

SERVANT LEADERSHIP NEWSLETTER

TOPIC THIS ISSUE: LEADING YOUNGER GENERATIONS WELL

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This is a special edition of the Servant Leadership Focus Newsletter. Most employers I meet with are struggling to understand, much less lead, this new generation of team members today. We have a new kind of diversity with multiple generations in the work force. Tim Elmore, *Founder of Growing Leaders*, has written an excellent e-book to equip to us to lead them well. This ebook is all about understanding, connecting with, and leading Generation Z staff. I believe the glass is still “half full,” and we have the opportunity to seize the day if we can shift our perspective and just see it. The following are two articles from the e-book.

I highly encourage getting Dr. Elmore’s free e-book <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f039522b096b01cd79e61cc/t/660da4a63554a633ee565ed2/1712170152135/The+Glass+is+Still+Half+Full+—+Tim+Elmore-compressed.pdf>

HELPING TEAM MEMBERS STOP MAKING EXCUSES AT WORK

By: Tim Elmore



I’ve written several articles about a growing mentality in our country. I see it in young and old. This mindset is expanding, and it’s damaging our people. For many, it’s ruining their lives. Millions of people today feel like a victim and embrace a victim mindset.

Consider this data. The number one motivation for voters in the last presidential election was that of a “victim.” Political commercials told

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viewers the other party had victimized them, and now justice should be done. Both parties said so. Not only commercials but social media posts convince people of their underdog status. People see themselves as victims of a broken system, a broken home, a broken relationship, or a broken spirit. They feel disadvantaged. Even though we live much better than people did a hundred years ago, or even people today who live in a developing nation, we're less happy. **Consider how millions of Americans live their lives:**

Almost one out of two marriages end in divorce.

Three out of four adults are overweight.

42% are clinically obese.

More than 80% are unhappy with their work life.

Six out of 10 have less than \$500 in savings.

Only 38% describe themselves as "satisfied."

Only 14% describe themselves as "very happy with life".

52% report feeling lonely.

Someone completes suicide every twelve minutes.

When we feel like a victim of our circumstances, we begin believing we can't catch a break. And we deserve one. Someone owes us a perk since we've been wronged. My wife recently visited a coffee shop where only one barista served a long line of customers. When my wife asked why the staff person was working solo, she replied, "Everyone else called in for a PTO day." One excused herself, saying: "I'm requesting PTO because I got 'crunk' last night and need a mental healthday." This left the one responsible team member who came ready to work in need of managing two shifts and covering for her irresponsible teammates. Someone's irresponsibility became someone else's responsibility. It can get old.

We're Talented at Making Excuses

One of our chief challenges today is that we've gotten very experienced at making excuses. Unlike the example above, most people create elaborate reasons for their poor performance. **Some work harder at excuses than execution.** Over the last thirty years, psychological diagnoses have entered our common vocabulary. People who are not therapists or psychologists know terms like anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, panic attacks, bipolar disorder, you name it. Like armchair quarterbacks, we diagnose our situation. This poses some problems.

First, our **self-diagnoses can be inaccurate;** after all, we are laymen in this field.

Second, we can become **victims of psychologism,** a term describing an over-dependence on human diagnoses, and later, our explanations become excuses. We begin to assume: **if I can explain my behavior, I can excuse my behavior.** Psychologism can be sinister. It fosters a tendency to interpret events or arguments in subjective terms or to



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exaggerate the relevance of psychological factors. Everyday people, without expertise in behavioral science, can lean too heavily on human explanations using psychological terms. Soon, any hardship we face becomes an excuse for poor effort.

Four Ideas Leaders Can Use to Combat Excuses

1. Give them decision-making rights.

Those who make excuses often feel like victims of their circumstances.



Someone created the problem they have. Leaders must keep decision-making rights at the lowest level possible, so they'll own their situation. As authority goes up, intelligence goes down, regarding problems on the ground. As we move up the ladder, we are further away from the daily grind. Everyone wins if leaders tell others: "you can make this choice."

2. See yourself as working for your team, not vice versa.

Many people are indeed victims of a suboptimal past. Victim mindsets, however, don't help anyone and cause staff to focus on themselves. **Instead of seeing your team as people who work for you, go to work for them.** See yourself as an advocate and supporter who serves them. When they recognize this, they're more apt to reciprocate and work harder for the organization.

3. Put a "win" under their belt.

Victim mindsets lead to excuses that are largely due to **"learned helplessness."** This is a term from Dr. Martin Seligman, who noticed people tend to give up when they feel their effort makes no difference. When leaders put a "win" under the belt of their team members, it can foster **"learned industriousness,"** which sparks more effort. Find ways to reveal their progress to them.

4. Remind them of the advantages and benefits they enjoy that others don't.

It's tough to maintain a victim mindset when we see someone else in worse conditions than we are in. All through last year, when I felt frustrated with a minor problem, I'd remind myself: "I am not in the Ukraine." Leaders must find ways to empathize with the plight of victims who make excuses and then point out the advantages they enjoy that others don't. We all need perspective. George Washington Carver wisely noted, "Ninety-nine percent of failures come from people who have the habit



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of making excuses.” Mason Cooley added “Excuses change nothing, but make us feel better.” **Let’s stop being satisfied with feeling better and actually get better.** When my friend Don Yaeger and I discussed this topic, he reminded me of his one-on-one game against Michael Jordan. Don said the best part came afterward. Michael told Don, **“A loss is not a failure until you make an excuse.”** When excuses are no longer an option, you can focus your attention on the job you have to do, not why it didn’t get done.

**HELPING YOUNG TEAM
MEMBERS NAVIGATE OUR
SCENE TODAY**

By: Tim Elmore

Our cultural **SCENE** is different today. We live in a world of **speed, convenience, entertainment, nurture and entitlement.** It’s affected nearly everyone. This explains why the generational challenge has become more difficult. Let’s talk about how we can overcome it.



When life gets more convenient, even small drudgeries feel bothersome. We get annoyed and impatient more easily. We retaliate faster and more impetuously. We complain faster. In fact, we want to fill out comment cards at restaurants, retail outlets or hotels if we feel the customer service was poor. I am not suggesting this is

wrong, but imagine what growing up in this world of assumptions and expectations has done to Millennials and Generation Z.

A meta-analysis of the data shows people are more prone to “quit” something hard than to persevere and resolve the difficulty. For example, we’d all agree—relationships can be hard, even in our own homes. Disagreements, conflict and spats often nudge people to walk away or avoid. It’s too hard to stay connected. **Did you realize that compared to life fifty years ago:**

- A smaller percentage belong to civic clubs and churches.***
- A smaller percentage are marrying.***
- More people are dining alone.***
- More people are traveling alone.***
- More people are living alone.***

I don’t think it’s because we don’t desire community and belonging. I



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think it’s because the skill sets needed for such a community are rare and challenging. Think about it—it is rare to find a couple who’s been married 40 or 50 years today. It’s rare to find people who’ve remained in a workplace for more than 20 or 30 years. ***I am not suggesting it’s wrong, just that it’s rare.*** Kids look around them and see adults walking away rather than working it out. Years ago, I created two columns to illustrate the challenge our culture has given to young people growing up in the 21st century. While they may enjoy modern luxuries that make life physically easier, the unintended consequences are emotional hardship. Their emotional muscles seem to have atrophied. Check out the columns below. In short, the columns make it clear how a high-tech lifestyle actually fosters entitlement and impulsivity for all of us:

Our SCENE Today

Our World Is Full Of:

- S – Speed
- C – Convenience
- E – Entertainment
- N – Nurture
- E – Entitlement

Consequently, Youth Can Assume:

- Slow is bad.
- Hard is bad.
- Boring is bad.
- Risk is bad.
- Labor is bad.

I think we all love the modern-day speed and conveniences we experience, but kids today are growing up in a world that is faster and more efficient than ever, which may foster a wrong assumption in them. For instance, as I suggest above, our world today is full of ***“entertainment.”*** It now travels with us everywhere on our phones. We can watch streamed videos, programs, news feeds, sports, you name it. There’s nothing wrong with that, but we’ve now become used to the stimuli it offers us. We hate to be bored. It has led many to believe that “boring is bad.” But that’s not true. While I remember hating boredom when I was a kid, today we recognize something we did not understand in my teen years.

Neuroscientists today tell us that our brains actually need boredom. It is in times of boredom—when we have margin in our day and quiet time to think—that we develop creativity and empathy. So, today, we sit more. We consume more. We watch more. We virtually connect more. But we experience higher levels of anxiety and fragility among our teens.



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How Must Leaders Respond?

First, allow me to point out that the right-hand column above is paramount. Notice the words: **slow, hard, boring, risk and labor. Aren't those the very ingredients that grow a young man or woman into a career-ready adult?** When we must struggle for an achievement; when it doesn't happen right away and we must be patient; when it's neither easy nor fun; when I realize I am not entitled to perks that I have not earned—these are lessons we all must learn as we move from adolescence to adulthood. I am not down on our marvelous world of 21st century technology. I am simply saying we must be more intentional in our leadership of this younger generation. They are products of our making. **So now, parents, educators, coaches, and employers must take calculated steps to equip them to move forward in their careers.** Perhaps it begins by discussing the columns above and acknowledging how we've all been affected by our world today.

I will never forget receiving a phone call from my daughter when she was three years into her career. She was living and working 2,500 miles away from home. When she called in the middle of the day, I was surprised. I asked her why she called, and she said, **“Oh, just to say thanks.**

” I smiled and replied, **“Well, every dad likes to hear those words, but why today? Did something happen at work?”**

She paused to collect her thoughts, then blurted out, **“I guess I just realized I work with a bunch of other twenty- somethings, and nobody seems ready for a career. They're on their phones, they're scrolling through Instagram and they're not getting anything done.”** Another pause. Then she concluded, **“Then, I realized how much you and mom got me ready. And...I just wanted to call and say thanks.”**

I paused and then replied, **“Sweetie, you didn't just make my day. You made my year.**

