



A time to talk: An open letter to Gen Y

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Guest columnist

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As the spokesperson for Generation X, I would like to formally, if a tad belatedly, welcome Generation Y to the table.

Those of you born between 1980 and 1995 already have lived through quite a few disasters in the past few years, and I'm not just referring to reality TV (hopefully you were napping during disco).

Now that you've had a chance to settle in, whether it be the lockers of your high school, the hallowed halls of university, the military or corporate America, it's time we had a talk.

No doubt you've noticed the current status of your hometown and your world and are now mature enough to comprehend what your elders have accomplished: a controversial war or two, an economy in the process of flame-out, global warming and a myriad of other calamities.

You may think our credibility is shot.

No argument.

Some of you already have miles underneath your feet: deployments to Iraq, pink slips, even prison. A good many of you are still awaiting the fruits of life following high school or college, like my own boys are.

All of you are wondering how we screwed things up so badly.

If history is any indication, Generation X did not invent the term "colossal mistake." The Greatest Generation, which fought WWII and rebuilt a country, also introduced us to a little known country called Vietnam.

The baby boomers, who courageously fought and died in its steaming jungles and rice paddies, in turn introduced my generation, and yours, to war in the ancient lands of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Despite our generational faux pas, as parents and mentors, we never have tried to bring such heart-breaking challenges to our children. No one person created the financial scandal in which we now sit (though I like Barry Madoff in the role of scapegoat), nor did any one person foment the intensity of hatred toward our country that brought about the events of Sept. 11, 2001.

And we all share responsibility for melting polar ice caps and a disappearing ozone layer.

In truth, we wanted what was best for you. We treasured and fussed over you, and we quietly resolved to improve your life over that of our own.

Take me, for example. My father worked a small Irish farm with 12 brothers and sisters before he and my mother immigrated to America in their 20s. Because he allowed his children daily access to school, my father rightly believed my siblings and I were privileged well beyond his meager education.

But on weekends and summers, he brought us to work on his construction site. Hard, manual labor was the only route to the success of which he knew. My two boys will never know the sinking feeling of 12 hours on the job, watching your friends head past on their way to a game. What they will know is how to mow a lawn.

But maybe we have gone too far. I have watched parents, including myself, hover over you in classrooms and at Little League games. We bought the right car seats and helmets. Then we bought you cell phones. In the words of that great American philosopher Homer Simpson, "D'oh!"

As a result, we have been the unwitting authors of your greatest fault: rude behavior.

How many times have we watched you loudly proclaim your innermost thoughts to random people on the street during an ill-timed cell phone conversation? Or snuff any attempt at human interaction by plugging in your earbuds? Or commit random acts of twitter?

To complete my rant, paste this thought on your Facebook page: Texting is not conversation, and sexting is not love. But wait, you say, we're just following your example! Really? How did you manage to pick that habit up while ignoring the broccoli on your plate?

My point is that you have a lot of work to do, and we don't want you getting sidetracked by distractions.

Consider this a very late invitation to take our collective hand, and let us pull you up out of yourselves a bit. Shake off some of that self-absorption and focus on the problem.

You have a world to save.

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