

grown up digital by Don Tapscott

The bottom line is this: if you understand the Net Generation, you will understand the future. And as my son often reminds me, the future is now.

Don Tapscott

The Net Generation, born between January 1977 and December 1997, also known as the Millennials or Generation Y is the first generation born into a digital world. They are as comfortable with the electronic gadgets of today as baby boomers were with television. Multi-tasking is natural to them: texting friends; downloading music; uploading videos; visiting friends' pages on Facebook or Myspace; and watching a movie on their iPods.

Don Tapscott, chairman of the nGenera Innovation Network and an adjunct professor of management at the Joseph L. Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto was inspired by the results of a four million dollar private research study to write this book. It is divided into three parts.

Part One: Meet the Net Gen

Part Two: Transforming Institutions

Part Three: Transforming Society

This book is a field guide for boomers to help them to understand how the Net Generation thinks, feels and works. It is also a call to action for employers and educators to examine how they operate/structure their institutions and companies and what changes will be needed if they hope to keep the talented young people of this generation engaged.

It is a hard book to put down once you begin reading. The author engages the reader from the opening paragraph to his final words of advice. Tapscott uses stories from his own experience and those of his children, Niki and Alex to illustrate his points. The research data spans the globe. The reader is able to compare the responses of Canadians to those of young people around the world. Canadian Net Geners for example, came in third highest amongst users who text messaged and/or e-mailed on mobile/cell phones in a month at 81 per cent. Only the Chinese (95%) and Japanese Net Geners (94%) outdistanced them.

Tapscott does not buy into the concerns and criticisms voiced about the Net Generation by parents, educators, employers and

others. The introductory chapter briefly discusses the top ten issues (pages 3-5) that he has heard boomers voice about this generation.

1. *They are dumber than we were at their age.*
2. *They are screenagers, addicted to the Net, losing their social skills, and they have no time for sports or healthy activities.*
3. *They have no shame.*
4. *Because their parents have coddled them, they are adrift in the world and afraid to choose a path.*
5. *They steal.*
6. *They are bullying friends online.*
7. *They are violent.*
8. *They have no work ethic and will be bad employees.*
9. *This is the latest narcissistic "me" generation.*
10. *They don't give a damn.*

Tapscott goes on to say that there are eight characteristics/norms (page 6), which distinguish the Net Generation from their boomer parents.

1. *They prize freedom and freedom of choice.*
2. *They want to customize things, make them their own.*
3. *They are natural collaborators, who enjoy a conversation, not a lecture.*
4. *They will scrutinize you and your organization.*
5. *They insist on integrity.*
6. *They want to have fun, at work and at school.*
7. *Speed is normal.*
8. *Innovation is part of life.*

These characteristics affect how Net Geners behave in school, at work and in social situations.

Chapter 5 addresses the Net Generation as learners. Tapscott begins by describing a video on YouTube called *A Vision of Students Today*. It was created by Kansas State University cultural anthropologist Michael Wesch and 200 student collaborators in the spring of 2007. The students hold up signs describing how they feel about the education they are receiving.

- Eighteen percent of teachers know my name.
- I will read eight books this year, 2,300 Web pages and 1,281 Facebook profiles.
- Holding up a multiple-choice test form and a sign, a student makes the point, "Filling this out won't get me there."
- I bring my laptop to class but I'm not working on class stuff.

Their point was to emphasize that the education system of the twentieth century does not meet the needs of the twenty-first century student. Today the focus has to be on the student and the eight norms mentioned above. Successful teachers interact with students to help them make discoveries on their own. The curricula needs to be customized to the individual student and collaboration within the classroom encouraged. Tapscott offers seven tips to educators on how to become better teachers in this digital age. His focus is on teaching students to learn. Technology, he says, is only one of the tools that assist in this process.

It is not just education that needs to re-shape itself, but business as well. Succession planning is as much a concern for business as it is for education. If the boomers want to keep their talented employees, the way they conduct business will have to change. The Net Generation will insist on working differently. They want a work-life balance, a collaborative working environment, authentic feedback and praise, and they want to have fun at work. They will not tolerate top down management. They will insist on access to their social networking tools even at work.

There is also a word of caution to the Net Generation. Tapscott is concerned about the amount of privacy the Net Generation may be giving up. The stories and pictures being posted on Facebook, MySpace and other social networking sites may come back to bite them years later when they are applying for jobs or entering politics. Once something is posted to the Net, it is there for life.

The final chapter *In Defense of the Future* addresses the ten concerns voiced by boomers in the opening chapter. Tapscott found that the research study on this generation "has produced some profound and inspiring conclusions." Test scores and IQ scores have gone up. They are not as dumb as some people think. The Net Geners are more global in their thinking, savvier and better educated than previous generations. He ends with some final advice for the Net Gen including: go to college; be patient at work; and bring back the family dinner.

grown up digital is a must read for every educator. If you only read one educational book this summer, this is one that will provide you with much to ponder and much to reflect upon. How are you and your staff meeting the needs of the twenty-first century learner? How are you as a school administrator engaging the Net Gen teachers joining your staff or your administration team?

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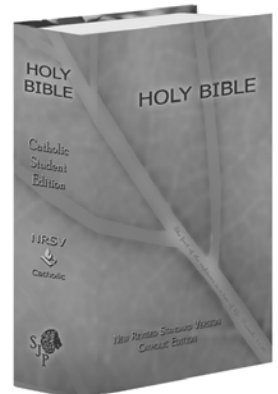


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