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----- WHAT'S UP, DOC? -----

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"Creating Leadership Solutions for Profit and Growth"

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## THIS MONTH'S THEME: WHAT DRIVES TODAY'S WORKING YOUTH?

A subscriber writes: "Dear AJ: How about today's generations. What drives them?" More than one reader has expressed an interest in this topic, though I approach it cautiously. I tend to find most descriptions of "Generation X" or "Generation Y" (or whatever generation is latest) to be short on substance and long on hype. But hey, that's me. I tend to think that human nature does not change, and that subsequent generations share more commonalities than differences. But there are some global economic and social trends that make the establishment of an adult identity in late adolescence and early adulthood more complex, and while these challenges are not unique to young people, their effects are probably more amplified among young people. So, here's my armchair take on "what drives today's youth." I've purposely not done active research on what others are saying in this area, so as not to bias my thinking. So you're either getting 1) some really uninformed, baseless, useless opinions or 2) you're getting some more or less original observations, from someone who's not trying to build a consulting practice based telling you how to market to people under 29 years of age. I'll let you decide how much any of these ideas have value. . .

SUBSCRIPTIONS INCREASE SINCE JAN 1, 2005: 12%

NEW SUBSCRIPTIONS GOAL FOR 2005: 300%

Thank you for your recommendations!

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### THIS MONTH'S QUOTES:

"The secret of joy in work is contained in one word - excellence. To know how to do something well is to enjoy it." -- Pearl Buck

"Success is not measured by the position one has reached in life, rather by the obstacles overcome while trying to succeed." -- Booker T. Washington

"Talking and eloquence are not the same: to speak and to speak well are two things. A fool may talk, but a wise man speaks." -- Ben Jonson

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## 1. WHAT DRIVES TODAY'S WORKING YOUTH?

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### THE "JOB" OF YOUTH

For our purposes here, I'll arbitrarily define "youth" as comprising those between the ages of 18 and 29 in 2005. What is their "job?"

Developmentally, their job is to establish some sense of who they are in the world, some sense of personal and social identity, to find some way to make a living, and to attempt to establish some bonds of intimacy that could lead to family life. That's pretty much it. Modern societies have progressively made these tasks more complex as societies and economies grow more complex, and so we see people becoming established on all these fronts later and later in life. Adolescence, that in-between period from childhood to adulthood, has become extended over the course of human history, but the nature of the tasks involved has not changed very much. Even societies that performed mate selection for young people left those young people with the challenges of learning how to navigate intimate relationships and possibly raise children, so these developmental tasks of emerging adulthood have always been with us. Everything that follows, as I examine what drives today's youth, comes from this context. In a sense, I'm saying that the things that drive today's youth are the same as the drives of the youth of yesterday, but as I'll argue, the "job" of youth has only gotten harder, and not just here in the West.

### INFORMATION OVERLOAD!

Not every part of the world is as saturated with media as the little corner where I live, near Washington, DC, USA. But there are few places in the world that have not been affected by, or are not becoming affected by, the expansion of media in our information age. We don't have to go back many generations to see how different the world was. We are now bombarded with messages clamoring for our attention, and you subscribers, who use email, certainly know what it's like to receive unsolicited, bizarre, even tasteless messages! What impact does this change in our global environment have on youth? On the one hand, it

gives individual young people many more choices and possibilities, many more models – good ones and bad ones – to follow as they form their own identities. Formerly, young people would have their identities and world views pretty much handed to them: they were told whom to marry, took on work at the family farm or in the family business, and never strayed beyond the local tribe or social group. Their social lives, lives of worship and group memberships could be handed to them. Not all stuck with to the lives given them, but many, even most, did. But that happens far less often today, and all of these new opportunities for self-definition by young people come at a cost: complexity is extremely confusing, often threatening. Young people may make choices their elders don't understand or support. Some make very bad choices. But for the young people themselves, the cacophony of options makes the job of growing into adulthood far more difficult than it ever has been, and the anxiety and difficulty they experience has global implications.

#### MULTIPLE SYSTEMS OF MEANING

The advantage of growing up in a world where little is changed or challenged by outside influences is expressed in the lyrics to an old show recently revived on Broadway, "Fiddler on the Roof." The main character describes life in his little village and says, "Because of our traditions, everyone here knows who he is, and what God expects him to do." The show goes on to dramatize the degree to which his life and the life of his group is turned upside down by changes in how people select their mates and changes in technology and in the political environment around them. Now in the world, as young people grow up, they have many different voices reaching out to tell them who they are and what God, however defined, may expect them to do. We live in a world that offers many different systems of meaning, and all of these systems include strains that make them hostile to any other system or approach. All of us in the world experience the effects of these clashing systems of meaning, and young people are at the forefront of trying to sort these things out as they make their own choices and ask themselves, "What do I believe? Who do I want to be?" In the future, people who can move comfortably among multiple worlds and systems of meaning will be in greater and greater demand, based on global economic trends.

#### WORK ETHIC AND THE CULT OF CELEBRITY

When my clients ask me about what motivates today's youth, they are often asking out of a sense of frustration. They believe, as probably every generation has believed, that young people lack the same work ethic or sense of responsibility that "we had at their age." I usually chalk this up to the usual sources of generational misunderstanding: if we want to tell ourselves that "we" were somehow better when we were young, we can always find some examples among today's young people to bolster our point of view. But I have to concede that there may (just may) be

something to what some of my business friends say when they make these complaints, given the context that young people operate in today. After all, if the world has become more complex for young people, and if it takes longer to figure out who you are, find your niche and embrace it with gusto, then might that process look like laziness or lack of responsibility to us older folks (full disclosure: I'll turn 39 in April, 2005)? While these young people are sorting out who they are, they need to try new things. That could look like a lack of focus and an unwillingness to take on responsibility to those of us who may look back and think it did not take our generation as long to meet those challenges in life. What's changed is not human nature, but the context in which human nature and development have to express themselves.

I'm also tempted to say that the media age we live in has created so many celebrities who make life and achievement seem so "easy," that some young people may consequently devalue work as a way to get what they want in life, and may act as if simply being who they are should merit getting them all they want from others. I have no evidence to suggest this, and I'm not convinced it's even remotely true, but for some young people, I suppose it may be possible. The power of the cult of celebrity in our media saturated age may have such an effect. On the other hand, I may just be trying to rationalize a view that says that more young people are lazy today than were lazy a generation or two ago! Really, I have no idea if that is true, and I tend to suspect it's not.

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#### SIMPLE ANSWERS WANTED!

Predictably, given the complexity of the world young people face today, many come to wish for, and run headlong into, a worldview that will offer them simple answers, clear enemies and a channel through which to funnel their anxiety and confusion into action – sometimes destructive action. In saying this, I'm not making a simple statement about various movements

whose exploits garner headlines daily across the globe: movements that offer a flight into a simplified worldview exist everywhere, in every culture, because human nature is the same no matter where you go, and the challenges we all face in an information age are quite similar. The great 20<sup>th</sup> century psychologist and social observer Erich Fromm offered precisely this insight in his book “Escape From Freedom,” back in 1941. At that time, Fromm was observing the rise of fascism and nazism, and responding to Marx’s industrial age observations involving the alienation of factory workers from the products of their work. These revolutionary social movements, precipitated by great changes in technology and the organization of economies, unleashed mass coping strategies we still see around us today. In Fromm’s analysis, greater choice and opportunity for learning brought about possibilities for freedom and human achievement, but he also observed that freedom brings confusion and anxiety, and can prompt social movements, opposed to modernity, that offer individuals an opportunity to escape from confusion: to escape from freedom itself. It’s impossible, to me, to comment on the contemporary challenges faced by youth in the world, or even in my neighborhood, without pointing out these social and psychological phenomena.

#### THE NEW “AGE OF ANXIETY”

Wags, pundits and commentators have employed the phrase “age of anxiety” to describe every decade for perhaps the last hundred years, but nevertheless, we do live in a time of great tension and anxiety, and young people feel the strain perhaps more than most of us do. At the same time, as they struggle with the discordant strains of culture in our media age, the perhaps offer the best hope for the development of modes of thinking and acting that allow people to integrate themselves into the modern world without the need to destroy others who must live in it. The old Chinese curse says, “May you live in interesting times!” Well, that’s where we find ourselves, you and I. For some people, the struggle to reconcile who we are and where we fit in the world, however difficult, proves to be creative and productive. There are places in the world, typically urban, cosmopolitan centers, where people learn to live with their differences and forge ties of commonality and communion, often through intermarriage and broadening of family ties. These are interesting times, but I’m not being pessimistic: there is much opportunity in these times as well.

#### HOW TO LEAD YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE WORK FORCE

Based on the analysis above, here’s what young people generally need from their leaders at work:

- 1) They need a degree of patience from their bosses and their work organizations. That does not mean a relaxation of performance standards (we’ll get to this in a minute), but don’t be surprised when they seem to go from one area of interest to another longer in life

than you expect. They need more time to sort out their career options, identities and preferences in a more complex world.

- 2) They need friendly guidance from organizational and professional whose expertise lies in how to develop a career path, who can show them what a particular career option has been like historically. The thing is, every career path is guaranteed to change, so mentors should help younger people discover what they like to do the most. Young people need to understand how lifelong learning and passion will be their tickets to long term success and working security, rather than finding any one well trod career path. People will not continue to learn what they do not ultimately enjoy or find interesting.
- 3) Young people need to understand the new rules for the working lives they will face: lifelong learning is their ticket to growth and prosperity in a knowledge economy. Expertise is valuable, but it gets stale. Young people have to be taught to embrace this approach to their working lives, and develop a degree of comfort with life in a changing world. Learning to live with some uncertainty is a necessary modern working skill. Teach young people that, in the future, those who will be in the most demand are those who can combine disparate worlds of expertise, and those who can speak more than one language and those who can integrate multiple cultural perspectives.
- 4) Young people also need boundaries and limits. Just because, as an employer, you may be patient, this does not mean, “anything goes.” Set standards, reward high performance and dole out fair consequences for lack of performance. No one learns through an excess of indulgence, and excessive tolerance for unproductive behavior is bad for your organization.
- 5) Some people say you have to make your messages quick and short for young people, and that is often true, since we learn to filter through many messages quickly in an information age. Young people in an information age tend necessarily to grow up with tougher mental screens and filters, just to manage the volume of demands for their attention. But young people will pay attention to more complex information when they are genuinely interested in the material and when they trust the source. Selective attention spans are often mistaken for short attention spans.
- 6) Finally, young people need encouragement. They can only discover what they are good at when you point out to them what they do well. This may seem obvious, but trust me: I’ve seldom met anyone who suffered from an excess of encouragement. Young people just need it more, because they don’t automatically know or understand themselves well. They gain self-understanding through reflections from others who have their interests at heart.
- 7) All of this may mean that leading young people in the workforce implies extra effort, and in a sense, it does. But you usually don’t

have to pay them as much, either! Though you'll lose some people you've nurtured because they decide to go in a different life and career direction, they may boomerang back on you, to your benefit, when they go further down one path or another. And the ones who stick with you will be more loyal and productive in your organization, having developed expertise specific to your business that you cannot readily acquire, like some commodity, in the general labor force.

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## 2. RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND ENTERTAINMENT

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BOOK: "Wharton on Making Decisions," by Stephen J. Hoch, and Howard C. Kunreuther, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 2001

This is an edited book I picked up recently, and I've read through a couple of chapters. It's not a book you would read cover-to-cover. But I've become more interested, based on some consulting work, in the ways that people make decisions, and the Wharton School (my alma mater) has done a lot to originate, develop and advance the whole field of decision science. As I get into this area, I may write about it more in the future. On the theory, however misguided, that subscribers to my newsletter might generally be interested in books I am reading, I offer you this recommendation. You can find the book for sale, if you're interested, [here](#).

ENTERTAINMENT: Music CD "Charlie Parker with Strings: The Master Takes," by Charlie Parker, Verve, 1995.

There actually are some movies out there right now I think I'd like to see (feel welcome to send your own review of something for possible publication!), but I have not had time to see any of them. So, it's back to my jazz collection for a recommendation. Charlie Parker is a legend, the premier improvisational saxophonist, whose myth was no doubt augmented by his early death and heroine addiction. But he was a genuine artistic genius in the jazz genre. Still, many people who are newer to jazz have a hard time getting to know his work: there is so much out there, and much of the bebop style he pioneered is not so easy for people who just like a catchy tune. This CD finds him bridging the worlds of melody and improvisation in a way that is at once friendly on the ears, tuneful and esteemed by the jazz snobs. If you ever wanted to try out an introduction to his work, and you still would like to hear something "sweet," then this is a good bet for you. I'm actually listening to it now: the right kind of

music helps me write, especially when I'm tired! You can find the CD for purchase [here](#).

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### 3. CHUCKLES

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This month's offering comes from a client-friend-subscriber:

A man and his wife were having some problems at home and were giving each other the silent treatment.

Suddenly, the man realized that the next day, he would need his wife to wake him at 5:00 AM for an early morning business flight. Not wanting to be the first to break the silence (and LOSE), he wrote on a piece of paper, "Please wake me at 5:00 AM." He left it where he knew she would find it.

The next morning, the man woke up, only to discover it was 9:00 AM and he had missed his flight. Furious, he was about to go and see why his wife hadn't wakened him, when he noticed a piece of paper by the bed.

The paper said, "It is 5:00 AM. Wake up."

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### 4. PROMOTE YOUR OWN GROWTH

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### 5. ABOUT DR. SCHULER

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A. J. Schuler, Psy. D., an expert on leadership, negotiation and organizational change, provides consulting services, keynote presentations and seminars for client companies. His trademark is highly personalized service that leads to measurable increases in productivity, profit and growth. He also provides personalized leadership education and coaching for highly motivated clients.

Dr. Schuler, President of Schuler Solutions, Inc., has served diverse organizations in the private and public sectors, including The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, Sony Development, Nomura Securities and the Executive Office for Immigration Review.

A graduate of the Wharton School of Business, Dr. Schuler has successfully led the profitable growth of a dynamic, international consulting firm while serving as Operations Director, and has successfully coached over five hundred CEO's and corporate executives.

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## 6. HOW TO SUBSCRIBE OR UNSUBSCRIBE

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## 7. NEWSLETTER STATEMENT OF ETHICS

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NEWSLETTER ETHICS: This e-Newsletter will be sent to subscribers only upon REQUEST, though subscribers may forward this letter to anyone they wish. Subscriber identities or contact information will NOT BE DISCLOSED to any other persons or entities under any circumstances. (An attorney friend recently pointed out that, technically, I'd have to give up my list if compelled to do so by a court of law. He's technically right, of course, but let's face it: that won't happen!)

Have a great month. . .

A. J. Schuler, Psy. D.  
Schuler Solutions, Inc.

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6300 Stevenson Avenue, Suite 916  
Alexandria, VA 22304  
Phone 703.370.6545 Fax 703.783.0232  
[AJ@SchulerSolutions.com](mailto:AJ@SchulerSolutions.com)  
[www.SchulerSolutions.com](http://www.SchulerSolutions.com)

"Make each day your masterpiece." -- John Wooden

P.S. - Remember to send in your comments and successes, and to forward this newsletter to at least one friend! Thanks . . . AJS