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## ESSENTIAL ONE: WAKE UP

He sits, with his earphones playing his favorite downloaded tunes, at a keyboard, staring at a screen filled with multiple pages, conversations, and links. He responds to each of them in a sequenced symphony of communication, as if starting one sentence in one place and ending it in another.

All the while, his eyes never leave the screen, and his focus never leaves the task at hand. He could be shopping for presents, downloading music, talking with friends, or even looking for and applying for a job. No matter the task, he brings a sensibility of a new consumer to his effort, with an attention span that, while short, can certainly multi-task with the best of them.

He is the new *consumer of work* who treats finding work just as he treats ordering a product or service. As the consumer, he is in charge. He sets the timing, dictates the response, and makes sure to be informed. He checks to confirm that the values he holds are in line with the values of the place where he makes his purchase. He knows he can discard the product at any time and find another. Online. In a flash. Being a consumer is being a consumer. It's no different whether he is a consumer of a product or service or whether he is the consumer of work. *What* he consumes is secondary.

To become a magnet for talent, and make your talent as famous as your brand, your business *must* reach this consumer. But it's a challenge to attract, retain, and engage workers with a totally new set of preferences and habits. For a well-branded company like General Mills, Ken Charles, head of recruitment,

admits that “it is all about being visible in the channels that the new generation frequents.” The web reaches beyond being a minute-by-minute reality for this consumer to be the primary way people connect and choose. Its proliferation alters every stage of a traditional recruitment process. “Now they will meet someone from a company, look them in the eye, listen to what they have to say, and then Google the person, find their LinkedIn profile, and research the company online,” Charles says. “They will believe their web experience first, to confirm what they are told, but they will not believe what we tell them simply because we tell them.” That’s why, according to Charles, General Mills uses a range of new tools such as virtual recruiting and webinars to reinforce what the company says on campus.<sup>1</sup> The comfort with technology is also the reason General Electric uses email to maintain contact with students even after they accept a GE job offer. According to Steve Canale, head of university recruiting at GE, “our monthly ‘Keeping in Touch’ email reinforces their decision to join GE and builds their enthusiasm, which is critical in the Spring season as competitor employees market their jobs on campus.”<sup>2</sup>

So what does this mean to the search for the right workers in the right positions at the right time?

The only way business can hope to find and engage the people it needs is to say hello to the new consumer of work—this new shopper who redefines experience and expectations. While the leaders of this shift are members of Generation Y, the change is too complex to attribute to any one demographic group. The patterns of change are as true of people in their twenties as they are of people in their fifties. Age is less an issue than comfort with and reliance on technology. This is a consumer who, because of technology, is used to controlling a marketplace from a keyboard and sees no reason to adjust when looking for or engaging in work.

This consumer makes every purchase in the shorthand of retail marketing. Each transaction begins with a specific expectation for a return on a purchase or investment; a clear understanding of the money-back guarantee. Each arrangement includes the resources

to contact for emergency troubleshooting and the promise of a personalized experience that will lead to bigger things. The new consumer is accustomed to buying familiar brands. It's no surprise that the same sensibility would travel to the marketplace for talent.

This hungry, insightful, savvy consumer quickly looks at what a brand represents. And, according to executive search consultant Janice Ellig, this takes the consumer to the top of an organization. "The worker looks at who is the CEO," according to Ellig, "who is on the leadership team, what they have done to create something in that business."<sup>3</sup> The new consumer will quickly compare the opportunities of Business A and Business B using the consumer skills learned at the mall. And brand will be an easy and familiar way to compare places to work just as it is to compare places to buy.

Are you ready for this change? If so, your business needs to address thirteen basic expectations to begin the discussion. To use your brand to attract and engage you must, first, wake up to say hello to this new consumer.

One of my great pleasures has been to mentor young HR professionals entering the field and to watch them progress and succeed over the years. One such person was a Google HR professional I met at a conference. In his early twenties, he was working at Google, arguably the hottest talent brand of the day. He had been there about a year, and was already feeling antsy about his career progress. He hadn't moved forward fast enough and was exploring the territory at other companies. Shortly, he was offered a promotion and then another, and then an overseas assignment. Yet, he continued to wonder whether such an assignment might derail his forward progress. Gen Y professionals, even at the most well-branded talent organizations, will always have an eye on the next prize and be open for new opportunities inside and outside of their company.

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### Wake Up Number 1: Habits

Instead of opening the pages of a daily newspaper and glancing through the classifieds, our new consumer looking for work goes directly to the website of a well-branded employer or to any number of job-hunting websites to find what's available.

Technology makes it easy to find almost any opening that matches consumers' interest in the assignment or the organization. Once on a site, this new consumer—whom we will name Lee—will rely on a search engine to spot key words about responsibilities, experience, and location. Then, with the quick click of the mouse, Lee can submit a resume and, within minutes, quickly scan to the next possible opportunity. If Lee wants to learn more about a company, any number of social network sites make it easy to get “the straight scoop” from current employees or other observers. While preparing for an interview, Lee can easily check everything that anyone has said about the company up to the minute before the first question is asked. Technology makes it possible for this consumer to uncover every possible secret before exchanging the first “hellos.”

It's a new world. Thanks to technology, this consumer can apply for work, have initial interviews, perhaps get an offer, and prepare to begin without ever having any actual contact with anyone. Everything can be handled with the speed of an online transaction. With a click of a mouse, it's as easy to “get the dirt” about a company as it is to get a recipe, a sports score, or a headline. Thanks to online fascinations such as YouTube, a corporate reputation—once a sacred commodity any business could manage—is immediately available for anyone to tarnish. Jeanie Mabie, IBM's Recruitment Leader, IBM Global Employment Branding and University, appreciates the significance of this change. “There are major changes in people, preferences, relationships with companies, and expectations for work agreements. With a company as rich in history as IBM, we have to make sure we reeducate people not only about their opportunities, but about our company as well.”<sup>4</sup> For any organization, dealing

with a new consumer is a challenge they didn't see coming over the horizon.

One reason is that, for the new consumer, the search for work never ends. A range of sites—such as LinkedIn, Plaxo, or Facebook—make it easy to maintain an updated resume or build a career website or link to potential new employers in the hopes to be found. Peppering these resumes are the names of the companies where someone might work. And it's no surprise that company names with cache are better received than the unknown. The employer brand becomes not only a way to tell a company's story but for a consumer of work to illustrate career progress. "Because the loyalty to companies is down—and the number of jobs in a career is so high—the employer brand becomes more of a proxy for one's accomplishments," observes Jim Citrin, executive search consultant for Spencer Stuart. "The employer brand projects the attributes of the brand onto the person. Someone must be cool if at a company with what others consider a cool employer brand."<sup>5</sup> That company logo, once worn only to a summer employee picnic, becomes a way for the consumer to advertise what has been accomplished.

The new consumer of work has become very smart. According to Robert J. Crowder, senior executive recruiter at Aetna, "Potential employees have high expectations and standards for potential employers, and they are willing to talk to several companies before making a decision. Candidates want to know the company's financial outlook, values, and culture. Like generations before them, they are seeking a company where performance is recognized, developed, and rewarded."<sup>6</sup> Technology makes it easy to check a company out. A simple look at any number of corporate reputation sites can generate a quick snapshot of who is saying what about a potential employer.

The change in consumer habits fundamentally alters what an organization must do to connect. No longer is it enough for a company to select one channel to reach current and prospective workers. A company lives in a 360-degree world surrounded

by every opportunity to reach, every opportunity to be reached, and every opportunity to be talked about. The consumer of work brings new habits to an open marketplace for talent. A company seeking to attract, retain and engage must adapt.

### **Wake Up Number 2: Expectations**

Technology changes how people look for work. Retail experience may inspire what people look for and aspire to accomplish. Practical experience in a retail market may prepare a consumer of work to be a smart buyer who selectively follows favorite brands. Comfort with technology means this consumer will be online every step of the way.

The retail world taught the consumer what it means to secure “the best buy” for a product. That expectation carries over to a career. The new consumer looks for a company to guarantee an experience and a return on investment just as it would offer a no-surprise promise to a customer. And this consumer won’t wait. The validation of work must be as immediate as the confirmation of an online purchase.

Our consumer of work is also a bit self-centered. Lee wants to be recognized and, no matter how electronically connected, looks for real-time attention from real people. Lee craves, and reacts to, the extra effort of a business that pays attention, shows an interest and describes a future path. Lee also wants, at the same time, to feel in control of the work, when to begin and end the day, how much work to take home, and if working on a weekend is necessary. In the end, it’s all about Lee.

As we worked through the development of a new college recruitment process and experience with a global organization, we came to many realizations about the new consumer of work. While the legacy process the organization followed had usually resulted in a sufficient number of new hires, the number of “closed deals” had

dropped in the past couple of cycles. The closer we looked, the more we realized that the legacy process left considerable gaps in time when the candidate would not hear from the organization. After an on-campus visit to a career fair, the organization might take several days to follow up with interested students. And, once a student expressed interest, and had perhaps even completed an interview, the organization took several days to complete its debrief and selection, which often caused a delay of several weeks before an offer would be extended. We compared this process to our fundamental insight into the talent market and helped the organization realize that it could no longer permit such gaps in communication to occur. The best way to secure these potential workers was to stay in close touch and tighten the gaps in time. The new process has eliminated all of those gaps and significantly increased the communications. Today, a student who emerges as a viable candidate from a career fair receives an invitation to an interview the same day. A student who completes an interview in a one-day experience receives a commitment for an offer or a polite dismissal on the same day. As a student offered a position deliberates his options, he receives regular communications from the organization, to help him realize, day in and day out, just how much he is wanted. The process now fits the consumer reality.

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Any business that wants to seriously compete for this consumer must gain insight into what Lee wants and how Lee makes choices. Otherwise the brand and marketing messages will fail. Before trying to reach Lee, and others, the business must build a profile of the new consumer of work it seeks so it can effectively tailor its brand and marketing efforts. It must get to know what will disappoint this consumer so it can strategize to please. It must learn what the consumer—as the new ruler of the talent marketplace—expects from the work experience.

This reliance on consumer insight and knowledge is fundamental to any marketing effort for workers. Kristen Weirick,

director of Talent Acquisition of the Whirlpool Corporation, believes that a company must learn what is required to appeal to workers. “We have to be flexible with a differentiated approach for different segments,” Weirick observes. “For us, the biggest segment difference is between the experienced candidate and the new campus recruit. While we don’t veer away from our messaging, we do tweak our messaging to meet the needs of the segment.”<sup>7</sup> This awareness of a need for targeted messaging can distinguish messages that are heard from those that are lost.

This insight begins with what consumers expect. According to Steve Canale, “GE’s talent acquisition strategies reflect the reality that most entry-level candidates expect to research employment opportunities via the Internet, online job boards, company websites, and even blogs.” Canale continues, “This generation is comfortable connecting with potential employers through informal, online forums such as virtual career fairs and WebEx meetings.”<sup>8</sup> Certainly an organization that responds to consumer preferences has a better chance to break through the noise.

But insight requires more than knowing a preference for media. The new generation simply looks at work in a different way—either when choosing a place to work or choosing how to work at a current place. The worker who may choose to work today will carefully evaluate how this experience provides background and preparation for tomorrow’s opportunity. Recent research shows that 41 percent of Generation Y workers expect to progress rapidly within their existing organization, compared to 20 percent of Generation X.<sup>9</sup> And while many issues may influence this perception, the results say a lot about the expectations consumers bring to work.

Some blame, or thank, the parents. Many companies report that the Generation Y workers enter the workforce with a great deal of parental influence and involvement. Caroline Emmons, University Relations Consultant at Aetna, describes the “infamous ‘helicopter parents’ who get (or stay) heavily involved in their children’s lives well beyond school age.” She

suggests that, because the new consumers of work grew up with such parental supervision, “this generation has higher expectations that employers and managers will advocate for (or at least cater to) their individual needs or issues.” That is one reason, Emmons believes, that new consumers of work look for employers that offer structured development programs that provide formal training, rotational assignments, mentorship and coaching, and frequent feedback and recognition for strong performance.<sup>10</sup> Certainly those organizations that confront complaining parents—such as when a child receives a poor performance appraisal (oh, yes, it happens)—would agree with those who observe a substantial change in consumer behavior.

But it’s not as simple as looking at a “one size fits all” approach to this segment of the workforce. Despite the fact that Generation Y will account for sixty-three million members of the American workforce by 2014,<sup>11</sup> many organizations try to look inside this large segment. At General Electric, for example, Steve Canale clarifies that they “try not to paint the Gen Y brush on the entry-level workforce. The entire workforce wants the same kind of flexibility that today’s technology has enabled.”<sup>12</sup> The changes that Generation Y introduced now characterize many segments of consumers of work.

### **Wake Up Number 3: Career**

The consumer of work looks for a work experience, not a job. Lee may consider a “job” an archaic description by an older generation while “work” is a present experience to build skills and expertise for the next opportunity. To the consumer, “work” must be relevant, meaningful, easy to leverage, and easy to fit into the narrative of a career. Richard Spitz, Chairman, Technology Markets, CEO and Board Services, Korn/Ferry International, observes that “people will respond to the challenge of work,

quality of people, and ability to grow.”<sup>13</sup> And it’s not just about what they actually experience. The value of the “work” is, as well, how the story can be shared.

At the same time, the consumer of work demonstrates a short attention span. Maybe it’s because of the media, all the brand messages, experience with a remote control device, or the new approaches to health care and retirement that increase personal financial burden. Regardless of the reasons, this consumer anticipates a career of several stops, adopting a free agent mentality. Any change in what business can offer, or reluctance to be obligated for the long term, gives Lee more freedom to keep looking for new opportunities. Automatic loyalty is not in this consumer’s makeup.

As a result this consumer of work will never stop searching for work, even when working. Lee will be just like the eager guest at a party who always looks beyond the current conversation to target the next networking opportunity. Because there is never a finite start or end to the search, Lee will constantly be “out there” with online profiles and active participation in social networks and efforts to survey the marketplace for a better deal. And while Lee may hope to stay at a company as long as it remains relevant, new ways to market accomplishment will always catch this consumer’s eye.

Lee will not settle for resumes on 8-1/2 by 11 sheets of paper. A profile on a social network site will be a given. Endorsements from co-workers, bosses, clients, and customers on LinkedIn or other sites will make it easy to check references and background information. This consumer of work will view a career as an ongoing effort to market a personal brand of value. Lee will look at a first job as a pathway to the next, and the next to the next, and perhaps then to grad school, and then to the next. Richard Spitz observes that, today, “everyone has multiple moves,” acknowledging that, if someone stays with one company, others may wonder why. “People may ask what’s wrong with him” because “moves on a resume will be very important.”<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, new consumers will never stop searching for work. It's just that, sometimes, they may do so while actually working for an organization.

This consumer likes brands on a resume. The reasons are simple. Executive search consultant Jim Bagley of Russell Reynolds observes, "It is easy to go on to the next role if you come successfully from a well-branded company."<sup>15</sup> The practical consumer of work realizes that, when competing for the next job, a resume filled with well-branded companies can make a real impression. Lee shops in terms of appearance: The design of clothing, the type of cell phone, the color of iPod. Lee looks to brands to convey identification and looks to image to make personal statements of identity and beliefs. And Lee knows, as Jim Bagley observes, "that companies look for workers who bring credible references from institutions that are branded."<sup>16</sup> The value of the brand doesn't end at the mall.

Of the changes a new consumer demonstrates, this desire to keep moving may be the most profound. Janice Ellig sees consumers who think, "at most, of what they will do, and what they can accomplish the next five years,"<sup>17</sup> But, to many, five years is an eternity and, in a vibrant economy, many may look to one or two years as the threshold for receiving the appropriate recognition of advancement. Ellig recalls that "most workers will say, 'I will work here two years but unless I am part of the team, have input, am recognized, and feel valued by the company, I will move on.' They do not look for lifetime employment."<sup>18</sup> The search for fulfillment and the online tools make it easy.

In tighter markets, however, the new consumer may not have as many choices. This can frustrate a consumer who fears that staying in one place can be an admission of becoming stale. Someone who believes that moves on a resume indicate ambition—and static means stagnation—may be frustrated when opportunities tighten. While Lee continues the search, stays on the market, and keeps a current resume online, an employer will need to look for many ways to engage this consumer. While Lee may also go as far

as to shoot a YouTube resume that will offer insight, a summary of accomplishments, and video endorsements, an employer must use its brand to create a new kind of loyalty.

A client, a global company, was, as many are, rethinking its recruitment process to meet the challenges of a new generation of worker. Of the challenges it found the most troubling, actually, was the realization that people coming to work for the company only planned to stay for a short time. These consumers of work reported that the company had such a strong brand as a place to develop talent that a period of time spent there could be easily leveraged into higher-paying work with a different company. The company realized that, to have any chance to keep these workers, it needed to internally replicate what workers were looking for on the outside. It had to be able to offer workers the chance to move around and advance as much on the inside, both in scope of responsibility and in opportunity for reward, as they could find on the outside. In order to keep the worker, the organization had to satisfy the “itch” the consumer of work gets to move. This realization significantly changed how the company looked at its learning and development efforts, as well as its career management process, and acknowledge that all the talent systems must coordinate to have any hope to retain key workers.

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### Wake Up Number 4: Engagement

The consumer of work is not patient. Lee expects any transaction and process to be flawless. This is, after all, a consumer raised on the reliability of systems. The ATM always has enough money to go around. The Internet connection always works or, if not, is quickly repaired. Lee recoils if, during the interview, on-boarding and work experience, everything doesn't go like clockwork.

Lee expects, with the click of a mouse, to learn how a company thinks, who works there, how people work in teams

(from a company website), what people say about a company, how it compares to others (from a social network site or blog), what a company offers (back to the company site), and what friends think of the idea to join (back to the social network site). With the convenience of online applications, Lee can easily apply, chat, and listen to music at the same time. After all, this consumer probably applied to college online, selected courses online, and turned in papers online.

During the recruitment process, Lee will not tolerate being forgotten, delayed, or overlooked. Lee spends most waking hours connected to others, seeking the opinions of others, offering suggestions to others, hoping to hear from others. So if a company doesn't show consistent interest, with an occasional email or text message, Lee may quickly feel ignored. This consumer may not understand, nor appreciate, necessary gaps in communication, natural delays in decisions, or issues that may surface in a hiring process. Lee only knows that a period of time in the day is not being filled.

Once work begins, Lee expects to be nurtured and appreciated for arriving with a resume packed with internships, overseas experiences, and serious academic achievements. And because Lee may also arrive with debt from college expenses, look for anticipation of a quick return on the investment. Lee doesn't want to have to wait too long until the loans are paid and the BMW is on the way.

Lee walks into a company expecting to know how a career will develop, knowledge and skills will be acquired, performance will be managed, pay will increase, and work and life will balance. Everything must be spelled in black and white, like the syllabus of a course, without the ambiguity that workers from a previous generation may have tolerated. After growing up in a highly programmed home—where everything was scheduled between play dates and music lessons and sports teams—this consumer wants a clear path to how the experience will unfold.

All of this want is not lost on those who provide. Amy Giglio, senior manager for talent acquisition of Aflac, observes how the new consumers “are equally concerned about what the company can do for them, how they can contribute, advance quicker and demonstrate their skills and knowledge sooner, and the possible career paths and progression after nine to twelve months.”<sup>19</sup> The new consumer simply wants to know what will happen on the first day, the names of colleagues, the nature of assignments, and the guidelines for reward and recognition.

This worker is asking, “What can I go do and be involved in?” according to Janice Ellig, “and what experiences will help me to stand out and add to my brand?”<sup>20</sup> Lee will look for everything from the clarity of a career to the karma of a community to the connection with friends to the attention from a supervisor. Now, Lee is willing to work just as long as the next opportunity occurs before lunch and recognition begins before dinner. This new consumer simply does not believe that *anything* can’t be within reach, including a job, a person, a place, as well as opportunities to step into the spotlight. Plus, there must be time to go to the gym and hang out with friends.

With one client, a global energy company, we had some good laughs about the generation of workers with a viewpoint of excellence skewed by the fact that, as young children, as they participated in their first competitive teams, everyone received a blue ribbon, perhaps because their parents were hesitant to declare any child a winner or loser. Whether or not that experience carried forward, there is an expectation among new consumers of work that they will be recognized and rewarded for achievements that were simply expected in different times. This reality can make it more difficult for one company to differentiate from another when it comes to the experience it delivers simply because the consumer of work expects so much and will only pay attention to a company that actually delivers something different. This company realized that new workers expect to be recognized. This gave

it insight into how the career management and development process must be structured. It maintained that unless a worker clearly understands that career advancement is a partnership with the company, he or she may be sitting a long time, frustrated, when movement doesn't automatically occur. The worker must raise the hand, develop the skill, and articulate the ambition. He or she can't simply wait for the ribbon to be presented.

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The new consumer, as well, will expect to be a part of the action at work. Lee won't be satisfied simply observing what the company may be doing. This consumer will come in wanting, expecting, and demanding an experience. Lee will expect, from the start, to be involved in what the business is doing, and, most importantly, to be a voice that is heard.

But Lee also wants to have fun. All the years of programmed experiences create expectations for onsite entertainment. No matter how interesting the work may be, it better not get in the way of going to the gym. Work/life balance is an expectation, not an option, as Lee seeks to seamlessly blend life and work into one experience. But things may change in life and Lee will demand the freedom to leave and re-enter the workforce, as needed, for school, family, and community commitments. Lee will expect flexibility in work schedule, a BlackBerry, perhaps an iPhone, and a commitment to contribute from home, from an office, or at a work site.

This consumer will be looking for, and evaluating, an entire experience at work, from the people to meet to the company's commitment to social causes. While Lee will certainly expect the paycheck to be competitive, and the growth potential to be significant, this consumer will also want to feel good about work and company. The need for image will require that Lee work at a place that people have heard of, in a business that people understand, and doing a job that people look up to.

### Wake Up Number 5: Connection

The new consumer will want to connect with colleagues. And that connection may be virtual. Lee will never be without a cell phone, a PDA, an iPod, or an all-in-one smart phone. For this new consumer, a text message or an IM will be a conversation. When considering a company, Lee may actually socialize with workers to learn whether the people are likable.

Technology will make it easy for Lee to hang around the water cooler, and soak it all in, before making a decision about work. Lee can post a message on a social network site or check out [www.glassdoor.com](http://www.glassdoor.com) to learn how workers rate jobs, bosses, pay, environments, and culture; or [www.indeed.com](http://www.indeed.com) to participate or observe forums where users discuss companies, jobs, career advice, and work stories; or [www.experience.com](http://www.experience.com) to get free advice about looking for work. This consumer will rely on social media to collect feedback and guidance from all the experts in cyberspace. And connections make a difference when 47 percent of people looking for jobs spend one to three hours a day online searching for work.<sup>21</sup> For the new consumer, the connection defines the experience.

The lesson for the organization is simple: Provide opportunities for connection or be left behind. It's not a matter of potential distinction; it's an issue of a level playing field. The new consumers of work are, simply, "more comfortable searching for employment opportunities via the Internet than using online job boards and company websites," according to Caroline Emmons of Aetna. This generation is more comfortable connecting with potential employers through informal, online forums such as virtual career fairs, and WebEx meetings, and is oftentimes quicker to respond to a text message than to an email.<sup>22</sup> That's not a surprise to the Institute for Corporate Productivity that reports 35 percent of job seekers use social networking as a means to canvass for new jobs. "As a result, the importance of effectively communicating your company brand and values through online

media has become increasingly clear over the last several years. Company image on blogs, Web 2.0 media, and social networking sites has become more important in recent years.”<sup>23</sup>

Never is this consumer out of touch. Jim Bagley observes how all the opportunities to connect fundamentally change how a candidate can access information, references, and an organization’s performance.<sup>24</sup> Ken Charles observes that consumers “believe in the power of their network. They confirm everything through multiple sources of contacts. The lines of privacy are blurred.” Specifically, Charles refers to how, at another time, an offer letter was a private document. “Now it is shared openly on the web. Today’s candidate sees transparency as an obligation.”<sup>25</sup> Technology can make once private information instantly public.

At work this consumer will look for relationships with colleagues. The online world in which Lee lives will redefine the nature of those relationships. Because this consumer lives online and connects online, Lee may look online for connections at work. This consumer, who can multi-task more than one electronic gadget at a time, believes that electronics create personal experiences. Focused on staying connected, Lee will never be out of reach and will expect, when walking in the door, to be connected, engaged, and for the company to be ready.

So Lee will become impatient if the email address isn’t ready the first day or if the laptop needs some refresher work. This consumer wants it now. And get ready: This consumer shares everything. That social network, so involved in the decision of where to work, will hear every detail about the work experience. Perhaps Lee will blog or twitter every detail. Or a bored Lee may access old-fashioned tools like email or the instant message.

The reach of consumer connection is staggering. The 2007 Yahoo! HotJobs survey revealed that 21 percent of respondents say they use social networking sites to look for a job, a penetration similar to 25 percent in the Yahoo! HotJobs/Robert Half International Millennials study in 2007 and the Yahoo! HotJobs poll

in 2008.<sup>26</sup> Because the new consumer of work defines connection in a new way a company that wants to connect must join in.

With all this connection, consumers of work rarely make decisions alone. They rely on group decision making or, at least, group response to individual decisions. Because technology makes it so easy to ask for feedback, this consumer will seek reaction at every step of a decision, looking to friends for confirmation. Such collective security—well-honed during years of sports teams and group dating—carries to the workplace as the consumer seeks a community of togetherness. As this consumer enters the workforce, well connected from school, other professional experiences, internships, and technology, the network can be nurtured at little or no cost.

For younger consumers—especially those entering the workforce for the first time—parents may be well-trained coaches from the sidelines. Many will take it upon themselves to actively participate in the decision process for work, as some report, by carefully comparing offers, benefit plans, and pay structures. And their involvement will not automatically end when the consumer goes to work. Because many younger workers may live at home when they first go to work, the parent may be there to oversee their homework, or to contact the supervisor if the feedback is less than positive. The Yahoo! HotJobs/Robert Half International survey reports that 25 percent of workers consult their parents when making an employment decision.<sup>27</sup> Those parents who got their helicopter licenses while the consumers-in-training were still in school are not about to give up their roles as controls-in-residence.

A Yahoo! employee was affected by a reduction in force in February 2008. He decided to share the experience with his social network via Twitter and give them a play-by-play account of his last day. He started with an announcement that he had been

impacted by the reduction in force. He then reported on packing up his desk and saying goodbye to great co-workers. Waiting for a call from HR to get his paperwork seemed like an eternity. And the biggest downer was that he was going to really miss the free lattes. He then reported on his meeting with HR and his last walk through the cafeteria, fondly remembering his meetings there. He paid tribute to his company-issued BlackBerry, saying goodbye, but let it know that he would have to buy an iPhone on the way home. He got one last latte before HR showed up to collect his laptop. He thanked all his friends for their “tweets” and then faded to black. About three hours later he reported back twittering via his new iPhone while celebrating his unemployment with a giant margarita. For me and all of HR this was a brand new experience - a live account of a layoff. Talk about “transparency”! And it was picked up by the local online gossip rag and published online even as it was twittered. The point here is that nothing is sacred anymore. If you look at the positive side of the story, our process worked as intended, and on the way out, he mentioned many of the best parts of working at the company. Great friends, free latte, a wonderful cafeteria, and the work and environment he would miss. Of course, the negative was that he lost a job he appeared to enjoy.

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### **Wake Up Number 6: Authenticity**

The new consumer will demand authenticity in the work experience. Lee will want to feel good about the world, life, and work. Lee will aspire to be socially aware, sensitive, and responsible, and to work for a place that wants the same. Lee will not be bought—Lee wants to buy. This free agent will not subscribe to a blind oath to stay at a company through thick and thin. Lee will look for greener grass if not getting ahead or if the company does not conform to a sense of values and value. Lee will demand truth, sniff spin, and detest what is not considered transparent.

Because it is so easy for Lee to check a company out an organization's deeds may undermine the authenticity this consumer expects. Janice Ellig observes that "negative press has a negative impact, it can create a sense of unease, what the noise in the market is about the company. It makes a difference to a worker—to his or her reputation."<sup>28</sup> It's impossible, in the 24/7 media world, for any company to hide its news. Savvy consumers can quickly do deep research on a company's actions.

That means a company has to be on its toes. Kristen Weirick of Whirlpool Corporation describes how the organization paints an authentic picture for potential workers. "For the younger candidates, we focus on our commitment to community service, our corporate social responsibility, our relationship with Habitat for Humanity, our Cook for Cure program, and the dollars we donate through our Whirlpool Foundation. At one of our core schools for campus recruiting, we involved the candidates in building a house with us for Habitat, so we could create an experience beyond the career fair."<sup>29</sup> The authenticity the consumer demands frames the commitments the organization makes.

One of my clients strongly believes that the most significant competition they face for new workers is not another company but is, instead, Teach for America, the excellent organization that offers top-level college graduates the opportunity to teach in low-performing school settings. It is known as a first cool job to take while you wait for grad school or decide what you really want to do. What is especially challenging, when competing for talent with a program like Teach for America, is that no commercial enterprise can realistically offer quite the same experience of feeling good at the end of the day for the gifts delivered to others. So my client, rather than try to compete with such a phenomenon, tries to work with it, and structures a flexible approach to some entry-level positions that, essentially, offers someone the chance

to spend, say, 50 percent of a work week in a traditional role at the company and 50 percent doing some type of community service. This arrangement recognizes that helping others is a significant part of what makes a new generation special. And rather than look for opportunities on their “spare time,” many in this generation expect to find the experience on the job every day.

... Mark

Likewise, at IBM, Jeanne Mabie describes how the company follows a purposeful effort to avoid what she labels “the plastic fantastic,” the efforts by some organizations to, perhaps with too much enthusiasm, promote their organizations as a places to work. “We want to tell an authentic story. That’s why we ran an employee video contest in our consulting business in the United States.” Mabie tells about one entry about career development focusing on a tortoise named Tommy. “It told a completely authentic picture of working life at IBM. And that’s what we want. An authentic picture.”<sup>30</sup> And it was a picture, because of its authentic roots, that took hold with viewers who would reject a slickly produced episode.

Such authenticity will mean a lot to the new consumer who wants to know what a company stands for. Lee will want to make a difference to the world—or at least work for a company that is trying to do so. A generation ago, a young person might be accused of hugging a tree to avoid going to work. Today’s consumer will want to take the tree, feed it, and prune it while doing the work. Lee will couple the search for work with a search for personal meaning, as well as identifying with what a company stands for.

Because of technology, the consumer can also easily and quickly check on how the company reportedly treats people, what its leadership says and does, and what people who work there are saying. Lee will have no patience for companies that do

not live a commitment to doing the right things for employees, customers, and the wider world.

### Getting to Work

Want to get to know the new consumer of work? Here's how.

First, focus on the *change* that has occurred in your organization in the past couple of years, specifically in how you try to appeal to a new generation of worker. Think about how you reach out to potential workers (experienced as well as on campus), keep your name alive over the months, and try to be different than your competitors. And, once in the door, consider how you are altering the worker experience to appeal to a new type of worker.

Second, think about the potential *experience* you can create for the new consumers of work that may exceed anything they expect. It's one thing to react to a demographic change; it's another to proactively create an experience that will delight.

Third, look at how you tell your company's story, and assess how appealing it may be to the new consumer of work. Is your website fresh? Would consumers consider it a destination? Or has it become, as many have, a place for information to sit rather than for potential workers to dream?

These three steps can help you put the key lessons of this chapter into quick action.

### Key Lessons: Chapter One

The first step to brand for talent is to wake up to the new consumer. We begin our journey here because the new consumer defines what that journey entails. No longer can a business dictate how a consumer must react. The consumer of work is now in charge. And business must change.

Ask yourself, are you ready for this new consumer? Is your brand as a place to work positioned to compete for this worker?

Do you focus as closely on what makes you relevant to the new consumer as you do on what you want to say?

- The new *consumer of work* orders work the same way as ordering a product or service.
- In a marketplace where knowledge is power, the information a potential worker can seize at his fingertips gives him the upper hand with a potential employer.
- Employees today simply don't believe they will work for one company for a lifetime. Or two or three. Try seven or eight.
- While many characteristics of the new consumer can be attributed to younger workers entering the marketplace, the impact reaches every generation at every stage of a relationship with a business.
- Consumers of work look for a work experience, not a job. They expect the transaction and process to be flawless. They have short attention spans and demand constant attention.
- The new consumer of work walks into a company with full expectation for a complete program of how a career will develop, performance will be managed, pay will increase, and work and life will balance.

