You want them: they’re full of energy and optimism and more tech savvy than any other generation, socializing and processing information in whole new ways. You need them: Boomers are retiring, and who else is waiting to step into the workplace? Given that fully one-third of new employees begin investigating alternative employment options within six months of being hired, you’re under the gun to find ways not only to hire the most promising talent, but to ensure that Y’s remain engaged and committed to your organization.

But Gen Y’s can be so difficult to manage—or even understand! Many are not ready to accept the norms of your organization—at least, not without a lot of questions. And some of their behaviors are just so extraordinary: they unashamedly ask for promotions, are impatient when you can’t answer their e-mails every minute of the day, and don’t hesitate to take their talents elsewhere if your workplace isn’t just about perfect.

How can you manage this generation? As so many of you have asked me, What are they thinking?

**From a Manager’s View, How Can Plugged In Help Me?**

Addressed to Y’s entering the workplace, Plugged In can provide you, as a manager of Y’s, deep, inside knowledge that will give you a unique understanding of this generation and the best ways to attract, retain, and get the best out of the newest force in the workplace.

Understanding Gen Y’s will help you, as a manager and as a corporate leader:

- Avoid forming judgments based on generational bias.
- Make your corporate practices and personal management style more effective.
- Allow you to create stronger and more lasting relationships with the Y’s in your organization.

This guide will help you to draw these themes from the book. It also provides discussion questions so you can host a conversation with your Y’s. You’ll be able to help your Y’s develop their own careers, while strengthening their commitment to your organization and gathering innovative ideas for change in your company.
Book Overview

Let's begin by walking through the book itself.

Part I. Who Are You and What Does That Mean for Your Career?

Part I of *Plugged In* will help you understand how the world looks to Y's in—or about to enter—your organization. Drawing on extensive research into generational patterns and preferences, I analyze how Y's historical background is likely to affect the ways they view their professional options and how they interact with others. As you read, I encourage you to think about ways to use that knowledge to develop committed, passionate employees who will energize and propel change in the workplace.

Chapter 1. The Outlines of Your Generation. Demographic studies show that Y's will dominate the workforce for the next forty years and be a significant presence for at least sixty or so! There will be not enough Y's to take the place of retiring Boomers and fill the new jobs that are likely to be created over the next several years. Today's managers need to take a hard look at how to compete for this critical talent.

Chapter 2. The Events and Trends That Have Shaped You. Turning from the statistics, this chapter explores the social and historical contexts that make this generation unique:

- Global events such as terrorism, school violence, and natural disasters give Y's a sense of immediacy and a strong sense of social activism (25–31).
- Ubiquitous technology that gives Y's an unprecedented number of ways to communicate has changed the way they get things done (fast, asynchronously, spontaneously, collaboratively) (31–39; see also 175–181).
- A strong pro-child culture has meant that Y's are more likely than other generations to like and trust their parents and older colleagues. Parents’ growing role in Y’s professional decisions has a direct impact on you as their manager (43–50).

Chapter 3. Shared Views and Common Choices. This chapter reviews Y's generational characteristics—how they see themselves, what they value, and what they want from work—traits that will influence their career path and choices. Topics include:

- Y's self-confidence means they ask for a task or even a position for which they have no experience or qualifications (52–53).
- Are Y's really narcissistic, used to being the center of attention and demanding praise even for nonachievements (56–59)?
✓ Y’s have little interest in traditional corporate rituals. That affects the way they want their work defined—by task rather than time—and the way they think about the rewards of work and the reasons to work (59–65).

✓ For Y’s, work is only one of several important elements of life—and not necessarily at the top of the list. What are they looking for in a flexible workplace (59–65; see also 69–70)?

**Part II. What Work Is Right for You?**

The chapters in this section form a step-by-step guide to help Y’s personalize their career strategy by offering frameworks, stories, and questions.

Read this part of the book from two perspectives. First, let it give you a “through the eyes of a Y” look at the process of choosing a career and a company. This will help you re-shape your own recruiting, hiring, and management practices to strengthen your firm’s value proposition for Generation Y. And when passionate employees choose to invest in the job, organizations realize improved shareholder value, higher levels of productivity and profitability, increased stability, and added energy and initiative.

Second, make this section an opportunity for you and your Y direct reports or interns to explore preferences and career paths together—and an opportunity for you to learn how to make your management approach and corporate practices more effective.

**Chapter 4.** Find Your Passion. This chapter is designed to help Y’s recognize what they are passionate about and the kinds of activities they personally value most highly. Have them complete table 4-2 (83–84).

**Chapter 5.** Identify Your Preferences. In this chapter, Y’s clarify the practical characteristics of their ideal relationship with work—their life lures. My research has shown a high correlation between certain types of life lures and specific, identifiable elements of the work environment. Have your Y’s complete table 5-1 (92–95).

**Chapter 6.** Target Your Place. Of course, every workplace is different, but certain outcomes are more probable in some places than others. I describe seven major business arenas, pointing out their potential appeal for Y’s based on their self-assessments in chapters 4 and 5. This chapter will also give you clues about how Y’s can fit into and contribute to your organization—and how to position it for the future.

**Chapter 7.** Align the Practical Realities. I give Y’s a career curve framework to guide their thinking about how practical considerations (financial needs, degree of responsibility, the role work will take among other priorities) shape career paths. Y’s will likely explore several paths before finding one that perfectly aligns with both passion and practical demands.
Chapter 8. Find the Perfect Job. This chapter considers the nuts and bolts of the job search—the role of location, relevant company offerings, relationships with colleagues, and the nature of work in making the choice of where to work. Pay special attention to the quotes from the Y focus groups—they have a lot to say about what can go wrong as well as what works.

Chapter 9. Leverage Your Advantages. A practical application of the characteristics explored in part I, chapter 9 shows Y’s how they can think of their unique traits as critical advantages to businesses today and how to “market” them during through the recruiting process.

Part III. You Got the Job—Now What?
The third part of Plugged In addresses the practical realities of settling in, guiding Y’s as they learn to work with multigenerational colleagues, and laying out some of the critical workplace skills that they may not yet have considered or developed.

Read this part with an eye toward how you can help your Y’s understand workplace smarts. Both you and your Gen Y’s will learn about how other generations in the workplace think and work, and the Y’s will get a course in workplace basics—from financial savvy to etiquette—that will “socialize” them within your culture.

As you and your Y’s read this section together, share different perspectives of the workplace with your Y direct reports. Can you tell stories of situations that now make more sense because of the generations of the people involved? How would you handle a similar situation differently in the future, now that you understand where the other individuals are coming from?

Chapter 10. Make a Multigenerational Workforce Work for You. Just as it is essential that you see Y’s from their perspective, it is crucial that they see you from yours and that you take a hard look at the traits that characterize the other generations in the workplace. I cover Traditionalists (188–194), Boomers (195–203), and Gen X’ers (203–208) and their unique relationships to Y’s and to each other.

Chapter 11. Business Basics—Communication and the Language of Business. This chapter focuses on two “hard” skills that are essential to success in the work world: communicating well in writing, and understanding and comfortably speaking the language of finance. I offer Y’s a schematic for good writing (219–220) and stress the importance of professionalism in more casual communication as well (218). On the finance side, I define basic financial concepts and offer an exercise (225–228) that walks Y’s through estimating the costs and likely financial results of a project.

Chapter 12. Business Finesse—Soft Skills for Tangible Results. This chapter is about developing the interpersonal skills crucial to Y’s as they step into the workplace and inevitably move into leadership roles. I advise Y’s to master eight soft skills:
1. Think positively (232–236)

2. Learn when to take the initiative (236–238)

3. Turn experience into learning (238–239)

4. Test ideas for pragmatism and learn to read the company’s “hidden code” (239–244)

5. Be perceived as purposeful (245–246)

6. Air concerns constructively (246–248)

7. Handle uncomfortable situations with grace (249)

8. Keep options open (250)

Guide to Managing Y’s

The first step to managing Y’s is understanding them. Reading Plugged In can help you understand what drives Y’s to think and act in ways that often may seem different from how you think or behave. Then you’ll be able to apply this knowledge to your recruiting and managing efforts.

Who are Y’s?

Each generation in the workplace has been shaped by markedly different teen experiences that have led them to approach work with diverse assumptions about how the world works and what they want from life. The first step to understanding Y’s is to understand the events and trends that affected them in their teenage years.

Read through part I of Plugged In. What aspects of Gen Y’s formative adolescence influence the behaviors you see in the Y’s in your organization? Does thinking about how Y’s act help put these behaviors in context?

Now compare Y’s to others in your organization. Read chapter 10 to put Y’s backgrounds and behaviors in the context of those of other generations in the workforce. What are the intergenerational dynamics in your workplace? Can you think of an example when a misunderstanding stemmed from a generational difference?

I hope your reading thus far has led you to rethink some of the popular myths about this generation—their self-involvement, their impatience, their sense of entitlement. Here’s the reality on several misperceptions that often color managers’ interactions with Generation Y:

✓ Parental involvement does not mean the Y’s are helpless or immature (43–50).

✓ Y’s are not unusually narcissistic or needy (52–53, 56–58).

✓ Playing computer games and other online activities have not ruined their cognitive abilities (31–38).
 ✓ They won’t grow out of their impatience—and don’t need to (26–27, 38–40, 53).

If these still seem counterintuitive to you, pay particular attention to the corresponding pages listed in the book and examine tables 10-1 (193–194), 10-2 (200–202), and 10-3 (209–210).

What are some other biases you’ve heard applied to the newest members of the workforce? What about Gen Y’s background helps to explain this particular behavior? How could you recast this behavior as a strength that you can cultivate and encourage in your Y’s? Can you think of Y colleagues with this trait—and can you think of a way to modify your actions toward them?

Creating a More Attractive Work Environment for Generation Y

Once you begin to understand what makes Y’s tick, you can effect changes in your organization that will increase its appeal to them, allowing you to attract and retain the best Y talent.

Take a look at table 3-1 (61). It what ways do the operating practices and policies in your organization today align with Generation Y’s preferences? Where do they conflict? How is your organization tackling the challenge of generational shifts? As new Y hires enter and Boomers trim back their involvement or retire, how are you changing to accommodate the next generation’s knowledge and style?

Pages 59–67 in chapter 3 and all of part II guide Gen Y’s through their search for a workplace that matches their unique needs and preferences. As you read these chapters, think about strategies to attract and retain Y talent, and why they are important to Y’s. Some ideas to start:

1. Make your organization’s value proposition more attractive to Generation Y. Gen Y’s pay close attention to both what and how you communicate, so it’s important to sell your offer by emphasizing your values and reputation (156–157), your community involvement, and your innovative recruiting approaches, including a vibrant Web presence (155–156) and swift and decisive communication (149, 152–153).

2. Address parents as an explicit part of your workforce strategy, conveying awareness and concerns. Like it or not, parents are an inevitable part of the process of recruiting Y’s, at least as advisers (43–50). Usually a Y will call home to discuss an offer with his or her parents; anticipate their needs by offering Y’s the opportunity to involve their parents or others in learning about the company to help in their decision making. You may also want to cater recruiting literature to parents (think about the U.S. Army’s series of ads addressed specifically to parents, reassuring them that “You made them strong. We’ll make them Army strong”).

3. Shift performance management to focus on tasks rather than time, allow (encourage!) time-shifting and asynchronous work, and offer flexible schedules. Many Y’s are very aware that they prefer to work long hours on their own schedules, not yours
Wherever possible, shift performance management to focus on task completion, not time spent. Provide the flexibility that allows for time-shifting and asynchronous work.

4. **Encourage the Boomers in your midst to mentor Y’s.** Many Y’s really like working with Boomers, and research shows that mentoring relationships between Y’s and Boomers appear to be valued and productive—especially if they are informal (158–159). When you assign a Y a new task, give him or her the names of a few Boomers who have done the task in the past or who have relevant experience.

5. **Develop a personal connection with the Y’s in your group.** As we’ve seen, Y’s flourish under a slightly different management style than has been typical in many organizations. Provide honest and frequent feedback and on-the-job coaching, as well as career-planning advice (153–155). Give them the chance to offer their own ideas and suggestions. Y’s expect and value informal conversations about these and other topics (the discussion questions in the next section of this guide should help get the conversation going).

These are just some of the small changes you can effect in your organization to make it more Y-friendly. What are some others? Read pages 145–161 and think about additional ways your company can recruit, inspire, and keep Y talent.

**Guide for Discussion with Your Y’s**

Hosting a *Plugged In* reading group for your interns or Gen Y reports will help them more effectively find their place in the work world, while strengthening your professional relationship with them—which they’ll highly value. Have them discuss the book with the “Questions to Ask Your Y’s” provided. In the process, you’ll undoubtedly learn more about how they view the workplace and gain innovative ideas for making it more appealing.

**Questions to Ask Your Y’s**

1. Read part I. No generational overview captures all the variation that may have shaped each individual’s view of the world. Nationality, socioeconomic background, parents’ ages, and many other factors will have influenced you and other Y’s. How has your personal history—especially during your teenage years—shaped your views on what role work should play in your life and what kind of workplace you would like to be a part of?

2. Read chapter 4 and fill out the exercise in table 4-2 (83–84). Share your responses with the group. What do the answers have in common? Can you agree on the primary elements of Y engagement, as opposed to those of other generations?

3. Read chapter 5 and complete the exercise in table 5-1 (92–95). Compare your results to table 5-2 (106) to see which archetype fits you best and then read the profile of
that archetype. Consider the four C’s—content, compensation, connection, and communication (105–106)—in light of the archetype you have. Do you know what roles in your organization fit these preferences?

4. Read chapter 6. What are the values that drew you to this type of work? What personal drawbacks or trade-offs do you feel you are making? In what ways would you reshape the conventions to make you and those of your generation more committed and comfortable—and make the organization better?

5. Read chapter 7, focusing on Dan’s (pages 128–133) and Allison’s (139–142) stories. What did they go through to get to the jobs they now hold? Imagine how the stories will continue into the future: how could these two Y’s shape their future in your organization? Use the archetypes shown in table 7-1 (138) as prompts.

6. Read chapter 8. What kind of learning opportunities does your company offer? What do you like about your corporate culture? What is the process you need to go through to get one of your ideas implemented? What kind of feedback do you want from us, your managers?

7. Read chapter 9. How would your career priorities be different if you had only twenty years to work? What are the risks you’ve been able to take because of a supportive parent or guardian? What are some advantages you have in the workplace because of your familiarity with current modes of communication (cell phones, Facebook, instant messaging)?

8. Read chapter 10. Now that you have an understanding of Traditionalists’ values and concerns, how could you approach Traditionalists with suggestions or questions? Consider each of the situations in table 10-1 (193–194) and role play how a constructive interaction might take place.

9. Now that you have an understanding of Boomers’ values and concerns, how could you approach Boomers with suggestions or questions? Consider each of the situations in table 10-2 (200–201) and role play how a constructive interaction might take place.

10. And now that you have an understanding of X’ers values and concerns, how could you approach X’ers with suggestions or questions? Consider each of the situations in table 10-3 (209-210) and role play how a constructive interaction might take place.

11. Read chapter 11. How confident are you of your writing skills? Go through several well-written memos with your manager and determine why each one was effective.

12. How confident are you of your financial skills? Go through your organization’s annual report and ask questions. With your manager, make sure you understand the key terms and which ones are most important in driving performance in your organization. How does the work that you do influence the bottom line?
13. Read chapter 12. What are some ways in which you have experienced and tackled each of these “soft skills”? Which one could you still develop?

On Your Way

Relationships among the generations—and between Generation Y’s and corporations—can be a bit tricky. *Plugged In*, and the discussions it generates within your organization, will help your Y’s succeed in a way that is productive for them and for you.

I look forward to answering your questions about the workplace and your career in “Ask Tammy” at www.tammyerickson.com.
For Further Reading


About the Author

Tamara Erickson is a McKinsey Award–winning author and widely respected expert on organizations and innovation, on building talent and enhancing productivity, and on the nature of work in the intelligent economy. Her work is based on extensive research on the changing workforce and employee values and, most recently, on how successful organizations innovate through collaboration. Tammy is president of the nGenera Innovation Network. She lives in the Boston area and is the mother of two Gen Y’s.