

## THE ECHO GENERATION: HELLO...HELLO, WHO ARE YOU?

by Patrice Truman, Esq.  
The proud mom of two Echoes

"This is a generation that cares."  
Case Western University student,  
Cleveland Ohio, October 5, 2004

They think they're smart, they're sassy, and by age 20, many of them have already been called for jury duty, as many as three times due to California's One Day-One Trial jury system. Who is this generation, the Echo Generation? They are the young Americans born in 1980 to the early years of the 21st Century. They are the children of Baby Boomers (born 1945-1965) and the little brothers and sisters of Generation X (born 1966-1979). The label attached to Echoes varies, since no name has been set in stone. Accordingly, they are also known as Generation Y, Net Generation, e-Generation and many more. In short, they are counsel's new crop of jurors who will be sitting in the jury pool for many years to come.

This newsletter discusses the characteristics of the Echo Generation as revealed in interviews, and from observations during mock trials.

### Etiquette Barriers Have Weakened

The Echoes' Baby Boomer parents were raised under strict etiquette rules and as a result raised their children with much less concern about what society deemed "proper." Consequently, many Echoes address members of the older generations by their first name, rather than Mr., Miss or Mrs. Respect is not out the window, but they show it differently than the respect that was expected of their Boomer parents during their childhoods. Overall, they seem to have a casual approach to older adults, sometimes to the chagrin of the older generations.

Observations of effect in deliberations: This generation is bold in deliberations. They operate with confidence, regardless of their educational level. They will not hold back their opinions, even if they are expressing a minority opinion that other generations interpret to be obscure. They hold their ground. With some irreverence, they have been heard telling older jurors that they are "out of touch."

### They Grew Up Faster

The innocence of childhood for Echoes seemed to have been abbreviated. Bombarded with sexual innuendo and violence from an early age through television, print media, and the internet, this group seemed to have escaped the simplicity of the past, characterized in Norman Rockwell paintings. As a result, they perceive that they face a tougher and uncertain future.

While their parents learned about the nuisance of herpes and other abstract sounding venereal diseases, this generation was drilled about the harsh reality of a direct threat to their life: HIV. Some Echoes heard of HIV's effects from HIV infected guest speakers at school. Many Echoes admit that they are careful about sex, and attribute their cautiousness to the education that they received not only in school, but by testimonials from their sports heroes, such as Magic Johnson.

They were on the receiving end of national ad campaigns warning them to *Don't Drink and Drive*, Nancy Reagan's *Just Say No To Drugs* campaign, and the anti-smoking campaigns. They acknowledge that they heard the preaching, however, refer to the drug scene casually, noting that it remains easy to "get anything" if they want it.

As children of workaholic Baby Boomer parents, the Echoes also experienced after-school child care or a loaded schedule of extra-curricular activities before dinnertime. Others experienced the solitude of the latch-key phenomenon, instructed to call in to mom's work at certain times in the afternoon, and act responsibly in her absence.

Overall, the *Leave It To Beaver* family that they found amusing to watch on "Nick At Night" proved to be more of a concept than a reality to the lifestyle they recognized.

Observations of effect in deliberations: The Echoes can be compassionate, but pragmatic about the evidence. The lawyer who overstates the case, especially the injuries to arouse sympathetic emotions, will find that their monologues ring hollow with Echoes. Echoes zero in on the holes in the trial story and will be vocal about criticizing it. Because of their youth, they tend to be more "black and white" thinkers; for many of them, the "gray" area has not yet entered their life's radar screen.

### Accepting of Differences

Having a tattoo, cornrows or dreadlocks are not just for freaks or tough guys as it might have been for their parents' generation. A hippie from the 1960's would appear to be main stream by the Echoes' standards. Echoes explain that they were influenced by the urban culture and hip hop. They can and will accept differences. They explain that they think beyond what "should be politically correct" and seem open minded about discussion pertaining to alternative lifestyles.

Observations of effect in deliberations: In deliberations, the Echoes are comfortable with colorful personalities either sitting next to them or when determining the credibility of the witness who testified during trial. They are comfortable with the mainstream yet diversity appears to be acceptable, and in some geographic areas, commonplace and expected.

### Take For Granted Rights Gained

Young female Echoes give blank stares or express complete disbelief when told stories about the hurdles that their older sister generations experienced with gender discrimination, sexual harassment and general prejudice in the workplace or by society generally. They find it hard to fathom that women who graduated from law school might have been relegated to a position of legal secretary. They expect that they will encounter few, if any, discriminatory actions because of the laws in place. Admittedly, they take for granted the rights foraged for them years before by the women's movement.

Observations of effect in deliberations: Typically, these young women believe that they are entitled to fair treatment and will accept nothing less. Defense beware.

### Employment Opportunities Are Scarce

The Echoes who have graduated from high school and college have faced tough job markets ever since they were old enough to work. Caught in a long recession, summer employment opportunities never blossomed as hoped. Consequently, they searched for creative ways to find summer and permanent employment: College age males worked as nannies for professional couples with small children, or started businesses organizing and cleaning out garages and attics. Now, as they graduate from higher education, the reality of the tight job market has many of them living back at home.

Observations of effect in deliberations:

Echoes express impatience at not being altogether financially independent; many face staggering student loan debt. They have not earned much money yet, thus, a large damage award may turn out to be beyond their sense of reasoning, given their financial predicaments. In their minds, \$100,000 means a huge amount of money. Therefore, counsel must educate, reason and delineate why a certain amount of money is justified for the damage award.

### They Grew Up With Technology

Completely unfazed by any type of technology because, as they explain, "We grew up with it," the savvy Echoes welcome any new technological gadget. They approach it with gusto and often intuitively figure it out, pushing aside the instruction manual. They cannot hide their exasperation at older folks who are not as skillful with it, let alone those who express fear and ignorance.

Observations of effect in deliberations: Counsel must use technology in the courtroom to keep this generation interested and concerned about the case. If needed, counsel should hire someone from the Echo Generation to assist at trial with the technology.

### Politically, They Say That They Care

The Echo Generation states that they are involved and energized politically. For many of them, the 2004 Presidential election will be their first chance to vote for President. The 2000 election may have provided the guidepost for them in this election and succeeding elections: Every vote counts. As one Dartmouth alumnus from the class of 2004 predicted: "This is an election that matters and they are going to vote this year."

Observations of effect in deliberations: Socially and politically aware, many Echoes seem to understand the unique role of the legal system in shaping policy for society. From the 2000 Presidential election results, they learned that the definitive voice comes from the U.S. Supreme Court. They realize that the legal system will ultimately determine controversial issues of reproductive choice, same sex marriage, and civil liberties affected by the Patriot Act, to name a few. In the end, they approach deliberations with energy, respect for the court, and resolve to make determinations that they believe to be fair.

### Conclusion

The Echo Generation is the largest demographic group since the Baby Boomers of 1945-65. They have a consciousness that their brothers and sisters of Generation X appeared to lack in some ways. Many Generation Xers had an easier entrée into adulthood with better job prospects. The Echoes seem to approach adulthood with no grand illusions. They know that they will be the generation called upon to solve some of the world's most pressing problems. Whereas Generation X was characterized as being the "Generation of Doubters," early indications show that Echoes will be the "Generation of Pragmatists."

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