

Viva the Vital

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A world where everyone is special

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We have figured out why Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and Twitter are so popular among younger generations, and seemingly pointless to many of us Boomers.

Before we share our epiphany, here is some background:

A few years ago the folks at Pew Research, a non-profit, conducted a study among younger generations to get a sense of their goals in life. The purpose was to learn more about the mindset of the leading edge of America's largest, and youngest generation, the Millennial generation. Some 80 million Millennials, born between 1982 and 2001, are reaching ages 8 to 27 this year. (Pew talked only with Millennials over the age of 18 for the study.)

A finding that got our attention was that the Millennials really only have two aspirations in life:

To get rich or to be famous.

As SpongeBob would say, "Well, good luck with that."

Seriously, though, this aspiration for fortune and fame strikes us as probably fairly normal for any generation at this youthful stage of life. The Pew study reports that not as many older Generation Xers (ages 26-40 in the study) want wealth, and "fame" ranks last, after helping people, being leaders in their community or becoming more spiritual. Are Gen Xers that much more grounded as a generation, or are they simply older and wiser than those in their early 20's?

Talking about My Generation's Goals

<i>Your generation's most important goals in life?</i>	Millennials (18-25) %	Gen X (26-40) %
To get rich	81	62
To be famous	51	29
To help people who need help	30	36
To be leaders in their community	22	33
To become more spiritual	10	31

Source: 2006 Gen Next Survey. Respondents were asked to choose the most important and next most important goals from these five options.

Back in the mid-1960's through late-1970's, when Boomers were ages 18-25 we suspect they had pretty ambitious expectations. Every generation starts adulthood with romantic notions of success in life. "I'm going to run this company someday," "I'm going to own my own business," and "I'm going to own a

vacation home in Florida someday” are normal blue sky goals for younger adults. By midlife, though, after marriage, kids, college costs, and bumps in the career path, reality sinks in and older adults modify their life’s goals. They accept their lot in life and find balance between dreams and everyday life.

Thinking back, fame wasn’t particularly a goal for us or our Boomer peers. We wanted to change the world, but we did not grow up seeking our “15 minutes of fame” prophesized by Andy Warhol. Some got it and good for them. Most of us didn’t and that wasn’t bad for us.

It was during the time when we Boomers were beyond our youth and in our young adulthood that the glorification of fame evolved into a modern media genre. Let’s agree it started with *People* magazine, first published in 1974, followed by the *Entertainment Tonight* syndicated TV show in 1981, *Inside Edition* in 1989, and more recently, Reality TV and web sites like TMZ.com (an America Online property).

In the last 25 years our culture has celebrated fame so much it now celebrates fame itself – Paris Hilton is mostly famous for being famous. The universal quest the Millennials have for fame and fortune is a direct result of this cultural shift towards fame and away from substance. We’re not sure what’s more troubling – that 81% of Millennials want to get rich or that only 22% want to be leaders in their community. Our hope is that the new civic mindset put forth by the Obama presidency trickles down to this large-and-one-day-in-charge generation.

Meanwhile, though, we now understand the attraction of Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and Twitter for the Millennial generation. All offer individuals the opportunity for fame. YouTube’s tagline is “Broadcast yourself.” One goal of Facebook is to have a broader circle of friends than your friends – more fame, if you will. Twitter enables you to have “followers.” More followers equals more fame.

This micro flavor of fame is easier to accomplish, and managed not by others, but essentially by ourselves and our close confidants. The more effort put into generating fame, the more of it.

With more than two out of three Millennials born and raised by Boomers, perhaps we only have ourselves to blame. Practically every day of their lives we have told these impressionable young minds that they are “special.” Apparently, they got the message. They all think they are special, or at least worthy of some level of fame.

In the long run this may be a good thing for America. To have a young, empowered, fearless generation coming of age during a worldwide recession and the continuing threat of terrorism, their confidence and ambition to solve all the problems we face means they could make real progress. Now that would be something special.

Oh, one last thing, now that we understand the purpose of Twitter, you can follow us: twitter.com/BoomerConsumer.