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# Tim Elmore's Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future

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## Tim Elmore's. *Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future.*

Review by Jeffrey Barlow

This book is very like Longfellow's little girl, who "When she was good, She was very good indeed. But when she was bad she was horrid."<sup>1</sup> First, the very good.

Judging from this particular work, the author, Dr. Tim Elmore, writes largely in support of his speaking engagements.<sup>2</sup> This is not uncommon in certain sorts of entrepreneurial operations. Elmore works as a motivational speaker, focusing on the development of leadership. As his biography proclaims, he has worked with a number of corporations and spoken at many universities, and in, all told, more than thirty countries.<sup>3</sup>

The author's credentials stem in large part from his sheer productivity. He has written more than twenty books, most of them focused, it appears, on living a Christian life of the sort that is conducive to developing not only excellent character but also leadership skills. *Generation iY* drew our attention because it seems to be one of many works discussing the changes wrought in younger generations by the impact of the Internet. We thought it worth analyzing, assuming it to be one of the large number of cautionary works—in large part because of the subtitle "Our Last Chance to Save Their Future," —which bemoan the loss of everything from attention spans to resistance to pornography on the part of those exposed to the Internet.

We were wrong in this assumption. The author is concerned about the Internet, no mistake in that; the work is full of cautionary tales of damage done to the unwary, such as addiction to video games and/or pornography, rapid weight gain, poor eyesight, etc., etc.<sup>4</sup> However, the author's approach is much more nuanced than many that are sometimes encountered. Dr. Elroy believes that the generation born between 1984 and 2002, which he calls "iY," is also very promising, very socially concerned, tolerant, quick to learn, ambitious, and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://wonderingminstrels.blogspot.com/2001/07/there-was-little-girl-henry-wadsworth.html>

<sup>2</sup> See his page at:

[http://timelmore.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=47&Itemid=27](http://timelmore.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=47&Itemid=27)

<sup>3</sup> It fails, however, to mention the source of the degree which justifies his use of the title "Dr." He lists Azusa Pacific University, a Christian school in southern California on his resume, and perhaps he has a D. Min. from there.

<sup>4</sup> See the dismaying list at p. 22.

confident.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, when all is said and done, they are all we have got, so far as future leaders are concerned.

The value of the book, I think, is precisely that, while highly concerned about the Internet, it nonetheless sees it as potentially extremely positive, like the iY generation themselves. The author puts constant stress on the importance of understanding this generation, parenting them closely, and helping them through the challenges facing them in what to me seems to be a relatively objective and useful fashion. I think that reading the book and its many cautions and such suggestions as “action steps” to positively impact children<sup>6</sup> might have improved my own parenting and teaching skills, particularly so far as dealing with the impact of media upon children.

The work, like the author himself, makes excellent use of the Internet. Each chapter ends with suggestions for clicking upon his massive web site, injunctions to post comments, get involved, receive additional printed materials—all sophisticated interactive approaches to the subject.

However, that having been said, the work has many faults. It is overwritten to a painful extent. It is full of overly folksy tales of individual youth and their well-nigh miraculous recoveries from the threats facing them. Many of these stories are so obvious and naïve that when we read in his acknowledgement his thanks to his editor, who trimmed the mss down from its original 350 pages to the current 215, we too want to get down on our knees, overwhelmed with gratitude.

The work is repetitive in the extreme. The author uses the common business book strategy of making frequent early notices of material to be introduced later, introduces the material itself, and sometimes makes later references back to the same point. This is perhaps an appropriate approach for a motivational speech, but a wasteful strategy for a printed book.

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<sup>5</sup> P. 35.

<sup>6</sup> Summary at p. 69.

The research supporting the work is amateurish. The author relies very heavily on one or two sources for his major points in each chapter, and only those that support his own rather narrow point of view—no hint of controversy is found in this work. Some of these are useful materials written by experts in the field bearing upon the author’s analysis, but many are from stories flashed on network news or taken from the pages of U.S.A. Today. When he does make personal claims to authority, it is usually derived from his encounters—in his leadership seminars and speaking engagements—with thousands of the youth whom he discusses here. These references are very unsystematic and often ultimately supported by homilies as opposed to serious research or a grasp of scholarship in the field.

The author has a curious take on the root source of the problems facing the youth about whom he is concerned. At no point does he really condemn advertising or all the panoply of tools of a consumer economy—after all, he hopes, we think, to one day advise these very same corporations on how best to employ these youth and to assist the corporations in honing the leadership skills of their workforces. But he does occasionally caution about the evils of the material world, and the importance of not getting entirely caught up in it. He also has an understanding of the pressures generated by an increasingly troubled economy and its impact on families.

Some of his discussion of the sources of the peril facing youth, in addition to unregulated use of the Internet, may strike some as idiosyncratic. He believes, for example, that the physical results of particular synthetic chemicals in the environment are not only impacting the attention span by producing ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), but also feminizing males.

We have some particular concern about his stealthy approach to his own obviously deeply held Christian values. He never really uses any Christian keywords, but there is a series of code-like references intended, we believe, to signal to readers and potential employers that the author enthusiastically plays on God’s Team. We assume that he does not want to alienate potential audiences, so he chooses to position himself as simply deeply concerned. We suspect that when appearing before many of the church groups, which seem to account for much of his audience, he is much more partisan in his approach.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> We are basing this judgment on the forward to his book, and the blurbs on various others, as well as his own web postings.

We also are disturbed by his failure to deal with national cultures. So far as he is concerned, all the youth of this generation in the world share the same problems—a Palestinian youth, a Somali refugee, and a middle-American yuppie are all equally generation iY. This is, we think, naïve.

On balance, we believe that there is a definite audience for this work, and for the author's other books and speeches. We think that many who might otherwise simply see the Internet as the Devil's Digital Workshop could well be led to a better understanding of the complexities of modern life, and particularly of the challenges facing the young. However, many others, particularly those wanting to achieve a serious understanding of the Internet based in expertise and research, will find it, well, horrid.