

# Answering the call of “Generation Why?”

or the art of delivering excellence,  
one employee at a time.

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Much has been written about “Generation Y” workers and their lack of commitment to their jobs. Yes, as a generation, these young people seem to possess a strongly noncommittal attitude, but these days, that attitude is pervasive within the workplace; a result of cynicism, too many disappointments and rampant mediocrity. I call this larger, more amorphous group “Generation Why” — as in, “Why should I do it, and what’s in it for me?”

In defining Generation Why, we move from an age group to a lifestyle group defined by “Why should I care? Why should I try my best? Why is it worth my time?”

Managers now face a new challenge: providing an answer to “why?”. Many are not prepared for this, having long focused on the how and when, as opposed to why or what. These managers have always dispensed orders and instructions without explaining them. Times have changed. Today, if you want to nurture excellence, you’ll need to master the why. In a world where employees are increasingly entitlement-focused, motivating them to do their best is easier said than done. We must engage employees in a conversation to prove that choosing excellence is in alignment with their personal goals. Unleashing the power of why engages employees and results in a level of commitment that supports the Daily Choice for excellence.

With the ground rules of management thus changing when it comes to excellence, a completely new set of management tools is needed. Of the old tools, “control” was key. Processes and procedures were designed to control employee performance. Managers

viewed performance through adherence to processes.

In sharp contrast, in the excellence performance domain there is a clear shift of power from executives to employees. Excellence is subject to employee choice. Processes are tools used as needed. When the challenge presented fits the process at hand, employees should follow the process to delight customers. However, where the process does not fit the problem at hand, employees need to use their discretion to customize and tailor excellence to the customer’s needs. Employees become the primary asset, the process subservient to them. The main goal is not adherence to procedure but rather delighting customers and delivering a complete experience. Many readers will find these statements difficult to accept.

While rigid adherence to process is strongly advocated by those loyal to six sigma and lean manufacturing movements, without employee discretion the result is a one-size-fits-all model that, in fact, fits relatively few of us. As customers accentuate their differences and demand individualized experiences, one-size-fits-all is not the answer. We must empower employees with respect to processes execution.

This dramatic shift in power from obedience to performance-at-will ushers in a new, upside-down management concept. If the new world of excellence demands employee willingness, the question is, can it be institutionalized? Can you manage excellence that has employee choice at its core? The answer is, yes, but not in the traditional ways, directed from above. It can be institutionalized by creating fertile ground for superior performance to flourish. Just as a basketball coach cannot mandate success on the court, neither can the new excellence manager.

Excellence is the opposite of top-down management, and executives must



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recognize this in the way they interact with their employees. The role of managers must transform from one of keeping employees focused on mechanical tasks to one of creating environments that bring the best out of their employees naturally.

Persuading your employees that excellence is good for them is a primary dimension of your new role. This persuasion starts with an inspiring mission. Employees need to see how their work can make a difference. Focusing on the positive impact their actions have on customers often presents the most compelling mission. SSN

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## About the Author

Lior Arussy is an author, visionary, consultant and creative catalyst in the areas of creating delightful customer experiences and executing profitable customer strategies. His company, Strativity Group, Inc., advises both Global 2000 companies as well as emerging businesses around the world. For his thought leadership and contribution to the industry, Arussy received CRM Magazine “2003 Influential Leaders” award and served as a juror on Fast Company’s Customer First Awards 2005.