

A photograph of two young boys in a classroom. The boy on the left is leaning over the boy on the right, who is holding a pencil and looking at a book. The background is a blurred classroom with colorful posters on the wall.

TIM ELMORE

AN EARLY INTRODUCTION TO THE

ALPHA GENERATION

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My daughter, Bethany, taught preschool children after she graduated from college. One night, she shared a story that made me chuckle. It's a picture of Generation Alpha. Berra was a four-year-old boy who was looking at a stack of hardback books. Bethany noticed he picked one up and gazed at the cover. Then, he did something that only a kid born in the digital age would do. Berra began to run his finger across the book's cover as if he was trying to manipulate a tablet. He just assumed that anything hard and flat must be a touchscreen.

Welcome to a new generation of children.

Meet the Alphas

I'd like you to meet the **mini millennials**, Generation Alpha, the population of kids born after Generation Z. Like a mirror of their parents, this generation is on track to become the largest generation in history worldwide.

Although the findings are still early, there are signs Generation Alpha could end up looking like the senior generation from one century before them. News journalist, Tom Brokaw, called the Seniors the "Greatest Generation" as they endured a pandemic (Spanish Flu), grew up in the roaring 20s and the Great Depression, then fought in World War II.¹ They were more doers than talkers when it came to reaching their goals, and those Seniors achieved some mighty outcomes. We can hope Generation Alpha responds in the same way.

There's not yet a consensus on the birth years of this new generation. Some sources say the Alpha Generation's birth years began in 2011. However, many definitions of Generation Z (ending in 2012 or 2015) would indicate that the oldest members of Generation Alpha were born in 2013 or 2016.² I suggest Generation Z was born between 2001 and 2016. The children of Generation Alpha were born into a very different world following those years:



- *A politically polarized world, with the Trump administration taking office*
- *A pandemic marked their early years, with infections, mask-wearing, and increased deaths*
- *Exposure to the conversations surrounding mental health at a young age*
- *An increase in U.S. mass shootings—2019 had more shootings than days in the year*
- *Conspiracy theories and distrust became common among millions of Americans*
- *Ubiquitous smart technology: Alphas have used smart devices since pre-school*
- *A volatile, uncertain economy and culture, spiking then dropping in their early years*

Let's review some interesting facts about Generation Alpha.

Do You Know the Alphas?

While Generation Alpha is predicted to be the largest generation in the world, they're much smaller in the U.S. as millennial parents have had fewer children and those children, when ready to have babies, will be a smaller population of parents. Thanks to the pandemic, birth rates dropped dramatically as families felt they could not afford more kids. In addition, fertility rates have fallen due to higher standards of living and women prioritizing a career first and having children second, according to Rachel Lopez in *Baby Monitor: See How Family Size is Shrinking*.³ Provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveal that U.S. fertility rates have fallen below the replacement level of 2.1 since 1971.⁴ In 2017, it dropped to 1.765, the lowest in three decades. In short, we are not replacing our current population.⁵

More than half of the human population now lives in urban areas (55 percent).⁶ If the current trend continues, it will reach two-thirds by the middle of this century. A direct consequence of urbanization is falling fertility.⁷ In rural areas, children can be considered an asset, that is additional labor. But in cities, children can be considered a burden. They are an additional expense.

The United Nations estimated in 2019 that the human population would reach about 9.7 billion by 2050, but this is lower than earlier projections.⁸ Already, eighty-three countries now have sub-replacement fertility. The year 2018 was the first time the number of people above sixty-five years of age (705 million) exceeded those between the ages of zero and four (680 million). If current trends continue, the ratio between these two age groups will be two to one by 2050.⁹ In short, there will be more grandparents than grandchildren. Education is one of the most important determinants of fertility. The more educated a woman is, the later she tends to have children— and fewer of them at that. That being said, here is what we can assume about Alphas:

- *They will likely be the most educated generation ever.*
- *They will likely be the most technologically immersed generation ever.*
- *They will likely be the most materially endowed generation ever.*
- *They will likely be the most impatient generation ever.*
- *They will likely be the most self-directed generation ever.*
- *They will be the generation who experiences more virtual (Siri, Alexa) relationships.*
- *They will be the most likely generation to spend their childhood without both of their biological parents.*

The title Alpha Generation is usually credited to Mark McCrindle, a generational researcher in Australia who leads a consulting agency. In 2008, his online survey revealed people felt that following Generation Z ought to be a return to a or alpha, the first letter in the Greek alphabet. According to McCrindle, “Gen Alphas will stay in education longer, start their earning years later and so stay at home with their parents later than even their predecessors, Gen Z and Gen Y. The role of parents therefore will span a longer age range—with many of these Gen Alphas likely to be still living at home into their late 20’s.”¹⁰

Because the Alphas are exposed to the realities of the world at younger ages (90 percent of them were on a smart portable device in pre-school),¹¹ they will care about the world much sooner and much more than preceding generations. A branding agency recently polled a group of 7-to 9-year-olds on a wide range of mostly non-divisive issues (such as the importance of making sure everyone has enough food to eat) and concluded that Generation Alpha cares more about all issues than their millennial and baby boomer [predecessors] did when they were kids, or even than they do now.¹² In fact, I predict that since the Alphas were conditioned in their early years by a pandemic, complete with seeing people applaud healthcare workers, watching essential workers make sacrifices on behalf of humankind, and hearing stories of people who went out of their way to serve those in need, they’ll likely mature into a deeply compassionate population as they enter adulthood. This is my hope. The children who grew up during the Spanish Flu pandemic a century ago grew up to be civic-minded and willing to serve. The COVID-19 pandemic offers us the same opportunity to raise a population of kids who demonstrate grit, resolve, and the ability to see the larger community of which they are a part of.

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Lucy Blaylock is a vivid example of this possibility today. When Lucy was 8-years old, she asked her mother and grandmother to teach her how to sew. She wanted to make a blanket for her friend’s birthday gift. She enjoyed it so much, she made two blankets. So, what did Lucy decide to do with the extra one? She had her mom post on social media that they had a blanket for anyone who would reply that they needed it and why. Lucy got 16 responses from families that desperately needed a blanket for disabled kids or kids that live unheated homes. Lucy had a new quandary. So, she decided that instead of choosing one winner, she would make 15 other blankets. She called them “Love Blankets.” By this time, creating these blankets for people in need consumed her. She loves imagining those who receive them, smiling at their package in the mail. Lucy’s Love Blankets has taken off as she continues to act on her compassion. Lucy has sewed more than 500 blankets for people and over 1,000 masks to protect people from COVID-19. Lucy is a picture of today’s empowered child who is doing something significant with their empathy. They have¹³given new meaning to: “I can’t wait.”

How does history inform us of the timeless virtues our children need today?



The New World Our Kids Live In

Child entertainment is increasingly dominated by smart technology and streaming services with interest in traditional television concurrently declining. Studies show allergies, obesity, and health problems related to screen time have become increasingly prevalent among kids in recent years. Think of the changes to childhood this way:

- **The tablet is the new pacifier.** When my kids were toddlers, we gave them a pacifier if they became fussy or fidgety. Today, nine out of ten preschool-aged children are on a tablet or portable device amusing themselves.¹⁴ It tends to pacify them.
- **The baby monitor is the new babysitter.** These monitors have been around for decades, but now we use them to watch both our children and the babysitters we've hired while we're away from our homes. Cameras are everywhere.
- **Netflix is the new playground.** Twenty years ago, our kids were outside playing more than kids are today. Children will now spend hours vegging and binging on Netflix shows. They're sedentary but safe, secluded, and satisfied. Virtual is close enough.
- **Fortnite is the new pick-up baseball game.** I recall playing outside for hours after school with whoever was available for a baseball or basketball game. Now, pickup games are played with friends or strangers on a video screen. Both the game and competitors can be anywhere in the world.
- **Instagram is the new photo album.** This one has made life easier. Instead of buying a physical photo album and storing it away in the attic, we now have our library of pictures on social media sites we can access simply and faster. We can filter them too!
- **Google is the new encyclopedia.** Move over dictionaries, textbooks, and encyclopedias— Google, Siri, and Alexa are here to answer all of our questions. By default, kids will revert to Google over other sources to find facts and news. The internet's always accurate, right?
- **YouTube is the new TV.** In 2019, data revealed that kids spent more time watching YouTube videos than watching television shows.¹⁵ The videos are raw, and unlike TV, they are unregulated and unrated. This could be troublesome for parents.
- **TikTok is the new shopping mall.** In 2022, the social media app TikTok surpassed Google as the most popular platform in the world.¹⁶ Kids spend more time on it than they do on visits to the mall to hangout. It provides hours of entertainment that feels raw and real.
- **Medication is the new timeout.** Over the years, kids have been given larger amounts of meds for a widening variety of allergies or diagnoses. It helps us and them manage life. We must be careful these meds don't replace the process of disciplining them.

In our desire to make life convenient, quick, and easy, Generation Alpha members are the beneficiaries of our new brand of parenting and leadership. Unfortunately, unless we make changes, the Alphas could be the loneliest generation our world has seen. In our focus groups, kids reported higher levels of solitude than past generations and said they feel lonely almost every day. (A pandemic and quarantine in early childhood didn't help.) It is easier to make connections today but tougher to experience authentic and deep relationships. Research psychologist Jean Twenge notes that there is a "link between the rise of smartphones and social media and the increase in depression, anxiety and loneliness in today's youth."¹⁷

The Shifts We See So Far

1. Binge-watching is morphing into cringe-watching.

Gen. Z grew up with the ability to binge-watch Game of Thrones on HBO. Binging is an old hat for the Alphas. They're showing a predisposition for cringe-watching—viewing a show on-demand over and over again until adults cringe at the repetition.

2. Master learning is morphing into personalized learning.

A wide range of topics became available as Gen. Z grew up with Master Classes, TED talks, YouTube channels, and the like. Alphas will grow up expecting a personalized learning experience, tailored for them and their learning styles.

3. Compromise is morphing into polarize.

The Alphas only know an adult population around them who've been divided, fighting and taking sides on almost every issue from masks to politics to vaccinations. Instead of compromising on issues, alphas are learning from adults around them to stake their territory and state their opinions.

4. Electronics are morphing into robotics.

Gen Z grew up as artificial intelligence became common. Alphas are growing up as robotics become common. While kids once grew up telling a device what to do, that device may soon tell them what to do. They may interact more with robots than people.

5. On-Demand is morphing into making demands.

Generation Z grew up with instant access, on-demand content. The Alphas are growing up with Alexa and Siri where they make harsh demands of the AI devices, sometimes scolding them if they don't respond quickly or in a helpful manner. Patience is an oddity.

I've heard concerns from parents of young children today who say their kids are yelling at Alexa and calling the device stupid because it didn't have the answer to their question or because Alexa or Siri took too long. Those parents obviously worry that their demanding and impatient children don't communicate this bluntly with other people. It's a new day. It's been said a million times, but it's still true: Artificial intelligence and automation make us smarter people, but they don't always make us better people. The best parents and leaders are intentional when managing time on devices and screens so that they don't take over. We must steward this tool well. Technology makes a wonderful servant but a horrible master.



Have you spotted any other shifts taking place with kids today?

How Should We Lead Them?

In light of the early research on Generation Alpha, the kids comprising this group will need some discerning leadership in their homes, schools, teams, and workplaces as they enter the job market. I offer some intentional steps we must take to lead these children to healthy maturity.

1. Focus on developing their emotional intelligence.

They will naturally feel at home with screens, much like Generation Z before them. We must be intentional about helping them build interpersonal skills and self-management.

2. Nudge them to play with physical toys.

While Alphas will acquire new skills (thanks to new tech), we must recognize that as the use of physical toys is reduced, the development of imagination and creativity will suffer.

3. Help them cultivate deeper relationships.

Since our digital connections are often superficial and normal for children, we must enable them to develop meaningful interactions with friends and acquaintances.

4. Promote time for physical activity and outdoor exercise.

Like Generation Z, children are more sedentary and obese than past generations. Why not have them shoot some hoops as they review spelling or take walks each day?

5. Limit their screen time.

The data shows kids who spend less than two hours daily on portable devices are far less vulnerable to anxiety or depression. Over two hours and the vulnerability climbs tangibly.¹⁸

6. Place boundaries on social media with a phone contract.

Few kids need to be on social media until their teen years. Even then, when you buy them a phone, have them sign an agreement filled with boundaries that have consequences.

7. Create margin in their days.

Kids do not like to be bored, but neuroscientists say our brains actually need boredom. It's when we're bored that we develop empathy and creativity. Simplify their days to create space.

Leading a child from Generation Alpha requires us to be more intentional than past generations of parents, teachers, coaches, and youth leaders. Seeing good leadership from us will help them develop healthy autonomy and responsibility as they grow older.

Do you know of any other needs or voids which caring adults must address in kids today?

A Foretaste: The Potential of the Alphas

Just a few years ago I learned about a 10-year-old boy living in Menlo Park, California who did something I can only imagine doing. The boy's name is Ayush Kumar.

His parents give him just 30 minutes of screen time a week so Ayush filled that time with videos and games. Wanting to guard him from the negative impact of technology, his parents believed their fourth grader was too young for a phone.

His parents noticed, however, that their son has loved coding since he was 4 years old. In fact, sometimes Ayush would use his 30 minutes of tech time to learn instead of to be entertained. So, mom and dad stayed on the lookout for opportunities for their son to do something constructive with his skill. When his dad heard about Apple's Worldwide Developer's Conference, he told Ayush about it. He said, "Ayush, you're too young to enter their annual contest, but you could try to develop something and see what they say."

And that's exactly what Ayush Kumar did.

He developed a physics-based app with a catapult lever that enables users to release a projectile. It's quite impressive. Apple not only made an exception to let this 10-year into the contest, Ayush won the contest—against people who were much older than he is—and was awarded a college scholarship!¹⁹

So what can we learn from him?

First, Ayush has grown up in a world full of smart technology. It is his natural habitat. Trying new opportunities with artificial intelligence is natural. Creating something helpful with it is instinctive for many kids. Technology is something to respect and use to make the world better.

Second, a caring adult made a difference in his life (in this case it was his dad). Ayush's father was the one who cautioned him about the boundaries of the opportunity (he told his son the contest was for people 13-years old or older and that he probably couldn't get in) but he challenged him to give it a shot. Ayush simply complied with what his dad said.

Third, Ayush broke the rules of the contest, but delivered a better project than all of the older participants. Even though other contestants complained that he was too young to be there, Ayush respectfully listened to them and then submitted to the judges' decision. No one could argue with his humble attitude that honored their verdict. Their decision stood: This kid should not be limited by the boundaries they set. His intelligence and his respect that won them over.

Do you know any gifted children that seem to break stereotypes of what kids can do?

Five Experiences That Can Be Rites of Passage for Generation Alpha

I read about a father, Paul Wallich, who built a camera-mounted drone helicopter to follow his young son to the bus stop. He wanted to ensure his son arrived at the bus stop safe and sound. There is no doubt that gizmo provided some entertainment for everyone. For me, Paul Wallich gives new meaning to the term helicopter parent.

Today, I not only see a new generation of kids, I see a new generation of parents as well. While I applaud the engagement of these moms and dads, we've focused so much on safety, self-esteem, and status, that our children can grow into adulthood unready for the hard knocks of life. Too often:

- *We risk too little.*
- *We rescue too quickly.*
- *We rave too easily.*

Over time, we fail to offer the rites of passage that former generations gave kids. I decided to do it differently. Since 1979, I've been committed to mentoring emerging leaders—both students and young professionals. I became a father in 1988 and now have two adult children. Over time, I've identified the experiences that are the most meaningful to my mentees. These experiences mature kids as well as build grit and depth. Collectively, they serve as a sort of rite of passage for them. I invite you to consider inserting these experiences as you invest in your kids.

Five Experiences That Foster Maturity

1. Do something scary.

There is something about stepping out of our comfort zones to attempt a risky act, which is unfamiliar and even a little frightening, that makes us come alive. Our senses are heightened when we feel we are taking a risk. We don't know what we're doing. We have to trust and even rely on each other. Ideally, these initiatives are intentional and well planned, but they should not be scripted. They must include the element of chance. As a mentor, I've taken my mentees downtown to spend a night with homeless people. Those students were wide-eyed as we interacted with an entirely different population of people, as we slept on cardboard with newspapers as a blanket. A small dose of danger mixed with a large dose of unfamiliar accelerate growth.



When my son was twelve, he and I took a father and son trip to another city. We explored some new places, but the scariest part of the four-day trip was when I traded places with him in our car and had him drive it around a parking lot. After explaining the gears and peddles, Jonathan overcame his panic and drove that big automobile. During certain moments, he was grinning from ear to ear. This sparked a remarkable conversation, comparing his fear to what he would experience when he become a man. Manhood is not for the fainthearted. It's about responsibility, being drivers, not passengers in life.

Facing their fears is a rite of passage for kids. Doing something that's neither prescribed nor guaranteed unleashes adrenaline and other chemicals in their bodies that awaken them. Other feel-good chemicals also come into play with scary experiences, including dopamine, endorphins, serotonin, and oxytocin. Part of the reason more teens don't "come alive" is because we've protected them from high stakes in the name of safety.

2. Meet someone influential.

Another challenge for them to rise to is meeting someone they deem significant. Because Gen Z members are less natural when meeting adults face to face, the encounter itself stretches them. They can be famous people, but they don't have to be. The key is they're people the students believe to be important due to what they've accomplished. I was invited to participate in a special meeting in Washington D.C. when my daughter, Bethany, was just nine years old. Since I would be meeting congressmen, ambassadors, and other civic leaders, I wanted her to experience it with me. Encountering noteworthy people can be intimidating, even to adults. It was fun to introduce her to those people and witness her interacting with them and eventually feeling quite at home.

For the first twenty years of my career, I worked for best-selling author John C. Maxwell. My kids were fortunate enough to build a relationship with John and his wife, Margaret. Interacting with the Maxwells enabled them to overcome social fears and to see noteworthy people as human. Today, my kids are not starstruck by celebrities and are comfortable interfacing with people of all ages.

3. Travel someplace different.

We all know that travel is an education in itself. While classrooms are useful learning contexts, leaving the classroom and all that's familiar is better still. Not only does travel push kids out of their comfort zones, it forces them to work at understanding others, at connecting with new environments, and at problem-solving since they are out of their comfort zone. Consider this, when we're in familiar situations, we can shift into cruise control. We can become numb to reality since we're on our home turf. This doesn't occur in a foreign location. Mission trips stir our curiosity, beg us to research, beckon us to learn, and invite us to grow up. We think new thoughts in new places. My friend Glen Jackson says, "A change of pace plus a change of place equals a change of perspective."



One of my favorite memories was taking my five-year-old daughter, Bethany, to Croatia during the Bosnian War in 1993. I wanted her to be comfortable in environments that were both foreign and struggling. Bethany helped to serve clothing, food, and blankets to refugees who had relocated to the area. She saw poverty she'd never seen before and experienced the joy of providing for the needs of those who were displaced and suffering. It was life-changing.

4. Chase a meaningful goal.

I believe teens need us to let them pursue an objective that has high stakes and to give them full control. Past generations matured more effectively because they were given the responsibility of holding jobs and creating goals that had genuine meaning at a young age. When we lower the stakes or give kids an artificial purpose to engage in, they end up with artificial maturity. While I believe in the value of academics, it's still a facsimile of a meaningful world, created by our contemporary structures. I meet too many students who've mastered the skill of getting good grades but struggle to translate those grades into a career, marriage, and family. Information is meaningful when it is applied.

When I speak of chasing a big goal, I mean aiming for a target that has deep meaning to your child, one that stretches his or her capacity and is important. As a teen, my son told us he wanted to pursue a career in the entertainment industry. So, my wife and I decided to let Jonathan pursue this goal at sixteen years old. As a homeschooler, he had more freedom with his time. He and his mom moved from Atlanta to Los Angeles for seven months to give him the opportunity to try his hand at acting. The experience was revealing, as you can imagine. Life in Burbank in an apartment with hundreds of other kid actors revealed the highly competitive world there. He soon recognized the real influencers are the storytellers behind the camera. Returning home, Jonathan was a different person—more clear on his calling. He earned a degree in screenwriting and now writes scripts every week.

5. Wait and work for something you want.

One of the reasons teens and college students find “adulting” so challenging today is they've grown up in a world where almost everything is instant access and on-demand. This can coerce them to expect instant gratification. The opposite of which is patience and work ethic. These virtues signal maturity because the person is able to see a goal in their mind, which is still invisible externally.



Teens need us to let them pursue an objective that has high stakes and give them full control.



Consider what's happening in their brains. When teens envision an outcome before they actually experience it, it can cause the brain to release dopamine and endorphins, which signal pleasure and rewards. As teens experience learned industriousness (I keep working because I know it will pay off), acetylcholine kicks in. This chemical plays a vital role in learning and memory, and it deepens neuropathways as kids associate rewards with working towards a goal. In our home, our kids paid for half of their first car, a portion of their smartphone, and a portion of a trip they each wanted to take in school.

My favorite outcome from all these experiences with my kids came years later. My daughter, Bethany, called me when she was twenty-five years old and living 2,000 miles away. When I asked why she called, she replied, "I guess I just called to say thanks."

I said, "Well, every dad loves to hear that from his children, but what drove you to call me?"

After collecting her thoughts, she blurted out, "I guess I just noticed I work with a ton of people like me, but no one sees the big picture. They act lazy, and they're on their phones. They're not ready for a job!" Then, she paused and concluded, "I guess I just realized that you and mom did get me ready. And I just wanted to say thanks."

Through tears, I smiled and replied, "Bethany, you just made my day."



What Our Kids Need Most From Us Every Day

As parents, we must remember we are leaders. Our families are our teams. We must remember first and foremost that our kids may have different reactions to disruptive times, and we must be careful not to minimize the angst they are feeling, while at the same time remaining a source of steady hope. Children need three items from their leaders during a crisis (and in this order). They spell the word CAB. I tell myself to jump in a CAB every day if I am going to reach my desired destination.

Context

It's easy to hear the news all day and become freaked out. We feel angst from all the bad news and the uncertainty of this season. Good leaders provide context to problems: This is not the worst crisis we have ever faced, yet it deserves our focused attention. Context means you furnish perspective on what's happening, stay knowledgeable on current details, and become a source of wisdom, especially for those who fall on either end of the spectrum (those who feel it's no big deal and those who feel like the sky is falling). When kids see a calamity on social media and don't know what to think, you must be the one who offers perspective. Just like toddlers watch the reactions of adults to know whether they should cry when they fall down, our kids will watch us to get a sense of context.

Applications

People usually need leaders to offer practical action steps in times like these. Children will need them even more. If their minds are flooded and overwhelmed, our job is to turn the flood into a river. Sometimes grown adults need reminders of the applications we've been given to respond to COVID-19 well: wash your hands many times a day, stay six feet apart from others in public, wear a mask, and shelter in place. The best leaders leave people with clear applications for their days. In fact, clarity is the greatest gift a leader can offer their team members right now. This is true for parents as well. Be honest if you don't know the answer to all their questions, but be clear on the few actions you can be sure about. Clarity is king.



Clarity is the greatest gift a leader can offer their team members.



Belief

Napoleon Bonaparte said, “Leaders are dealers in hope.” In uncertain times, I believe we owe it to people, especially our children, to offer belief and hope for a better future. They need to hear a person they look up to offer reasons why he or she believes that this season will one day pass and that we may just return to a better normal. Throughout history, many outbreaks have resulted in better vaccines, better job conditions, and better health practices. I believe we as a society will improve due to COVID-19. Americans, once polarized in recent times, began to cooperate and focus on helping each other. We’re applauding health care professionals and essential workers. We will get through this and be better for it.

My friend Collin told me he got the greatest compliment from his teenage son during the pandemic in 2020. As the two were talking, his son said, “Dad, mom is getting anxious about what’s going on, isn’t she?”

Collin paused then agreed. “Yes, son, she’s a little nervous right now.”

After a moment, the teen asked, “But you’re not scared are you, Dad?”

Collin smiled and said, “No, son, I’m not scared.”

His son replied, “Good. That’s what I was hoping.”

My Question for the Alphas

When all is said and done, our leadership has a lot to do with how these children will turn out. They are maturing in a tumultuous time, a time of disruption and complexity. And their greatest influence at their age now—is the adults who lead them: their parents, teachers, coaches and youth workers. If we fail to intentionally address the data points I’ve listed here, we leave their development to chance. This is our opportunity to influence them in a positive, hopeful way. My biggest questions regarding the Alpha Generation remain are these:

- *Will they win the battle for mental health?*
- *Will these difficult times foster anxiety or empathy?*
- *Will the pandemic produce a scarcity mindset or a service mindset?*
- *Will they emerge from it with Post Traumatic Stress or with Post Traumatic Growth?*

If We Lead Them Well:

1. They'll be problem solvers
2. They'll embrace a service mindset
3. They'll enjoy PTG (a growth mindset)
4. They will emerge with a grit narrative
5. They will see the silver lining
6. They will be resilient and resourceful

If We Fail to Lead Them Well:

1. They will be part of the problem
2. They will embrace a scarcity mindset
3. They may experience PTSD (stress disorder)
4. They will emerge with a victim narrative
5. They will see the dark cloud
6. They will be reactive and regretful

I was encouraged when I spoke to a group of high school seniors and college freshmen during the COVID-19 quarantine. We met on Zoom, like millions did, and I facilitated an informal focus group, asking these students how the pandemic was affecting them. They admitted to feeling postponed and penalized by it all, but they also told me something else. Many had dropped their former ambition to be an entertainer and decided to become a healthcare worker or a first-responder or an essential worker in a field they felt would matter to the world. At least in this case, several had lowered their ambition to merely make a dollar and raised their ambition to make a difference. What a great response to the need of the hour.

My Challenge to You

Historians Neil Howe and William Strauss wrote a book years ago called, *The Fourth Turning*. In it, they introduce the idea that generations cycle through each century in a somewhat predictable way. History doesn't exactly repeat itself, but it does echo. There are ups and down to the economy of each era, to the spirit of tone of the culture at the time, which is reflected in the music, art and entertainment of the day.

It dawned on me that the Alpha Generation is at the beginning of a new cycle, much like the Senior Generation was a century ago. This population in the beginning of the 20th century grew up with realities similar to the Alphas, and emerged so strong, that television anchor Tom Brokaw called them, *The Greatest Generation*, in his book by that title. Consider the parallels of the Senior Generation when compared to the Alpha Generation:

- They faced a pandemic (the Spanish Flu) in their childhood.
- They grew up in the roaring 20s, when culture was changing dramatically.
- They experienced a Great Depression complete with a tumultuous economy.
- They saw suicide rates rise as people endured a season of unemployment and angst.
- They entered adulthood prepared to sacrifice and to help win World War II.
- They carried our nation through some of its most difficult time with grit and grace.

How could they? On the whole, they were led well as kids. They were prepared.

My question is: what if we could lead our children the way parents, teachers, coaches and employers led these kids in the Senior Generation, taking the long view and teaching them to fend off a victim mindset, to serve their fellow man, to cultivate grit in the midst of hardship, to see themselves as part of something bigger than their own life and career, and to sacrifice on behalf of their larger community.

We can guide the narrative of these kids. That's the job before us.



Dr. Tim Elmore is the founder and CEO of Growing Leaders, a non-profit organization established to develop emerging leaders. Growing Leaders partners with schools and organizations to build life skills and social and emotional learning in students. It also provides training to educators and leaders to help understand today's young generations. Tim has authored over 35 books and was named a Top 100 Leadership speaker by Inc. magazine. You can find his work at: **GrowingLeaders.com**

Learn more about us at GrowingLeaders.com

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