It’s 9:45 A.M., and at 93 degrees and 1,000% humidity, Saddle Brook, N.J., feels more like the Serengeti than suburbia. I’m in a doorless truck, wearing high-waisted shorts, facing a day full of handcarts and heavy boxes. When I arose at 5:45 this morning—an hour I haven’t seen the daytime side of since … ever—the day had something of the adventurous about it. Like more of my Generation Y peers than one might expect, I’d never worn a uniform, or even properly nine-to-fived it for that matter, and here at last was my chance.

UPS would soon fix me, though. At 8:15, after touring the huge open warehouse of concrete and conveyor belts that is UPS’s Saddle Brook center, I met Vincent “Vinny” Plateroti, a UPS “driver service provider,” or DSP—that’s UPS for driver—of 21 years and my escort for the day. At 8:45, we attended the “pre-work communications meeting,” or PCM—UPS for morning meeting—which included reports from the previous day and a short but detailed lecture on hydration. At 9, Plateroti walked me to his “package car”—UPS for truck—and performed his daily “Z-scan,” a Z-shaped once-over of the sides and front of the vehicle, culminating in a good kick to each tire and a signed form for the automotive department confirming everything was in order. At 9:08, he demonstrated “three points of contact”—UPS for stepping off the truck—with a hand holding the handrail, one foot on the package-car step, and one foot on the ground below, to minimize impact on the ankles. (This would come up approximately 256 more times during the course of my weeks with UPS.) And at 9:10, I got a look at the “delivery information acquisition device,” or DIAD—UPS for electronic clipboard—which is GPS-enabled, plans drivers’ routes, records all their deliveries, and is said to rival the iPhone in capability. When we pull out of the lot, the huge red numbers
on the UPS-branded outdoor digital clock—which, in the UPS dictionary, might be under “idol”—read 9:16.

In the half-hour since then, the real job’s begun, and my verve has, to put it nicely, ended. Wide-open doors are not a pleasant, rugged alternative to air-conditioning, and what UPSers call “walking at a brisk pace” to deliver packages would induce wheezing in even the most seasoned city walker. We’ve only delivered to one location, and already I am sweaty, tired, and wondering how exactly I’m going to make it through a whole day of this torture. And if Plateroti spouts one more abbreviation at me, well, this might just turn into a different sort of ride-along.

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO WANT to slap me, not to worry, I’m with you. Barely an hour into my job safari and I’m acting like a big spoiled 26-year-old baby.

But such is the Gen Y reaction to what one academic described as a “plum blue-collar job.” (UPS drivers make an average of $75,000 a year, plus an average of $20,000 in health-care benefits and pension, well above the norm for comparable positions at other freight carriers.) Much derided as a group of upstart technophiles of little work ethic and even less loyalty, Gen Yers aren’t exactly a perfect fit for Big Brown. In fact, it’s hard to imagine a worse match. For decades this company, which last year had $47.5 billion in revenue, has relied on “human engineering”—strictly timed routines, rote memorization, even uniform appearance, going so far as to mandate short hair and outlaw beards—to distinguish itself. (And just in case you thought they weren’t hip to the times, there’s even a policy on piercings and tattoos: one stud in each ear at most for both men and women, and a ban on tattoos visible during deliveries.) Though UPS has adapted over time, it’s that human aspect that has continued to make the business successful. Here, you don’t just pick up a package any old way. You take 15.5 seconds to carry out “selection,” the prescribed 12-step process that starts with parking the vehicle and ends when you step off the package car, delivery in hand. It’s all laid out in UPS’s “340 methods”—a detailed manual of rules and routines that, until now, was taught to UPS’s legions of driver candidates in two weeks of lectures.

But if there’s one group that isn’t down to be engineered, it’s Generation Y, people who can’t even be bothered to use punctuation, let alone memorize anything. The inevitable discord started to show in 2003, when the oldest Gen Yers were in their mid-20s. UPS senior staffers began to notice a serious decline in some major performance indicators, among them drivers’ time to proficiency. Before, trainees had needed an average of 30 days to become proficient drivers; the younger group was taking 90 to 180 days. Perhaps more disturbing, the number of new drivers quitting the post after 30 to 45 days on the job spiked. That was cause for serious alarm. Gen Yers make up over 60% of the company’s part-time loader workforce, from which it draws the majority of new driver hires. And in the next five years, to keep the more than 100,000 driving jobs that currently exist filled, the company will need to train up to 25,000 new drivers.

So did UPS bow to demographic pressure and abandon its 340 methods? It did not. Instead, the company is attempting to change how they’re taught, embarking on a management-train-

BROWN’S BOOT CAMP: UNLOADING

12-Step Program
At UPS’s Integrad training center in Maryland, driver trainees are taught the “340 methods” at the heart of the company’s human engineering. Timing is everything.

1 package from a shelf
15.5 SECONDS

1 package from floor
25.1 SECONDS

3 packages from a shelf
29.6 SECONDS

5 packages from rear door
65.5 SECONDS

ONE PACKAGE FROM A SHELF
1 Shift into the lowest gear or park
2 Turn the ignition off and engage the parking brake
3 Release the seatbelt with your left hand
4 Open the door
5 Place key on ring finger
6 Select package without stepping through door (if possible)
7 Only select packages from selection area
8 Close the door
9 Pick up the DIAD
10 Fasten DIAD to clip
11 Look before stepping into the street
12 Hold on to the handrail and exit truck

DIAD Delivery Information Acquisition Device—just think PDA on steroids.
ing project the likes of which few in corporate America—or Generation Y, for that matter—have ever seen.

On Sept. 17, UPS opened its first-ever full-service pilot training center, a $34 million, 11,500-square-foot, movie-set-style facility in Landover, Md., aimed directly at young would-be drivers and known as Integrad. The facility and curriculum have been shaped over three years by more than 170 people, including UPS executives, professors and design students at Virginia Tech, a team at MIT, forecasters at the Institute for the Future, and animators at an Indian company called Brainvisa. Because Stephen Jones—a former driver who heads training for UPS and is Integrad's project manager—received a $1.8 million grant from the Department of Labor, much of the project data, including the research related to safety and generational differences, will be made public. That information could prove useful across industries—especially for companies that, lacking UPS's almost obsessive penchant for measuring things, may just be starting to see this new generation's impact.

### BROWN'S BOOT CAMP: SLIP-AND-FALL SIMULATOR

**SLIP-ON SOLES**
Foot pads with slippery, hard Teflon cleats fit over trainees' shoes to amplify the falling experience.

**LET 'EM FLY**
A few steps in and trainees encounter invisible hazards—simulating snow, ice, rain, and sticky floors—that are meant to trip them up.

**STRAP 'EM IN ...**
Trainees are fitted with a harness secured to an overhead beam.

### Rookie Mistake
Slips and falls bedevil first-year drivers. UPS's new machine "perturbs" trainees—safely—so that their bodies will be on alert.
senger service with his friend Claude Ryan and a $100 loan from Ryan's uncle. A merger in 1913 shifted the Seattle company's focus from messenger services to home delivery, and when Seattle's leading department stores became clients, having a brown car from the renamed Merchants Parcel Delivery pull up to one's home became a sign of status. (Brown was chosen for its dirt-disguising properties.) Once the company expanded down the West Coast, it began offering common-carrier services to the public, putting it in direct competition with the U.S. Postal Service. To manage the increased volume, the company introduced its first conveyor-belt system in 1924. Expansion continued until, in 1975, UPS became the first package-delivery company to serve the entire continental U.S. In the 1990s the focus turned to new technology: The DIAD, introduced in 1991, is now in its fourth generation; UPS's fleet of jets is the world's eighth-largest airline; the company's “preload assist system,” or PAS, automates its meticulous loading process.

Casey, the founder, never married, and just two months before his death in 1983 he attended a UPS board meeting. UPS people at all levels quote him so often it's funny. “You can’t be a big person until you’ve shown competence as a small one,” a staffer tells me, reciting a line from a pamphlet Casey wrote in 1958 called “Determined Men.” Both DSP Plateroti and CEO Eskew have noted nonchalantly that in 1956, Casey told UPSers to be “constructively dissatisfied.” Casey's words even serve as art in UPS's Atlanta headquarters—itself a museum-cum-shrine since the company moved there in 1991—where a glass wall reads, “Our horizon is as distant as our mind’s eye wishes it to be.” The building's lobby features a brown Model T Ford, a replica of the original “package car,” so named because when the company began making deliveries, trucks didn’t exist. (Later, when trucks appeared on the scene, the company kept the package-car moniker because it didn’t like the sound of “truck driver,” according to UPS's archivist.)

“UPS culture is hard to describe,” says Eskew, who recently announced he'll be leaving in January, having completed the five-year tenure that’s become customary for UPS CEOs, and will be succeeded by CFO Scott Davis. “But when you walk in here, you can feel it. We all realize we’re part of something bigger than ourselves, and I think that crosses generations. It speaks to everybody.”

WHEN STEPHEN JONES BEGAN examining the problem of training the untrainable Gen Yers back in 2003, he didn’t have much to go on. The numbers told him that the company’s existing training program wasn’t working, and the popular media seemed to be saying that gaming was the answer. That, Jones thought, was the way this new generation learned, so he enlisted Francis “Skip” Atkinson, a former professor of instructional technology at Georgia State University, to do a full literature review—a step for which there’s usually no time or money in corporate settings—and conduct focus groups with UPS employees. “We thought we were going to design a bunch of videogames,” Jones says. “Then the research came back, and we did a complete 180.”

What Atkinson’s team uncovered in focus groups with Gen Y employees was surprising in its simplicity. “To a person, they said...
The handrail, and immediately, they can see a representation of diagram? Students take a few hops off the truck with and without better way to show that than with a computer-generated force Supermen is how frail their bodies really are. Grow lax with your job functions—one of the most difficult things to teach young of 500 to 800 packages per hour,” says a casual list of essential 800 to 1,300 packages per hour and while ‘loading’ at a rate range up to 70 pounds each … while ‘unloading’ at a rate of on-road—and getting the chance to try it yourself before your first end, Lockhart’s lab houses a falling machine—a nine-foot-high metal frame with a body harness attached to it. A subject puts on the harness and gets comfortable walking back and forth, and then someone sneaks up behind her and spills soapy water, causing the subject to slip, scream, and flail around before getting caught by the harness. It sounds funny—until you wipe out. For the record, having experienced this first-hand, I was perturbed, and my gait remains adjusted. “This type of research has been going on since the 1920s,” Lockhart says, “but UPS is going to be the first to apply it. And when their guys get out of the program, they’ll almost be ergonomists. The training is that good.” Now there’s a shiny new brown version of the simulator at the training center.

There is, of course, also driving done at Integrad. An outdoor parking lot—called the integration station—has been turned into a mini-town where trainees can put what they’ve learned into practice. There are real street and stop signs, a toy house and toy stores, a UPS dropbox, and even a loading dock, which was being cemented into the ground during my tour. Trainees will travel these streets every afternoon, with tasks increasing in difficulty each day, and facilitators and fellow trainees standing in as customers to test them on the finer points of customer service. And while there aren’t any videogames in the Integrad curriculum per se, there sure are a lot of screens. Students log in to watch animated demonstrations of tasks, take quizzes on what they’ve learned, and conduct simulations with special teaching DIADs connected via Bluetooth. And in true mechanical UPS fashion, they get … scores! Every piece of data—from a student’s performance on a particular module to comments from his facilitator—is stored in a new database tool developed by Virginia Tech design students. It will continue to map trainees’ progress once they become drivers, and it’s customized for each level of the UPS hierarchy, so that a region manager can log on for general stats about his districts’ performance, and a supervisor meeting a new
driver for the first time will already know every single possible thing there is to know about him.

The pilot program began with 24 students and five facilitators. Each session runs for five days, for a total of 48 hours, and there will be nine more sessions this year before the company begins to tabulate the data. All involved can’t stop stressing that this is only a pilot, but if it’s deemed to be a success—which, for the determined Jones, would mean a 15% reduction in accidents by first-year drivers and a 20% reduction in injuries for the same group—work will begin on 14 more sites around the country. In the long run, the hope is that young drivers will begin to learn what dispatch supervisor and former DSP Veronica Reisinger calls “the why.” “A lot of people outside of the organization don’t fully understand how much work it is, how quick we have to be, how much we have to know,” the 29-year-old says. “I learned my methods, but I just kind of memorized them and could spout them off. I don’t think I fully understood them until I got on the road. I didn’t get the ‘why.’”

FOR ALL THAT CAN BE LEARNED from the hands-on and technology-enhanced, the best place for Yers to learn the “why” may ultimately be from —horror of horrors—their older baby-boomer and World War II–era teachers. “Yers have a great appreciation of reputation and expertise,” says Tamara Erickson, president of the Concourse Institute research firm. “To the extent they can hear from a person who’s done it for 30 years, and hear what worked for him or her, they respond to that. And if there’s someone who’s legendary—a god of drivers, say—even better.”

This afternoon’s legend-in-residence at Integrad is Don Petersik, a tall older gentleman with a ready smile and firm handshake. Petersik is set to retire in January, and his last assignment as the company’s star facilitator is to train the facilitators at Integrad. The assembled UPSers ask him to tell me a story, and he obliges. Long ago, when he was just a long-haired hippie preloader, the story goes, a stooped, suited Jim Casey—evidently on a corporate visit—walked over to the oblivious youngster and said, “Hi, I’m Jim. I work for UPS.”

“Afterward, everyone came running up to me asking if I knew who he was, but all he’d said was, ‘I work for UPS.’ And that’s the thing about this place,” Petersik says, gesturing at the surroundings. “It’s a fuse. What’s new about the company now is that our teaching style matches your learning styles. But we’re still taking care of the customer—at my wedding, half the guests were my customers. That hasn’t changed in 100 years.”

But that isn’t the only thing that’s remained the same these last 100 years. While customers may be at the heart of UPS’s business, it’s drivers who are at the heart of UPS itself. And even today they carry the weight of their obligation—abbreviations and all—with such effortlessness that it’s easy to believe they’re just carrying boxes around. But watch closely and those deliveries become something else entirely—an exhibition of routines so precise they never vary, limbs so trained they need no direction, and words so long remembered, they are like one’s own thoughts. It’s something I experienced my first day with UPS, as I did the rounds with Plateroti, though I couldn’t have named it yet. And I’ve been watching it ever since, each time I pass a package car on the road or share an elevator with my UPS driver. “I see you’re wearing your shorts today,” a customer said to Plateroti and me that first afternoon, “keeping cool while you’re running around.” And Plateroti replied cheerfully, without a moment’s hesitation: “Not running. Walking at a brisk pace.”