



# n-gen's New Book is Coming!

*Leading Virtual Teams and Leveraging Social Media*

March 2012

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## A Sneak Peek...

We are pleased to announce that n-gen's 2nd book, *Upgrade Now: 9 Advanced Leadership Skills*, will be released in April 2012. Each chapter of the book is structured to provide leaders with the information required to: **learn** each advanced skill; **apply** each skill (with helpful tips on how to do so); **upgrade** their leadership approach (by layering on a generational perspective); and **execute** their plans (using the comprehensive tools provided). In this month's newsletter, we briefly highlight topics of leading virtual teams, and leveraging social media.



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## Preview Our Table of Contents

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## Chapter Overview

As a result of globalization, outsourcing, and joint ventures, the creation of virtual teams requires stronger collaboration skills more than ever before. With a strong shift towards knowledge and information-based organizations, employees can now complete their work anytime, anywhere. Small and mid-size organizations are giving employees more flexibility to work from home or on the road, which translates into less face to face time and a greater need to collaborate using technology.

Regardless if team members are from across the globe, or just across the same city, virtual teams are a collection of employees who are:

- interdependent in their tasks
- focused on common goals and have shared responsibilities for outcomes
- geographically dispersed
- electronically dependent
- dynamic or comprise diverse members
- self-reliant and self-motivated
- viewed by themselves to be an intact unit

It is important to recognize that there are several advantages to establishing virtual teams and managing them well, even though much is written about the challenges. As organizations adopt more flexible work arrangements, there are strategic and financial benefits gains, such as:

- increased employee engagement & productivity
- improved employee attraction & retention
- reduced health-care costs

In addition, by leveraging technology to conduct team meetings, travel costs are significantly reduced.

Social media is often leveraged by virtual teams to enhance communication; it is, however, becomingly increasingly part of all employees' daily lives. While organizations and leaders have been aware for several years that employees are using social media in their personal lives, they have been reluctant to allow and incorporate them into the business environment. Today, even the most traditionalist work environments have adopted some form of social media. It's futile to resist the adoption of these technologies, just as it was futile in the past to place barriers on personal computers and e-mail.

***According to our GAC results, 84% of Gen Y, 86% of Gen X, and 43% of Boomers spend at least 1-2 hours on social media sites per day.***

There are countless definitions of 'social media, but fundamentally they are "technologies designed to facilitate social interactions, communication, and, sometimes, publishing". These technologies are generally internet-based and are used to support 'many-to-many' conversations, versus traditional 'one-to-many' media broadcasts, such as television.

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There are numerous benefits to organizations, leaders and employees from integrating social media within current work practices. Some of the rewards gained by teams who are embracing social media include:

- increased productivity and performance
- stronger internal relationships
- increased communication
- improved knowledge management
- greater creativity through exposure to differing thoughts/ perspectives

Ultimately, both social media and global virtual teams represent a change in how we communicate, interact, work and create. They are challenging us to think and lead differently. By leveraging the tools available, organizations can achieve business goals and engage employees in the right way, at the right time.

Trust is one of the most important characteristics of high performing virtual teams, as well as for those who wish to leverage social media within their work environments. Trust is achieved by creating a safe environment where employees can openly express feelings, speak up, and take risks. Through small daily interactions, a trusting environment is created; however, it is far more challenging to build trust virtually with colleagues that you may not see face-to-face.

Since a culture of trust is essential for high levels of employee engagement, performance and retention, the restriction of social media websites can have the negative impact of employee disengagement and turnover. If you don't trust your employees to communicate through social media, using good judgement, you likely have a hiring problem, not a social media problem. Employees that abuse the system were probably bad hires to begin with. Those that you can trust will become ambassadors for your brand and will demonstrate the positive effects of a less rigid social media policy.

***"As long as it is used moderately, social media is as harmless a distraction as any other during break time. Given that many can access these sites via smart phones, the use of the employer's computer is a moot point".***

***- Gen X GAC Member***

## Generational Considerations

Traditionalists got up each morning and went to work at a physical, brick and mortar location. There were few, if any, virtual employees, and work wasn't completed at home. When you were at the office, you worked, and followed the workplace rules. Because of these beliefs, Traditionalists will strictly adhere to any social media policy put in place. For Traditionalist leaders, who are now managing virtual teams or adjusting to the use of social media in an organization, their management style must also adjust. The typical structure used to measure performance, such as observing the time someone spends at their desk, and what time they arrive or leave the office doesn't exist in a virtual environment and has different implications when considering the use of social media. Instead, Traditionalists must focus on outcomes and results and should be supported in their interest to keep up-to-date on newer technologies.

## What's Up?



Check out our [calendar](#) for upcoming speaking engagements, webinars, and other events.

Many Baby Boomer leaders believe that only high performers should be given the ability to work remotely as a reward. However, with the construction of virtual teams, this work style is no longer a luxury, but a necessity. This means that many Baby Boomers will welcome the ability to work on a virtual team due to the flexibility and enhanced work-life balance that can be achieved. Baby Boomers have significantly increased their usage of social media in the past year, yet 45% of Baby Boomers still believe that meetings are extremely necessary to decide on a course of action. This desire for face-to-face communication can cause conflicts with Gen Xers and Gen Ys who are more inclined to rely on other methods to connect.

***According to our GAC results, 71% of Boomers believe that the workplace controversy surrounding social media use is well founded.***

Gen Xers are well positioned to excel as virtual team members. Given this generation's strong independence, self-reliance on achieving outcomes, and focus on results, Gen Xers thrive in an environment where they can work independently and collaborate using technology when needed. Given this cohort's desire for a work-life balance, Gen Xers leverage technology to ensure they can meet personal and professional commitments within a flexible work-day, and are very open to leveraging social media, if it has a direct benefit to them. Gen Xers who lead virtual teams are often very effective because they adopt a results-based approach and don't place an emphasis on how or when work is completed as long as the outcome is delivered on time and to the right standards.

Gen Ys have participated in virtual teams for years, prior to working for an organization. They have been gaming with friends around the world, they have been solving problems with their classmates online through group discussions, they have been forming relationships and staying connected with others using social media, even if they have never met face-to-face. Gen Ys are comfortable with the notion of using technology to collaborate. This cohort expects to have access to social media at work, and find organizations' attempts to block social networking sites as laughable (since most of them can access it on their hand-held devices anyway).

## Your Questions Answered

These two chapters will answer your questions about how to engage, motivate and drive results from current and future employees in order to achieve business goals by:

1. Recognizing and overcoming the challenges that are unique to virtual teams
2. Learning more about the three focus areas of successful virtual teams



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3. Demonstrating the five leadership behaviours and characteristics needed to effectively lead a virtual team

4. Evaluating, building and maintaining trust in your virtual team and how to formulate a unique and comprehensive social media policy based on trust

5. Leveraging social media technologies in order to improve transparency, engagement, collaboration, productivity and knowledge transfer

6. Creating guidelines and training that will encourage the appropriate use of social media and that will overcome any perceived barriers to its use

7. Recognizing the value employees from each of the four generations place on collaborative technologies, and how they are currently using them