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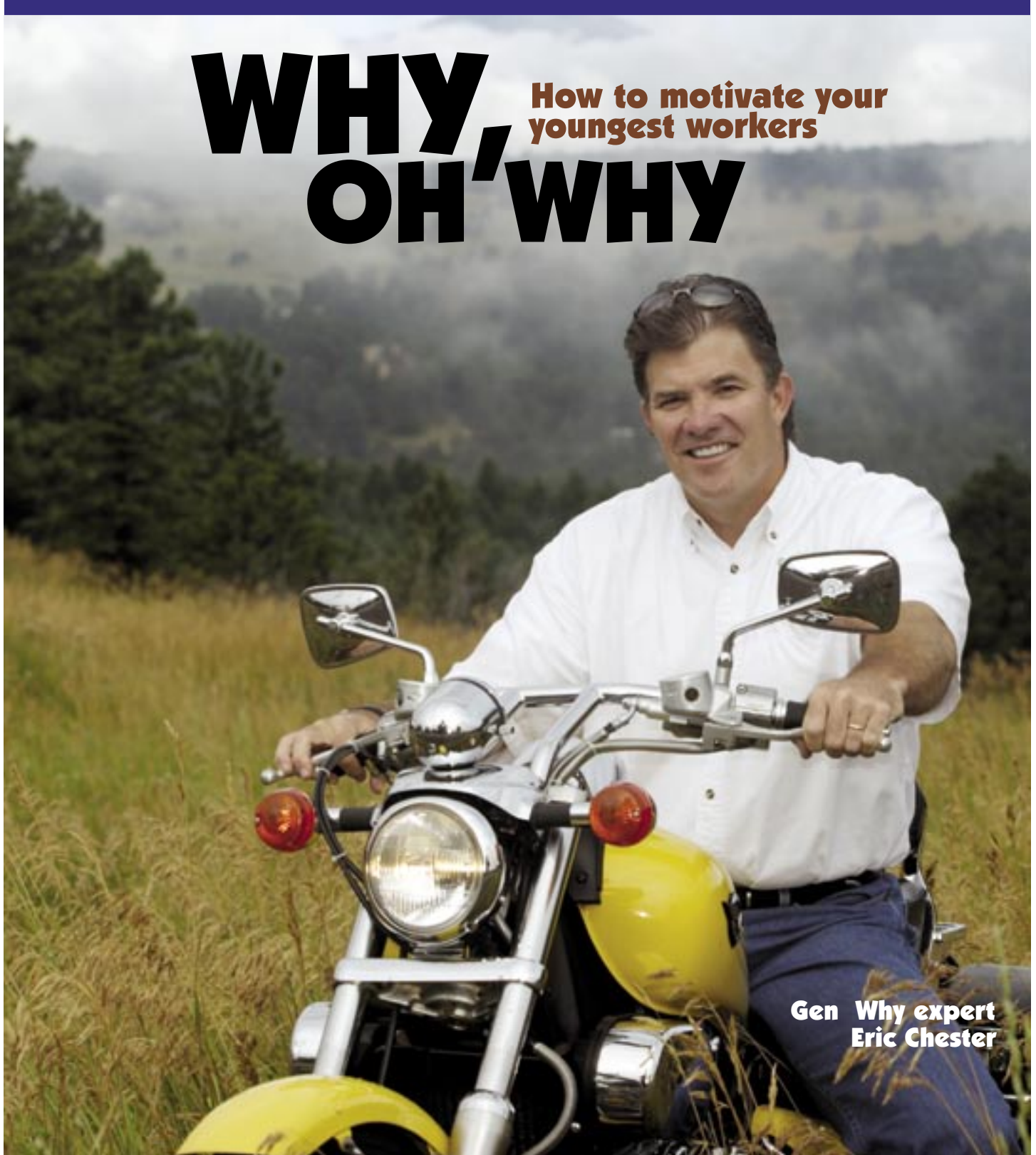
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WHY, OH, WHY

**How to motivate your
youngest workers**



**Gen Why expert
Eric Chester**

WHY OH, WHY

How to motivate young workers to give a damn

By Nancy Weingartner

Eric Chester was at the top of his game. He was zigzagging the country delivering motivational speeches at high school assemblies.

"I typically did the 'give-it-your-all' (speeches)," he says. "Around prom time, it was 'don't drink and drive'—stories wrapped in a blanket of humor."

And then the '90s happened.

"I saw a change in the late '90s," he says. The kids were no longer as receptive to the message. It wasn't that his material wasn't working, but the atmosphere had changed. It took teachers longer to usher the students into the auditorium, longer for the kids to settle down. If a student got loud and provocative, the teachers all looked away rather than tell the perpetrator to cool it.

It became clear to Chester the kids didn't want to cheer for the

person on stage, they wanted to be on the stage. The entertainment bar was being raised higher and higher. Teachers who spent all day with these kids were asking him, "How do you motivate these kids?"

That's when Chester, a former teacher and coach, started taking a hard look at the 16 to 24 age group, and noticed they didn't fit the Generation X profile.

These Gen Yers, which Chester dubbed Generation Why, aren't motivated in the same way as their older brothers and sisters and certainly not the same as their parents.

"Whys are trying to separate effort from reward," he says. "This generation likes tangible rewards," but not necessarily the work that gains them. They feel a sense of entitlement and often aren't reliable. Gen Whys are more techno-savvy than previous generations, and have a free-agent mentality—they're not planning on staying around for the gold watch, if this job doesn't work out there's always another one.

For the franchise community, Generation Why is their bread and butter, so to speak.

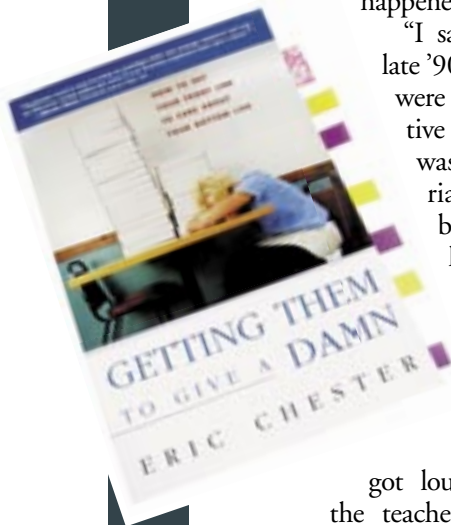
These are the workers who greet their customers, serve their food and answer their phones.

Chester still does motivational talks, but now as president and founder of Denver-based Generation Why Inc., he's more likely to address to the companies that need to find ways to train and motivate "kidployees" (Chester defines them as "those legally old enough to have a job but too young to know that the words 'rap' and 'music' don't belong in the same sentence").

His second book on Generation Why, "Getting Them to Give a Damn: How to Get Your Front Line to Care About Your Bottom Line," has been "doing very well, better than forecasted," according to his publisher, Cynthia Zigmund, vice president and publisher for Dearborn Trade Publishing.

The subject matter has resonated with a number of franchise executives, who signed on to participate in a pilot of a Web-based training program designed by WisdomTools in partnership with Dearborn.

The Web application presents Scenarios in which participants read a brief story about characters based on Chester's book



and then interact with others on how the situation could have or should have been handled.

To date, there have been three pilot programs on “Getting Them to Give a Damn.” The participants were made up of a mixture of executives, mostly from HR and training departments, including several franchise companies. But the ideal is to have people from the same company, “with the same culture,” participating in the Scenarios, says Craig Wortmann, president and CEO of WisdomTools.

E-learning isn’t always a priority with busy professionals. “Every client said, ‘My people don’t have time,’” says Wortmann, “but once they see it, they get pulled into the story.”

Bill Carmichael, director of training for Back Yard Burgers, a 175-unit chain based in Memphis, was one of the volunteers who participated in a pilot for Chester’s book.

“I’ve been a fan of Eric’s for several years,” Carmichael says. “His first book opened my eyes...He’s got this Gen Why down pat. How they act; what they say.”

As a growing regional brand, Back Yard Burgers counts on this age group as their front line. What Carmichael has found is that young workers expect a different relationship at work than past generations—“They feel entitled to benefits they haven’t earned,” he says.

Common courtesy expressions, such as “yes, sir” and “no, ma’am” are nonexistent, and even worse, often replaced with “dude.”

Karin Davie, training manager for Chili’s, says the main feedback they hear

from customers is that “older people don’t like to be called ‘guys,’” a salutation that rolls easily off Gen Why’s often-pierced tongues.

The job of hiring and retaining workers has become harder in an industry like fast food where turnover is off the charts.

“We tell our managers (to) find out how they learn...what motivates them,” Carmichael says. For instance, if an employee has ADD (Attention Deficiency Disorder), and has trouble focusing, managers will break down the task into singular steps.

“It’s not taking more time to manage, just a different type of managing,” Carmichael explains. Instead of issuing a set of orders as a manager may have 10 years ago, the enlightened manager today is going to not only explain how to do a task, but why it’s being done.

Why they should do the task is as important to this group as what is expected and how it’s done. Often they just need to know that if they don’t do their task it impacts their co-workers, making their job more difficult. For instance, if an employee is consistently late, instead of reiterating that the shift starts at noon, explain that when they’re late, their peers have to work harder to make up for being short a person.

“Middle managers have more responsibility,” Chester says. It’s not enough anymore to remember a worker’s name, now bosses need to know about the employee’s off-job activities, such as playing on the soccer team or in a band. They have to make a connection with the employee and spend some time talking about subjects that interest



Photo by Deanna Urs

Eric Chester, here with his son, Zac, says Gen Why is an immensely talented generation. The key to managing them, he says, is don't expect them to be motivated the same way baby boomers are.

them, not just assigning tasks.

The plus side to this added investment is that the “kidployee (another word Chester’s coined)” feels a connection to the place he or she works.

“There’s loyalty to the store they work in, rather than the company,” Carmichael says.

In his book Chester talks about recruiting “Opies,” after the character Opie from the ’60s TV show, “The Andy Griffith Show.” Opie was hard-working, polite, enthusiastic and honest. (Some of that advice he received from his pa, Andy Griffith, must have sunk in because Ron Howard, who played Opie, grew up to be the hard-working, likeable director of classics like “Apollo 13” and “A Beautiful Mind.”)

To find the Opies out there, managers at Back Yard Burgers conduct background checks and calls references

from the last three jobs. If it seems implausible that a 17 year old may have had three previous employers, it’s the new reality. “Job hopping is four to five months for this age group,” Carmichael says.

Rib Crib, a 38-unit chain based in Tulsa, Okla., is also looking for Opies. “Once you find a really good employee, you find out what makes them like that and then where their friends are working,” says Rib Crib’s Eric Bartlett.

Doesn’t it pose a new problem to have good friends working together?

“Not if they’re all Opies,” Bartlett claims.

Like Carmichael, Bartlett has also found Chester’s analysis to be right on. They try to catch employees doing something right. “Whatever gets rewarded, gets repeated,” he says. Reprimands are done privately, because Gen Whys—even more than most people—hate to be embarrassed in front of their peers.

One of the scenarios in the Web-based training in which Bartlett participated was a deli manager who belittled an employee in front of a long line of customers. The employee quit on the

spot, helping himself to several gift cards in the process as an “entitlement” for his unfair treatment.

That’s something that won’t happen at Rib Crib. New employees are given a two-hour orientation about the company culture, the expectations and what’s in it for them. And, managers are being recruited and trained in the “soft skills.”

You can dress him up...

Rib Crib’s uniforms are something kids don’t mind wearing—jeans and a “fun, colorful T-shirt.” While they don’t allow nose or tongue piercings, they are tolerant of “small, non-obscene” tattoos, Bartlett says. For the heavily tattooed, they offer long-sleeve T-shirts.

For Chili’s, a casual-dining chain, dress code is based on the location. For instance, in Southern California, it’s OK to have visible tattoos and a tongue ring. “In more conservative areas, that’s not the case,” Davie says.

Labor laws in California require employees to have a choice in uniforms, so Chili’s has added a white shirt to its standard of black shirt, black pants or jeans. Bare backs and bellies are a no go in all geographies.

Where the Opies are

Cold Stone Creamery has built its concept with getting the best from Gen Why. The upscale ice cream stores audition, rather than hire employees, says Karen LaFond, director of program development.

Kidploys are placed in groups during the interview process to test their social skills, including being a team player. They sing, dance and

make ice cream serving into performance art.

That takes an outgoing person with a sense of fun. In their downtime, the employees not only get to eat the ice cream, they practice tossing it into cups or cones.

Sure, some ice cream ends up on the floor, but that can be entertaining as well, LaFond says. And, since the object is to get people talking about their experiences at Cold Stone, no one’s crying over some spilled ice cream.

Just rewards

What motivates these kids varies. And, money isn’t always the pat answer. Carmichael at Back Yard Burgers says they’ve found that only about 60 percent of their employees are motivated by money. Around 20 percent want recognition, and another 20 percent want something personal, such as time off or flexibility in their work schedule.

This is a busy group with more commitments outside of work than just school.

Rewards, such as movie tickets or gas cards, work, as does moving workers up the pay scale or promoting them.

“Our young employees want to know about opportunities (for promotions) earlier than workers 10 years ago,” Carmichael says. Career paths are now explained on day one of training, he adds.

Chester has found a following among fast food companies because they’re the ones that rely heavily on this generation for workers. Plus there’s that whole turnover dilemma. To illustrate his point, Chester tells about his son, Zac, who was one of six servers to be hired at a restaurant. By the end of

the training week, only two were left. In order to end up with the necessary number of workers, companies have to “widen the funnel at the top,” meaning that more workers than needed have to be hired to cover the revolving door. That wider funnel is the result of ongoing recruitment. Restaurants should “always be looking for talent,” even if all the spots are filled. One way to ensure you don’t lose a good catch is to shorten the employment application process, Chester suggests. If a potential employee has to wait around, they may accept another job or no longer be interested in your job when you finally have approval.

Since a majority of Gen Whys have been raised in single-parent families, or by two-working parents, a manager often fills in for the missing parent. Management becomes a balancing act: “You can’t treat everybody the same,” he says, but you need to treat everyone fairly. For instance, “plant boundaries very deep,” and reward anyone who meets the standards.

“Keep the rule book light and tight,” he suggests, and be able to defend the policies you have in place.

While it may have been much easier to manage in the “olden days,” get over it. To ensure your workforce “gives a damn,” you have to cater to them. You have to keep them happy.

Chester tells another story about making conversation with a clerk, and asking him how he liked his job. The youth replied, “This sucks. I hate it here.”

While the kid could be a bad apple, there’s also the possibility that he had a bad

manager.

“This is an amazingly talented generation,” Chester says. To motivate them, however, is going to take some time and some effort. Managers can’t respond robotically—a manager has to make a real effort to find out about the worker and to personalize rewards: Don’t just give them movie tickets, give them tickets to the premiere of “Star Wars” if you know that’s something they’re into, Chester says. It shows a real connection, not a generic one.

Unfortunately, no one has shown this generation how to work, Chester points out. He refers to the dilemma as “Preparation H,” preparing students to go to Harvard, not how to make a living.

If kidploys don’t know how to work, managers are going to have to be the ones who take over the parenting (OK, we know we’re dealing with generalities here, not every 16 to 24 year old falls into this category, just like not all baby boomers are hard workers).

Every generation has problems with the ones that come after it. But, Chester contends that armed with a little knowledge about what motivates the newest workforce can save the expense and headaches of the revolving door.

There’s three ways to get the insight: Read the book, log onto the online scenarios version or hire the author to speak. And while it’s definitely a win-win-win for Chester, WisdomTools and Dearborn, it’s also a winning combination for companies that need to motivate their Gen Why workers. Because who knows what their kids are going to be like? [FT](#)