

## Late Adopters to Great Adapters

Ever feel like the chasm between you and your kids is growing? I'm not just referring to the generation gap, I mean total communication break down. If it seems like the technology that was supposed to make it easier for us to stay connected is slowly creating an innovation wedge between youthful MySpacers and stodgy old thirty somethings, it's because we're what's called Late Adopters.

Researchers who study emerging cultural trends and the impact of technology tell us that all innovation is stuff that was invented after we turned twelve. To the kids growing up now, the internet, hand held communications, and social networking is an organic part of their experience.

It must seem a little amusing to them when we marvel at the gadgets that are part of their everyday life. I imagine it would be the same polite humoring we'd offer to a grandparent who reminds us that they didn't have cars when they were young. Still, I'm only thirty five and I refuse to be relegated to the senior care facility where I can dream about the good old days, where people paged one another with important information and we rewound our VHS tapes before we took them back.

Recently, I spoke to a group of teachers at Mesquite Junior High in Gilbert. I asked if any of them knew the difference between the internet and the World Wide Web. I wasn't shocked when none did as it is that way for most of the audiences I speak to. Why should they know? They have to make adequate yearly progress as measured by No Child Left Behind and that is a full time job. It's also the reason that students today are perpetuating a radical shift in culture and we are becoming the obsolete versions of people 1.0. Free time, it's what they have a ton of to sit and figure out how to incorporate the latest applications to their desk top or phone. **By immediately adopting the latest technology, they create a faster social and emotional paradigm.**

Comscore Networks, a leading provider for measuring the digital age released a study that showed that fifty eight percent of 18 to 24 year olds stated text messaging as of "high importance" when selecting a cell phone. That's compared to only thirty percent of the 35 and up crowd. Hand held devices embody a greater social dimension in the minds of the kids who grew up with them. They convey components of their personality and status, while older adopters of the same technology view it as useful but not necessarily an extension of themselves. The

instant message also creates an environment for asynchronous communication which allows kids to place themselves into a larger social context. If you feel left out of the world they live in, it's because the digital bus has left and we decided not to get on.

So how do we reconnect with this generation? Ignoring the issue seems to be the answer I encounter around the country. If the parent or teacher or boss doesn't get it, than it must not constitute an authentic challenge. Introduce innovative ideas to the culture of education and often you'll be lumped into the crowd that's soft on internet predators or dismissed as one of those "smart but unrealistically technical" people.

Here's the challenge, abstain from your cell phone and e-mail for two days and only gather information from the U.S. Postal Service (snail mail). You'll find that the connective tissue that we have interwoven into our experience through personal communications is where we assign the social and emotional importance of our lives. When you feel disconnected and forced to relate with old and slow mediums of communication, you'll feel a slice of how this generation perceives our technological ignorance.

As new opportunities arise from the emergence of faster and more comprehensive systems of communication, it's incumbent upon those who are in leadership to, at the very least; understand how a new generation is connecting. The youth of today should not be blamed for operating on a speedier track. They didn't create the system; they just decided to use it faster than anyone else. Trying to ignore advancement will only further separate our perceptions of immediacy and shared values. It's time we initiate the four "A" words into our leadership strategy. Analyze audience adapt accordingly. Then we go from being late adopters to great adapters. Start today, text me and let me know you're on the bus. (480) 227-4575.

National motivational specialist and author, Leon Quan has a daily presence on school campuses and in conferences. In 2007, he will speak to more than 75,000 students throughout North America. Quan Presentations challenges students to define their lives with clarity and authenticity and is dedicated to helping schools create supportive learning environments.

