning their wheels. That's why it's important to Hall that people look for growth both personally and professionally. "What people should do here is grow and develop as they are working for the West Group, so we set out to create that kind of culture, one where people could feel that there is opportunity," says Hall. "We want to basically create a culture of collegiality and camaraderie where people feel good about the environment they are in." This philosophy manifests itself in a couple of ways.

Everyone wants to retain their employees these days, but this company embodies the *nourish retention* part of the ACORN imperatives better than most employers you will encounter.

One of West Group's more aggressive strategies is what Hall calls "the employer of choice." That may sound like a platitude or cliché until you start looking at what the company does to back up the talk. Creating an environment where people can feel like part of a team, where

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they can feel like they make a difference, is a good step in that direction, but it has its drawbacks. Hall says there are instances where employees feel comfortable enough to call him on the carpet when they don't like a particular policy or direction, asking him assertively, "Is this what an employer of choice would do?" If it's not, Hall is accountable to make the changes so that people want to stay. That accountability is what puts muscle in the "employer of choice" strategy. "It's good because people are starting to adopt that kind of thinking where they know they can point out to us where we are not exactly being the 'employer of choice,' when we haven't perhaps handled things the way we should. It's pretty potent," says Hall.

Of course being the employer of choice cuts both ways. It makes people want to work at West Group and stay there, but it also encourages other employers to actively recruit his people. "People want to work here," says Hall, "but other companies view us as a recruiting ground, which doesn't always make me feel real comfortable. But it makes me feel really good when I know our people have choices." By that, Hall means there's a lot of room for movement within the corporation, so if people need to move around a lot—particularly Generation X employees—they are encouraged to stay with the company while trying their hand at different jobs at West Group. The worst thing, says Hall, is if people feel trapped in their jobs. "When people don't have choices, then they become desperate and so they could potentially jump at any opportunity. That isn't good for the company, and sometimes isn't good for the individual. They think 'If I don't take this opportunity today, I may never get another one.'" Hall compares it to shopping for a house: If you can only afford one house, then all the other houses you look at seem more appealing. "So I think the development of people through Thompson University—as well as the other things we do to develop people—provides them with a lot of choices, whether with us or someplace else. But I think if people have a choice, they can then make good conscious decisions as to where they want to spend their career," says Hall.

No one knows that better than Steve Buege, vice president of technical services for West Group. Buege, born in 1963, is an older member of Generation X and says he falls into the "young for my title" category. He's been with West Group twelve years, so he's seen the old and the new corporate culture and thrived in both. He says in the old West, it was a bit atypical to move around a lot, but his technological skills kept

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him jumping from cutting-edge project to cutting-edge project. He was doing online work before anyone knew what online meant, and then he moved to developing CD-ROMs, again before anyone knew what that medium was all about. Now, the new West is more dynamic, says Buege, and people move around laterally a lot.

Keeping people is particularly important to Ed Gilbert, vice president of human resources for the technology group and in charge of recruiting. And professional development is one of the key things he can offer. "We create a platform for you to grow your career. Our systems are such that if you want to try a wide variety of things, we'll help you do that," says Gilbert. And he says that's a very important message to his primary audience—Generation X. He says he runs into resistance from Boomers about moving horizontally through the organization, whereas Generation X loves it. If a Boomer is in the financial department, he tends to specialize in that and never really strays too far from the function, says Gilbert, a twenty-year veteran of Fortune 500 human resource departments. Xers, on the other hand, love to try lots of jobs, from operations to marketing to sales to accounting. "Generation X says 'Don't just tell me what it's like. I want to experience it myself,'" says Gilbert.

Recruiting Generation X high-tech employees consumes most of Gilbert's time. Although he's always worked in human resources, he sounds more like a marketer. "In today's communications-driven era, you've got to think radio, you've got to think alternative sites [for recruiting] where potential employees might be." He talks about venues for recruitment and establishing the company's brand. And his brand is: West Group is the employer of choice.

He's been targeting Xers by advertising on local alternative radio stations and sending the message that West Group is a great place to work. "Make your Mark" was a particularly effective ad campaign for recruiting these younger, highly sought, employees, says Gilbert, because being part of something important really appeals to them. In his ads, Gilbert says, "We moved away from the stodgy attorney on the screen with a bunch of law books. We don't show any law books whatsoever because we're not about that. We're about bringing in and attracting people with a wide variety of skills." The company's policies also help Gilbert recruit Generation X workers.

Hall explains that, after interviewing a high-tech worker for West Group, the company guarantees they will have an offer on the table for the potential employee within 24 hours if they decide to hire him or her. This

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fast turnaround is important, says Hall, because "With the Gen Xers—especially people in technology—we understand that we must move quickly because they move quickly. How you hire somebody is pretty indicative of the kind of company they're coming to work for." If his company can react nimbly and quickly, he knows that reflects the kind of environment a lot of Xers are looking for. Because many of these workers have plenty of offers and opportunities from other companies, being able to move quickly can be an important advantage. Of course, the ACORN imperative of *operating from a sophisticated management style* is directly reflected in West Group's fast turnaround time for new hires.

Gilbert agrees with the theory that the old West Publishing was very much a Veteran company that's just recently evolved into a Boomer-run business. Now it's reaching out in a big way to the Generation X workforce. He was recruited to come to work for West Group right after the merger and was a bit taken aback. When he saw the rows and rows of cubicles, he said to himself, "Holy cow, this is where Dilbert was born!" It's gotten a lot better since then, says Gilbert, but in terms of recruiting, he stills sees room to grow West Group into a culture that really appeals to the high-tech Gen X worker. His strategy consists of paying more than competitors, having better benefits, and providing an enriching and rewarding environment where people can find opportunities to grow. "When I recruit people, I don't look at them for the job that we're hiring them for. I want to see if they have the capability to go two or three jobs beyond that," says Gilbert.

No one can tell us more about the difference between the old West and the new organization better than twelve-year veteran Buege. He calls the old West a private company with a capital *P*, a place where you weren't informed about the financials of the company and a bit afraid to make aggressive decisions. You never questioned the direction from above because it was assumed, often wrongly, that those making the decisions were more informed than you. "You did what you were told, you did it very well, you felt free to offer suggestions and add judgment along the way, but your job wasn't to set direction," explains Buege.

When Thompson merged with West Publishing, the culture turned upside down. Now most of the direction in the company is bottom-up, says Buege, "The analogy that I think fits well is: West Publishing was a kind of 'Ready, Aim, Shoot!' organization with a very organized, very methodical, very disciplined approach to almost everything. Thompson was a 'Ready, Shoot, Aim!' group with the attitude of 'Let's do some-

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thing. If it's wrong, we'll fix it later. But damn it, do something and do it now."

Buege is also at the center of his own generational vortex, an Xer with a vice president title managing seven departments and almost four hundred employees. That means, of course, that he's managing people his own age, younger employees, and Boomers who are seven to ten years older than himself. It's been easier than it could have been, he says, because coworkers tended to give him the benefit of the doubt, at least initially. The Boomers he's worked with "don't tend to form an opinion of you right away. And that's all I ask for. Give me a month or three to prove myself. Judge me on what you see first hand. Don't judge me on what you may have heard about me. And I think for the most part that age group tends to do that," says Buege. "Sometimes you get a little bit of the attitude that 'you haven't paid your dues, you don't really deserve this, it fell in your lap and what are you going to do to demonstrate you're capable.' But to some extent, I think that's fair. If I were in their shoes, I'd be asking the same thing," he adds.

Downplaying his title and position has worked well for him, and it's a typical Xer sentiment that corporate politics and posturing is a waste of time. "I think you want to focus more on the people and the projects and less on the organization. The organization is an afterthought. It's a necessary evil, and they understand that. I think if you play it that way, then you're fine. But if you get into this *my position, your position* crap, they throw it back at you—as they should," says Buege.

Buege has a lot to say about managing people that is revealing of the "new West." It gives us a glimpse into what the Xer managers and leaders of the future might be like, the kinds of approaches to supervision that we could expect. Buege is on the cusp of the Boomers, a leading-edge Xer who nevertheless seems to embrace his predecessors' affection for consensus building. But primarily, this is a treatise on Xer management. Buege says, "In some ways I think being sort of in-between is an advantage. I'd like to think I could be seen as 'one of us' to each group I manage. I think that the older generation relied heavily on title and position to get respect and to get people to follow them. I don't think you can get away with that anymore."

"I think if you try, you're setting yourself up for failure. It's tempting, but you want to go out of your way to set that aside and attempt to talk to people as peers. Let them be the ones who factor in your title and position if they're going to. The minute you have to pull rank on somebody,

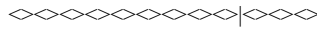
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you've lost. So I look at it as 'let's all put our labels aside, let's sit here and have a productive discussion, and let's tackle this problem.' And I think as you move around and your title changes, if you've operated that way, I think you'll carry respect into that position. If you've relied on your title, you're sort of hosed the day you lose it. That's worked for me."

And Buege on motivation? He says, "What I look for in people, in one word, is initiative. I think if you find initiative, then the job becomes about steering and directing and really just managing and not motivating. If I stay out of the motivating business, that's where I like to be. I don't like to be pushing people and kicking them in the butt all the time. I'd rather be pointing and steering and letting them run on their own."

What's happened at West Group over the past two to three years has been repeated and will continue to be repeated in companies across industries all over the United States. Gurus and pundits attribute it to the global economy, technology, and the rise of knowledge work, but it could be that the flattening of hierarchies, teamwork, participative management, total quality, and business reengineering are all symptoms of the generational changes taking place in workplaces across the nation. It sure seems that way at West Group. The Boomers have taken the reins of power there and are remaking it in their image of a workplace. And it's clear that Generation X is having its own effect, with places like Café.com and an increasing attitude toward employees that the company wants them to stay around for awhile. As Gilbert puts it, "it's not your traditional lock-them-at-their-desk environment anymore."

So it wouldn't be much of a surprise to see West Group gradually evolve toward a predominately Generation X work environment down the line. As it stands, the "new West" is firmly ensconced and an amazing case study in organizational change. If you put on your "generational" glasses and take a hard look at it, it makes a lot of sense. CEO Hall, talking about the environment he's trying to create, says it this way, "Anybody who earns a living puts a lot of time and energy into what they do every day, so part of the philosophy here is you need to have a good work experience. I want people to feel engaged. I want them to feel part of a community that this is a place where they can come in and feel fulfilled as a person. Their total life experience is a holistic event and this [environment] is part of it. We want to make it a good experience."



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Lucent Technologies

Lucent <i>Technologies</i>	Founded:	1996
	Headquarters:	Murray Hill, New Jersey
	CEO:	Richard McGinn
	1997 Sales (million):	\$26,360
	1997 Employees:	134,000
	Distinctions:	Highly creative telecom manufacturer

Lucent Technologies is a brand-new, century-old manufacturer of telecommunications equipment and software, from telephones to business communication systems, switching and transmission equipment, and wireless networks. It was formed when AT&T decided to spin off its systems and technology business as an independent company. Lucent is the spiritual legate of Western Electric, the manufacturing arm of predivestiture AT&T and Bell Laboratories, the vaunted Ma Bell think tank. When Lucent "went public" in 1996, the initial public offering raised \$3 billion, a very big birthing indeed. Lucent also inherited and took with it into its new life as a brand-new company the genetic inheritance of a make-no-waves, regulated public utility. The company's challenge, first under Henry Schacht and now under Richard McGinn, was, and is, to turn a company with a low tolerance for risk mentality and turn it into a creative, entrepreneurial organization capable of competing—and winning—in the heady high-tech atmosphere of the new millennium.

To turn a company with a history of respect for titles and seniority into an open incubator for new ideas and products that will routinely render all that has come before them obsolete is tricky business. Although the creative center of Lucent Technologies is still Bell Laboratories, inventor of the microchip, C11, and 101 other high-tech miracles, all of Lucent is today charged with making the company better, faster, and more competitive.

To make that a reality, Lucent has been breaking down the traditional barriers and formalities that limited the reach and responsibili-

ties of employees and invited everyone to make as creative a contribution as they can. When you look at this mission in light of the ACORN imperative to *create workplace choices*, it can be a bit intimidating. A company like Lucent, with so much tradition and history behind it, has had a lot of success with what is now the status quo. On the other hand, with Bell Labs association, there was a lot of precedent for creatively pushing the envelope in terms of product development. This journey was daunting, but not insurmountable. But what happens when every person in the company, from John in accounting to Jill in sales, approaches everyday work from a creative perspective? In the best case scenario, you'd have a staff of experienced employees working with as much excitement and passion about their jobs as they did on day one. They're not only satisfied, they're energized. Nobody's wondering what's in it for them, nobody's counting the minutes until quitting time, nobody would rather be sailing. More importantly, nobody's calling competitors to inquire about job openings, and they're not answering when the competitors call them. Lucent is clearly demonstrating the *nourish retention* imperative.

In your dreams, right? Not necessarily. Lucent management believes it can create ways to infuse more creativity and passion into the cubicles of their employees, and they've convinced skeptical Boomers and scoffing Veterans to come along for the ride. Three years ago, Lucent employees Laurie Lamantia, Lari Washburn, Angela Just, and Chris Steinberg founded IdeaVerse, a creativity and innovation training center. That's right. Lucent has invested time, money, and other resources to help its employees to be more creative. You can almost hear the Veterans laughing at the sheer frivolity of it.

The concept behind IdeaVerse, Lamantia explains, was to give Lucent employees the space and time to be free with their thinking and to play with ideas without having to worry about the typical kinds of censure one often finds in the workplace. They wanted people to not only think outside the box, but to destroy it. Break down barriers to creative flow. Unleash the ideas and creativity within.

The result was a department within Lucent headquarters where the walls are purple, vice presidents color with Crayolas, and just about anything goes.

To Boomers who might be wondering how this will affect the company's bottom line (and their own quarterly bonuses) and to Veterans who scoff at its frivolous nature, IdeaVerse was a concept that took a bit

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of getting used to. Purple walls? Give me a break. Creativity? Forget it and get serious about the work. Creativity is for artists. It doesn't have much to do with daily life in a cubicle.

Doesn't happen, says Washburn. People use their creativity every day. And it doesn't mean you have to be composing a symphony to be doing something creative. "People have elevated creativity to something almost nonhuman," says Washburn. "But we're creating all the time." If you don't believe you're creating all the time, she says, think about a typical morning at your house. Does it involve getting the family up, dressed, ready for school, and out the door on time? Does it involve finding the quickest route to work and changing direction midstream to avoid heavy traffic? Does it involve juggling a million little things before you settle into your office? Follow yourself through a typical day, keeping one eye on creativity, says Washburn. You're being spontaneous and creative all the time, and you may not even realize it.

This isn't simply new-age, flower-power, I'm okay-you're okay stuff. Lamantia and Washburn can tie creativity directly to the company's bottom line. Through the success of IdeaVerse, they have demonstrated how employees can plug their creative juices directly into their jobs. That's bread and butter, solid enough to satisfy a company of skeptical Boomers and hesitant Veterans.

If employees are tackling their jobs with newfound creativity, exciting things can happen, says Lamantia. People look at old problems in new ways. John in accounting comes up with a great redesign of that same old tired spreadsheet. Jill in sales hits on a fresh angle that boosts her monthly sales. People are working with their eyes on high beam and their minds open. And that's not always the case in the average workplace, where people tend to perform their jobs on automatic pilot after a while.

"Accessing the whole, creative self hasn't been done in corporate America," says Washburn. But it should be, she says. Instead of focusing on only logic and rational thought in the workplace, people ought to draw from a deeper well. They'll get more from their jobs and be more on the job if they do, she says.

So, where does the average guy in accounting find the "deep well"? That's the job of Lamantia, Washburn, and their team at IdeaVerse. They act as the divining rod to help people find the deep well of creativity within. Lamantia is quick to explain that they're not teaching people to be creative at IdeaVerse. There's no need. People are naturally

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creative, she says. If you don't believe it, drift back in time to when a sunny afternoon, a cardboard box, and a couple of friends were all the fodder you needed to come up with hours of creative play. Everyone starts out creative, she says, but over the years it gets drummed out of one's conscious mind to make room for more serious pursuits like workplace norms, societal conventions, and the litany of rules and regulations Boomers live by.

Employees are encouraged to take IdeaVerse courses like "Tapping into Your Own Creative Power," "Wholeness in the Workplace," and "The Artist's Way" on company time, Lamantia says. And that's important to the success of the program. Employees, especially those who wonder about the seemingly frivolous nature of a course entitled "Life, Paint, and Passion," need the reassurance that this is something their employer actually wants them to do. It might feel like they're skipping school, but they're not. "We're making the statement that this is important, real work," Lamantia says.

But for Boomers like Lucent internal consultant Patrick Brown, viewing "Life, Paint, and Passion" as important, real work was a bit of a stretch. After all, sitting in a classroom for three days playing with paint and canvas doesn't have much to do with his everyday job. Or does it?

The course "Life, Paint, and Passion," requires participants to paint pictures for three days. It involves canvas and oils, but it is really about risk, says Washburn. It's about going out on a limb and discovering that the risk was worth taking, and heck, the fall wouldn't have been so bad after all.

To many Boomers and Veterans, the idea of sitting in a room alongside your colleagues, superiors, and underlings painting a winter scene on canvas brings, at best, embarrassment and at worst, nausea. Could you paint a group of kids ice skating on a frozen pond? Do your eyes tear up at the thought of your boss seeing the ridiculous-looking stick figures you'll surely produce?

That's self-censoring at work. That's what the course is designed to break. And when you get past the idea that your picture has to be a Da Vinci masterpiece to be of value, you're half-way there.

"This course helped me to go one step beyond the edge of my knowledge or safety zone," says Patrick Brown. "It showed me that I can go beyond the box into what might seem, at first, like uncomfortable territory." Brown says the course also taught him to rethink his notion of the concept "finished." There were many times when he felt he was

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finished with a painting, and the course facilitators pushed him to do more. At first, Brown didn't know quite what they meant. The painting was finished. That was it. Then facilitators asked him to think about the last element he would ever consider using in the picture. What would happen if it were included? Where would the picture go from there? By considering these things, Brown says he discovered that there is more beyond one's self-imposed boundaries. In pushing his limits, Brown says he unblocked the flow of spontaneous creative energy, a clear example of *respecting competence and initiative*.

He could go one step beyond. There was indeed more. "It was powerful to learn I could do it," he says.

Touchy-feely stuff. But look a bit deeper. Brown says he was able to bring the experience back into the workplace and translate it into better on-the-job performance. He says the idea of not stopping at a predictable place, but instead going out on a limb and discovering what's beyond the boundary has been helpful in his creative brainstorming with clients. When he's designing a project plan, for example, he now will find himself pushing his limits to get at the stuff that lies just beyond his self-imposed boundary.

Creative risk-taking is where all great ideas come from. Any new idea sounds a bit crazy at first, right? The whole point, says Washburn, is to help break down the self-censoring that can prevent new ideas from coming to light. When you're in a business like communications technology, which is the kind of business in which a crazy idea today might mean the next-generation Internet tomorrow, creative risk-taking needs to be "job one."

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