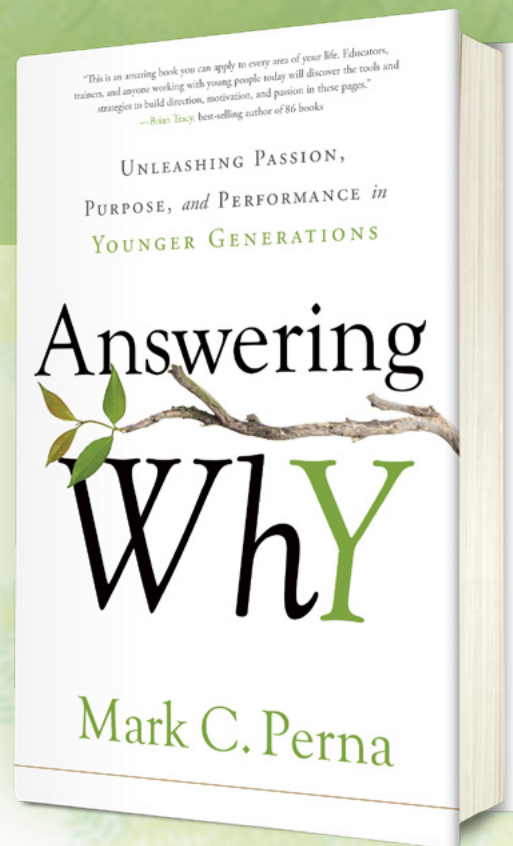


# ANSWERING WHY:

UNLEASHING PASSION, PURPOSE,  
*and* PERFORMANCE *in*  
YOUNGER GENERATIONS

**BOOK  
DISCUSSION  
GUIDE**



## Table of Contents

Table of Contents/How to Use This Guide	2
Chapter One: Closing the Skills Gap	3
Chapter Two: Overcoming Generational Rifts	4
Chapter Three: Getting to Know the Why Generation	5
Chapter Four: Why the Why Generation Doesn't Hear the Branch Creaking	6
Chapter Five: Finding the Light at the End of the Tunnel	7
Chapter Six: Bridging the Awareness Gap	8
Chapter Seven: Building a Competitive Advantage	9
Chapter Eight: Education with Purpose; Employment with Passion	10
Chapter Nine: Strategies and Tools to Connect and Empower	11
Conclusion: The Wade Factor	12



**Mark C. Perna**  
 Founder, Author, and CEO

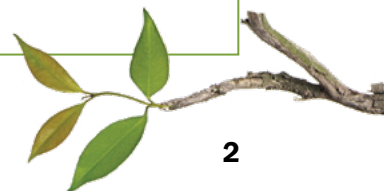
### How to Use This Discussion Guide

Thank you for choosing *Answering Why: Unleashing Passion, Purpose, and Performance in Younger Generations* for your book discussion!

This discussion guide is designed to deepen your understanding of the concepts and principles shared in the book. It can be used by parents, teachers, administrators, employers, and many others in a wide range of educational and workforce development environments.

With focused questions for each chapter, this discussion guide will help you explore the concepts and then encourage you to apply those principles to your own context. Feel free to adapt this guide to your unique needs and group dynamics to answer your own why!

It is my hope that your discussions create a ripple effect that helps us change long-standing paradigms — one conversation at a time. Once again, thank you for choosing my book, *Answering Why!*

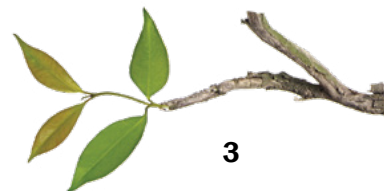


## Chapter One: Closing the Skills Gap

“I am a huge fan of going to college. I did it myself. [But] the Awareness Gap that we battle today is the assumption that college is the only path a young person can take to create a successful life. In addition, we don’t do a good enough job of informing our young people about the pitfalls they may face when they go to college. We should want them to choose college as a clearly defined step toward their career attainment—not because everyone else is going, not because they think they cannot succeed without a degree, and not because they view college as the place where they figure out their life direction. College is a great postsecondary option—if your career path requires it. Too many people today go just to go—often failing to finish their course of study, missing out on profitable career paths that require specialized postsecondary but not university training, and increasing our nation’s student-loan default rate.” (pg. 18)

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. **What is the skills gap and why is it happening in America?** (pg. 15)
  - a. Is there a skills gap that you or your organization is experiencing? What can be done about this?
2. **What are Professional Skills?** (pg. 16)
  - a. What Professional Skills do we value most within our organization? How can we drive those skills throughout our organization and culture?
3. **What is the 1:2:7 ratio?** (pg. 17)
  - a. Do you think this ratio will ever change? Why or why not?
  - b. Where do you or your organization fall in this ratio when hiring new employees?
4. **How is the Awareness Gap contributing to the skills gap in the U.S.?** (pg. 18)
  - a. How can you or your organization start closing the Awareness Gap that exists for your young people?
5. **Define college and career readiness.** (pg. 19)
  - a. Does your organization hire employees who have not attended a four-year baccalaureate program?
6. **The author states that for many young people, college has become little more than an expensive career exploration program.** (pg. 20)
  - a. How can you or your organization help young people and their parents to become “smarter consumers of education”?
7. **According to the author, U.S. employers now prioritize candidates with real work experience rather than academic knowledge alone. Why is this the case?** (pg. 24)
  - a. How does this affect the job market in your area?
8. **The author says, “Education is not work history or experience; it is simply education”** (pg. 25).
  - a. Is education by itself an adequate preparation for the world of work? Why or why not?
9. **How can early career exploration in middle and high school expand a student’s opportunities rather than limit them?** (pg. 27)
  - a. What can you or your organization do to empower students to begin a career-focused education with a hands-on and authentic approach, rather than just having guest speakers come in one day and speak?



## Chapter Two: Overcoming Generational Rifts

“If we want to better understand how to unlock the potential of young people in a way that allows them to build fulfilling and productive lives, we need to meet them where they are rather than complain about why they aren’t like us. We must grasp what makes them tick and why they do the things they do. It may come as a surprise, but they often have excellent reasons for their ideas, based on their different experience and perception of the world.” (pg. 35)

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

**1. Define Generational Rifts.** (pg. 33)

- a. Have you witnessed any Generational Rifts in your organization?
- b. What can you or your organization do to minimize Generational Rifts in your everyday interactions?

**2. Why does the author call Generations Y and Z “the Why Generation”?** (pg. 34)

- a. Have you found that when young people ask questions, often “it’s not about challenging authority”?

**3. How does the prevailing view of today’s younger generations tend to be more negative?** (pg. 38)

- a. What can you or your organization do to raise rather than lower expectations for the younger generations?

**4. The author states that older and younger generations approach their work differently, with older folks who often “live to work,” and younger people who usually “work to live.” How does this play out in the workforce today?** (pg. 40)

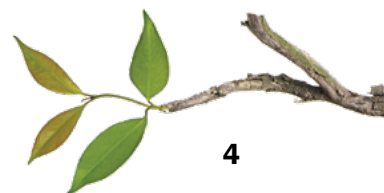
- a. What mindset do you or your organization tend to have: work-life balance or work-life blend?

**5. The author writes that for young people, “lifestyle is the most important consideration in any career decision or direction.” What does this mean?** (pg. 41)

- a. Since experience is everything to the Why Generation, what can you or your organization do to ensure that the Why Generation doesn’t quit?
- b. Do you or your organization hold any biases about the way things are done that may be hindering you from adapting to the needs and perspectives of today’s young people? How can you or your organization improve this?

**6. The story of the Why Generation woman who quit her job and moved in with her parents in order to take a yoga class is an example of how one individual defines success. Explain how this can be one definition of success.** (pg. 41)

- a. Have you or anyone in your organization ever made a choice that may not have seemed ideal to others from a different generation?



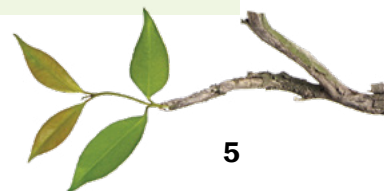


## Chapter Three: Getting to Know the Why Generation

“If I were to describe the younger generations in one key phrase, it would have to be that “experience is everything.” They are hungry to experience life to the fullest and are looking for significant moments online, in person, on location, and through each relationship. “We’d rather have experiences than bank statements” is how one Why Generation member describes her generation’s priorities.” (pg. 45)

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. **“Experience is everything.” Which is better: to “have experiences or bank statements”?** (pg. 45)
  - a. In what ways have you or your organization observed this trait in motion with the younger generations?
2. **Why do Why Generation members believe they are unique, special, and important?** (pg. 47)
  - a. In what ways do you or your organization see the Why Generation live out this belief?
3. **The author states that often, young people “expect far less from themselves than they are truly capable of achieving.”** (pg. 49)
  - a. If you or your organization observes this in the young people you interact with, how can you help them raise their expectations for themselves?
4. **Why does the Why Generation generally prefer group interactions as opposed to one-on-one situations?** (pg. 49)
  - a. Do you or your organization interact more frequently one-on-one or in groups? If one-on-one, how would it be more beneficial to introduce more of a team dynamic or have more group collaboration to share ideas and dialogue?
5. **How are you or your organization using social media as an advantage in connecting with the “digital natives” of today’s younger generations?** (pg. 50)
  - a. How have you observed technology and social media changing the way the young people in your sphere communicate and multitask?
6. **What are some of the factors behind the perceived “entitled” mindset of the younger generations?** (pg. 51)
  - a. Understanding the traits of the younger generation will support positive interactions. What can you or your organization do to adapt to the traits of the younger generations so that they will be committed for the long term?
7. **The author states, “It’s not only about the salary anymore; today’s young people demand a workplace that stimulates their creativity, values their contribution, and challenges them to exceed their limits as they work toward a shared vision they believe in.”** (pg. 54)
  - a. How do you see this affecting you or your organization?
8. **How did UPS overcome its retention issues with its Why Generation employees?** (pg. 56)
  - a. Do you or your organization need to implement any new changes or procedures to address retention issues?
9. **Why do employers think that they need to use “butt-kissing” approach to retain students or employees?** (pg. 57)
  - a. How can you or your organization make sure the younger and older generations partner and have the same vision and mission to eliminate any pandering approaches?
10. **Why is company/employee loyalty such a different picture today than it was in the past?** (pg. 60)
  - a. Since “the loss of loyalty is a two-way street and has become the new reality in the American labor market,” what can you or your organization do to minimize this?



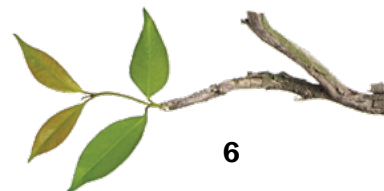
## Chapter Four: Why the Why Generation Doesn't Hear the Branch Creaking

"I submit to you that these students simply don't hear the branch creak. They are pretty comfortable, and growth is a far-off, "maturity" kind of concept that happens when they are much older, certainly not today. But growth happens when we step outside our comfort zone, when the branch creaks—almost never when we are in our comfort zone standing on firm ground.

We should think about the safety nets we've created for our children and students—and maybe also ourselves. Should those safety nets be removed? Branch creaks mean nothing if there's no real danger of plunging to the ground below. Short-term discomfort can be the catalyst for long-term positive change—and that might start with the parents." (pg. 70)

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. **What are some of the reasons that young people may not hear the branch creak?** (pg. 67)
  - a. Have you heard the branch creak before? If so, when and what did you do about it?
  - b. What can you or your organization do differently so that the younger generations hear the branch creak and make their success more sustainable?
2. **The Why Generation has been raised for achievement. How has this affected them?** (pg. 68)
  - a. How can you or your organization inspire young people when there may not be an urgency or "want-to" within themselves?
3. **How do entitlement and self-esteem affect each other?** (pg. 69)
  - a. How do you or your organization see entitlement being played out in individuals you interact with?
4. **What happens in a young person when self-reliance and independence are not taught?** (pg. 71)
  - a. What lessons can you or your organization draw from the example of the mother and father robins?
5. **Many parents of the Why generation are helicopter parents. What effects does this type of parenting style have on the younger generations?** (pg. 72)
  - a. Have you or your organization had any experience with helicopter parents?
  - b. Are there safety nets in place that you or your organization can remove to help young people hear the branch creak a little more clearly?
6. **How can the Light at the End of the Tunnel be ignited for young people whose parents, far from being helicopter parents, were unengaged, passive, or even abusive?** (pg. 74)
  - a. What will you or your organization do or implement to inspire, motivate, and guide young people from less advantaged backgrounds to find their Light at the End of the Tunnel?
7. **Why can failure be a powerful catalyst for success?** (pg. 76)
  - a. What strategies can you or your organization use to teach the younger generations that failures are opportunities?
8. **When do self-reliance and independence become challenging for the younger generations?** (pg. 77)
  - a. What practices can you or your organization put into place to help the younger generations build these qualities?
9. **What will it take for the nation to realize that bridging the Awareness Gap is imperative for the success of all?** (pg. 79)
  - a. How can you or your organization show people how important it is to bridge the Awareness Gap?

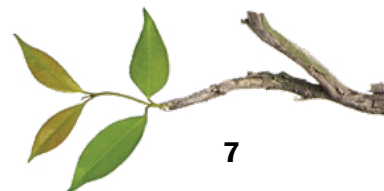


## Chapter Five: Finding the Light at the End of the Tunnel

“Think of the tunnel as the work, labor, and effort required to achieve your goals, which are the light at the other end of that tunnel. In order to motivate yourself to go through the tunnel, there must be a powerful light, or “want-to,” at the opposite end to entice you sufficiently to persist through the tunnel to reach it. The light represents anything you want. It might be the kind of career, lifestyle, or relationships you want to achieve. Perhaps it is a specific material need or want that has been pent up for some time, or an impulse item that has recently appeared on your radar screen. Perhaps it is a certain position at work, recognition, or personal achievement. However you perceive it, and we all perceive it differently, the light is the reward and therefore the motivation necessary to journey through the tunnel. Understanding this concept is key to motivating both ourselves and others to achieve what we want.” (pg. 86)

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. **Explain the Light at the End of the Tunnel concept.** (pg. 85)
  - a. Explain what you or your organization does to build motivation when things get tough and the light seems dim.
2. **How did the author motivate his sons to take more ownership of their lives and performance?** (pg. 86)
  - a. How do you or your organization encourage the younger generations to take ownership of their performance?
3. **What questions can be used to begin simple chats with the younger generations about finding their own Light at the End of the Tunnel to become self-reliant and independent?** (pg. 89)
  - a. What strategies do you or your organization use to plant seeds for the Why Generation?
4. **What are the two diametrically opposed parenting styles the author encounters when sharing this material in his speeches?** (pg. 90)
  - a. What approach do you or your organization find produces the best outcome for the young person?
5. **Who is Hernán Cortés and why did he scuttle his ships?** (pg. 91)
  - a. How can you or your organization scuttle the ships of the Why Generation?
6. **“When the “want-to” is strong enough, the “how-to” will come.” What does a person need to do to make almost anything possible?** (pg. 94)
  - a. How can you use the “want-to, how-to” concept with the young people in your life or in your organization?
7. **Explain how the Nicks who have amazing potential but just aren’t motivated cause frustration for themselves and others.** (pg. 95)
  - a. How can you or your organization motivate these types of Nicks to focus, plan, and take action to live up to their highest potential?
8. **Explain when work does not feel like work.** (pg. 101)
  - a. Would you consider yourself as having a job, a career, or a mission? Explain.
  - b. Is your organization open to hearing and supporting employees’ visions and career missions?
9. **How does the author explain to the Why Generation how to build their own dream instead of building someone else’s?** (pg. 103)
  - a. Whose dream or dreams are you and your organization building? Does anything need to be altered?

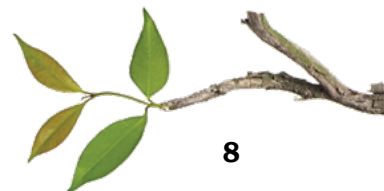


## Chapter Six: Bridging the Awareness Gap

“Our goal should be to close the Awareness Gap by conveying the broad range of careers and occupations available to young people today. Whatever strategy we use, it has to tell a compelling success story that the student can see himself in. It has to help change the education paradigm in this country so that we move students toward true career readiness rather than exclusively toward college readiness. It has to demonstrate the expanded options and opportunities that come by exploring career direction in high school rather than waiting until college. It has to capture the imagination of our young people and provide ongoing motivation to keep pushing toward the goals they set based on their own unique interests, talents, and abilities.” (pg. 110)

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. **Why do many young people today not know what they want to do with their lives?** (pg. 108)
  - a. Did you or anyone in your organization ever have a period in life when the “want-to” wasn’t present? How did it change?
2. **What is the Awareness Gap and who experiences it?** (pg. 109)
  - a. How can you or your organization help the Why Generation and their parents to bridge the Awareness Gap?
3. **Explain the important reasons why the education paradigm in this country needs to change so that students move toward true career readiness rather than exclusively college readiness.** (pg. 110)
  - a. How can you or your organization help change the paradigm of college being used as a career exploration tool?
4. **What are the three levels of the Career Tree and what do these levels illustrate?** (pg. 114)
  - a. Have you or your organization ever explained these career levels in as much depth as the Career Tree does?
5. **How does the Career Tree help young people discover the endless possibilities that connect with their interests, talents, and abilities so they can invest wisely in their career and lifestyle choices?** (pg. 117)
  - a. How does opening a dialogue earlier in life about many potential destinations increase the likelihood of a young person becoming passionate about reaching one of those destinations?
6. **The author lists a large number of viable career opportunities in various fields.** (pg. 121)
  - a. How many viable career opportunities does your organization prepare students, trainees, and employees for?
7. **Why do some young people still choose a career path solely because it’s a field in which a family member works?** (pg. 130)
  - a. Do you or your organization applaud this decision? Why or why not?
8. **Explain how tools like the Career Tree bridge the Awareness Gap and help individuals see their personal Light at the End of the Tunnel.** (pg. 132)
  - a. How can you or your organization create a powerful dialogue about the many options available to the younger generations?
9. **The Career Tree plays a critical role in helping organizations create a planning culture. What is a planning culture and why is it so crucial for not only the younger generations but for the entire organization?** (pg. 133)
  - a. What steps can you or your organization take to promote a planning culture in your environment?



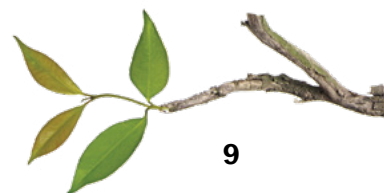


## Chapter Seven: Building a Competitive Advantage

“The key strategy behind the Career Tree is to open and maintain the dialogue with adult, high school, and middle school students about the virtues of all branches and sections of the Tree without pushing them toward any one area or branch. All areas are possible and viable. Unlike today’s societal pressure for all students to attend college, the Career Tree pushes no preconceived notion or direction—it’s based on each student’s desires, and every option is on the table. As part of the exploration process, students choose the branch that speaks to them, research the specific career and lifestyle on that branch, and in due course determine the appropriateness of the fit and long-range plan to achieve that goal. But there’s far more to the Tree than just the trunk and branches. The majestic spreads of branches and leaves we see would not be possible without something that lies beneath the surface of the ground: the Root System.” (pg. 142)

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. **What is the “single most important competitive advantage in today’s new economy”? Why?** (pg. 139)
  - a. Do you or your organization support the acquisition of both academic knowledge and technical skills?
2. **How do career-focused high school programs benefit the collegebound student?** (pg. 140)
  - a. Are people in your area generally aware of these benefits?
3. **Timing is critical to effective career exploration. Discuss the pros of early career exploration and self-discovery.** (pg. 141)
  - a. What can you or your organization do to ensure that the younger generations are aware of all the growth opportunities in your field?
4. **What are the four Roots that make up the Career Tree Root System and why are they important for everyone’s educational and career pathway?** (pg. 143)
  - a. How can you or your organization integrate the four Roots into your existing plans to help formulate a viable, detailed plan for all futures?
5. **How do the Career Tree Branch and Root Systems work together to make education and training programs relevant?** (pg. 147)
  - a. How can you or your organization integrate tools like the Career Tree and Root System to reframe and overcome performance/disciplinary issues?
6. **Exceptional performance happens when people dive deeply into the Root System. What are the most crucial questions that need to be asked of one’s self in order to build a competitive advantage?** (pg. 154)
  - a. How can you or your organization utilize the questions on pages 154 and 155 to build a dynamic competitive advantage for the people that you work with?
7. **The Career Tree allowed students to become more aware of all the career choices and opportunities in the field of electricity. How did the Career Tree help change the perception of the electrical teacher’s career?** (pg. 156)
  - a. Do you or your organization have any Awareness Gaps in your own field or career?
8. **Why is it so important that young people’s educational and career pathways be self-motivated and self-directed?** (pg. 159)
  - a. How can you or your organization make sure that the people that you are associated with take ownership of their own motivation and vision while emphasizing your organization’s goals?



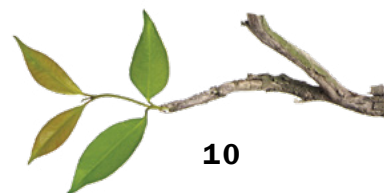
## Chapter Eight: Education with Purpose; Employment with Passion

“Education with Purpose means that if you are going to go to college, go with purpose, invest wisely, and get it done. Know why you are going, and avoid the pitfalls of treating college itself as the goal. The goal for a student is not simply to go to college; the goal is to finish college and get a job that pays a living wage in a field he or she loves.

The same applies for students who plan to take any other postsecondary education path. I would tell them: go with purpose, invest wisely, get it done, and get going with the career you chose. Keep your light clearly in view and push through the tunnel of your learning experience with perseverance and resilience. Whether college or other postsecondary training is your plan, pursuing your personal Education with Purpose will help you focus your time and energy, avoid unnecessary debt, and enjoy the satisfaction of reaching your goals faster.” (pg. 172)

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

- 1. What is contextual learning and what makes it so effective?** (pg. 165)
  - a. What would it take for you or your organization to implement contextual learning in your environment on a regular basis?
- 2. What is the Education with Purpose® philosophy? How does it provide direction to the learning process and tie into the planning culture?** (pg. 167)
  - a. How can you or your organization ignite the fire of ambition in young people so that your culture creates a competitive advantage and maximizes your outcomes?
- 3. For employers, how does Education with Purpose translate to Employment with Passion?** (pg. 170)
  - a. What can you or your organization do to better nurture young people earlier in their educational and career journeys?
- 4. What does the Why Generation gain by asking themselves: What’s In It For Me? (WIIFM)** (pg. 175)
  - a. What can you or your organization do to implement the WIIFM question on a daily basis to further motivate the Why Generation?

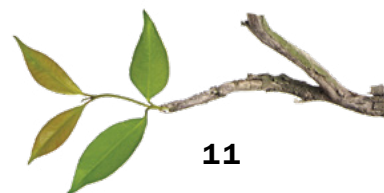


## Chapter Nine: Strategies and Tools to Connect and Empower

“An effective career conversation answers every parent’s burning question: “Why would my son or daughter do this?” I believe the best career conversations are those that help young people find their direction sooner so that they can invest in additional education wisely and purposefully. Far from limiting a young person’s options, the goal of early career exploration actually expands opportunities for every post-graduation path: college, career, or advanced training. A great career conversation will highlight the competitive advantage that every young person brings, no matter what their education and career aspirations. Creating these conversations is also part of a larger planning culture that helps individuals thrive, both now and in their future. They help give students the critical foundation, relevance, and excitement to create effective goals and plans, share what they’ve established, collaborate with peers, and ultimately take action on their plan.” (pg. 195)

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. **“The young people of the Why Generation want lots of challenges.” What resources do they need to meet those challenges?** (pg. 182)
  - a. How can you or your organization provide the meaningful reasons and clear roadmap for the younger generations to invest their time and energy to complete the tasks that you desire?
2. **Discuss what a supportive education and environment mean to the Why Generation.** (pg. 182)
  - a. What ways can you or your organization create an environment where all work together to achieve a common purpose?
3. **What are the advantages of formal structure for the Why Generation?** (pg. 183)
  - a. Do you or your organization need to reframe your approach on providing tips instead of rules? Explain.
4. **Social media has changed everything. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages that technology and social media have created for both older and younger generations?** (pg. 184)
  - a. How do you or your organization utilize technology/social media to connect all generations?
5. **“In many cases, it seems that the young people of the Why Generation have extremely high expectations of everything in their lives except themselves.” Explain what key element is missing for those that don’t have high expectations of themselves.** (pg. 187)
  - a. How can you or your organization work to make self-esteem, self-worth, and self-respect a priority in your environment alongside high expectations of one’s self?
6. **How does respect work today?** (pg. 188)
  - a. Do you or your organization accept the fact that respect isn’t assumed anymore and both sides need to earn it? If not, what do you or your organization need to change to accept this?
7. **What are some creative ways organizations are using the Career Tree to build a planning culture and give students a competitive advantage?** (pg. 190)
  - a. Which Career Tree best practices can you or your organization implement or adapt?
8. **“The Why Generation is shaping up to become one of the most entrepreneurial generational cohorts in our history.” Why is this?** (pg. 195)
  - a. In what specific ways can you or your organization support young people who want to pursue entrepreneurship?

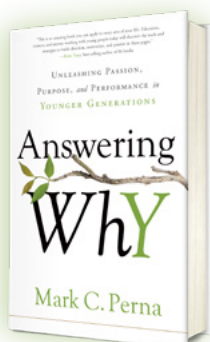


## Conclusion: The Wade Factor

“Have you ever met someone who put a bounce in your step, made you feel better, or seemed to remove the chip from your shoulder? That was Wade. Despite all that had occurred to bring me to Wade’s bus—the travel delays, meeting time pressure, and stress of making the day work—it all seemed to melt away after that 10-minute ride. Wade unlocked in each of us that guarded enthusiasm, fun personality, and deep-seated desire to connect with others that we all had been hiding from view. Wade made us feel better about ourselves and our circumstances, and ultimately made a tremendous difference for those around him.” (pg. 204)

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. **Who is Wade and what qualities set him apart from so many others?**
  - a. How do you or your organization cultivate Wades in your own atmosphere?
2. **What major positive effects did Wade have on those around him?**
  - a. Are you or your organization able to have a positive effect on those you interact with on a daily basis? If not, what needs to change?
3. **Why did Wade choose to go beyond expectations and make a difference for the people on his bus?**
  - a. How can you or your organization become more like this Wade and exceed expectations on a daily basis?
4. **Who was April and why was she the “anti-Wade”?**
  - a. Are you or your organization ever a reflection of April? If so, what needs to change?
5. **April was technically proficient at her job, but that wasn’t enough to create a positive customer experience. Why are warmth and genuineness just as important as technical proficiency?**
  - a. Are you or your organization fully present, engaged, and using your people skills to the fullest degree even in trivial tasks each day?
6. **What characteristics are visible in Wade but not in April? Is this simply just a choice?**
  - a. On what end of the Wade-April spectrum do you or your organization tend to be?
7. **How does the movie *Apollo 13* demonstrate the value of perseverance? What were the challenges faced in the Space Race and how were they overcome?**
  - a. “It wasn’t a miracle; we just decided to go.” How can this line from *Apollo 13* motivate you or your organization to focus, plan, and take action to implement the concepts of this book?
8. **What can happen if we just make the decision to go when the branch creaks?**
  - a. In what ways has this book creaked your own branch and the branch of your organization?



“This is an amazing book you can apply to every area of your life. Educators, trainers, and anyone working with young people today will discover the tools and strategies to build direction, motivation, and passion in these pages.”

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