

LIVING

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# Labour pains

Teaching the iPod generation office etiquette isn't easy, writes **Lisa Belkin**



Illustration: Wilson Tang

Shortly after they reported for work this summer, groups of interns at Ernst & Young were invited to an orientation programme that included a PowerPoint presentation titled "Hello. W U?!" For those who need translation, that's how Generation Y, to which these twentysomethings belong, might ask "How are you?" in a text message.

And this meeting was all about translation. "Strategies to Connect With Baby Boomers" was the title of one of the slides. Its advice? When the boss complains that the young team is "spending too much time text-messaging each other and listening to iPods," it's not the best time to explain that you have to "leave early to meet your volunteer commitments".

Summer is the season of culture shock in the working world, when the old guard comes face to face with a wave of newcomers – and the result is something like lost tribes encountering explorers for the first time. This year is the first time that four distinct generations – those who lived through the second world war, baby boomers, Generation X and Generation Y – are together in the workplace.

Managers tell stories of summer associates who come to meetings with midriffs exposed revealing a belly ring; of interns who walk through the halls with iPods plugged in; of new employees who explain that they need Fridays off because their boyfriends get Fridays off. Then there's the tale of the summer worker who sent a text message to a senior partner asking "Are bras required as part of the dress code?"

"They have an attitude towards work that looks like laziness and looks like impatience," says Janice Smith, who leads the Ernst & Young seminar, carefully putting the best light on Generation Y qualities that are flummoxing managers. "But they don't understand that's how it looks."

There have always been overconfident 20-year-olds, just as there have always been elders who say, "When I was your age..." Members of the latter group that upended the working world with ambition and drive are now looking down from their offices at their Generation Y children, who are as single-minded in their search for balance as their parents were in their quest for success.

Surveys during the past few years have found that this group is

looking for work that includes a "flexible work schedule" (92 per cent, according to a poll by US market research company Harris Interactive), "requires creativity" (96 per cent) and "allows me to have an impact on the world" (97 per cent). When pollsters Roper Starch Worldwide did a survey comparing workplace attitudes among generations, 90 per cent of Generation Y-ers said they wanted co-workers "who make work fun". No other generation polled put that requirement in their top five.

So the de rigueur summer event at many companies now is a seminar designed to close this generation gap. At Arrow Electronics it's "Generations in the Workplace". Michelle Marks, an expert on organisational behaviour at George Mason University, calls hers "Managing the Challenges of the Gen X and Gen Y Workforce".

Much of the purpose is to teach Generation Y the basics, which have often been neglected along the way. "They all have amazing résumés," says Mary Crane, the founder of a Denver-based consultancy and part of a new crop of experts teaching companies to overcome generational conflicts. She has

been "taming" Generation Y at workplaces all over the US.

These young employees don't feel particularly inclined to pay their dues, she says. "They've climbed Everest and excavated Machu Picchu," Crane says. "But they've never had the experience of showing up for work at 9am."

When speaking to this group, Crane explains scenarios. When you e-mail a client, do you use their first name in the salutation? Only if they've indicated that it would be all right. At a business lunch, who sits in the chair pulled out by the waiter? "The client always goes first, unless that seems to make the client uncomfortable, in which case just sit down," Crane says.

Some of the blame for this knowledge gap lies with the elders who are scratching their heads.

"This is the largest, healthiest, most pampered generation in history," she says. Their parents showed their love by staying late at the office to bring home more money. The children expect to be home for dinner. Career dominance can be achieved by 5pm, can't it?

Billy Warden, an account director at marketing company Capstrat, realised this recently when he was being interviewed by an intern who

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Mary Crane, workplace consultant

was working on a booklet about Generation Y and work. The topic was job interviews and Warden says the 20-year-old was explaining "that job interviews are a two-way conversation, where the company puts out what they want and expect from me, and I put out there what I want and expect from the company."

Warden didn't think that's what interviews were. "Maybe in 10 years you'll get to state your expectations," he told the intern. "Right now, you're a box of cereal and you're going to have to sell yourself and hope that someone decides to put you in their grocery cart and give you a try."

It's a concept that has all but disappeared from internship programmes, where employees make it clear that they have no patience with bad attitudes.

"I walked away from one internship because it was a waste of my time," says Ryan Healy, who last spring founded Employee Evolution, a website that gives advice to young people entering the workforce. "We have limits." Healy is 23.

For all the talk of teaching Generation Y, a looming worker shortage means that workplaces

are bending to their needs. So while Ernst & Young is teaching its Generation Y employees how to talk politely to partners, it has also started teaching those partners how to send text messages. Similarly, Liggett Stashower, an advertising and public relations firm, encourages summer interns to blog about their experiences.

Deloitte & Touche runs a summer film competition (the winner will be posted on YouTube), on the theory that it's an area where interns can show off. And the technology company Avnet changed its internship programme so that interns spend the summer in one department, a response to suggestions from previous groups who felt they weren't doing enough substantive work.

So, who exactly is grooming whom? Generation Y seems to be in the lead, setting the life-work agenda. But it would be rash to underestimate the Me Generation. As boomers learn to text more quickly and interns learn to wear suits, the only certainty is that the tug of war between these generations will shape the workplace for decades to come.

The New York Times

## Signposts: Stuff the mushrooms

Pia Mugerud

Navigating the many roles women face isn't an easy task, especially because we have to try to remain true to ourselves.

Whether you're a stay-at-home mum, a working mother or a career woman who derives a lot of self-esteem from your job, it's increasingly difficult to find time for ourselves as we try to balance our responsibilities. We might all aspire to be a domestic goddess à la Nigella Lawson, but she has full-time staff to assist her, despite what she says on her TV shows.

Be realistic about what you can achieve instead of becoming stuck in a cycle of low self-esteem due to unmet goals or expectations.

In her 1970s feminist manifesto *Superwoman*, Shirley Conran said that "life's too short to stuff a mushroom", debunking expectations (often self-imposed) that women should be able to have – and do – it all.

So you may be asking yourself,

"Do I have to choose between being a domestic goddess and having a career?" The answer is no. But you need a healthy balance to function well and feel good.

It's not always appropriate to express yourself in the workplace, but it's your responsibility to do so when you leave the office.

Leave the suit behind you when you close the office door and go home to relax or out to have fun. Likewise, if you're spending all your time with people under 10 years old you need to spend some time in the adult world.

So, how do you indulge yourself without feeling self-indulgent? Here are some things you can spend time doing without feeling guilty.

- Make time for yourself and spend this time alone doing something you enjoy such as listening to music, reading or writing a diary.
- Work less and sleep or relax more. It's tempting, especially in Hong Kong, to over-work, but rest is critical to feeling rejuvenated.

- Book a massage or have a bubble bath: physical pleasure is important.
- Learn to love your body – regardless of its shape or size.
- Exercise has a positive impact on both your physical and mental well-being. Even a short workout is beneficial. Look for variety. Many former gym slaves now swear by yoga and Pilates.
- Spend time with your friends. It may be difficult to arrange, especially if you're in relationships, but friendships need to be nurtured.
- Try something completely different. Design your own webpage, take up tennis or try out for a dragon boat team. Learning a new skill breaks the boredom.
- Take time for a personal audit. Write down some of the negative things in your life and consider how you can change them. Remember to reflect on the positives for a feel-good boost.

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## Vet's casebook: Enamel instinct



**My Chihuahua is only two years old and already his back teeth are turning dark brown. I brush them every night, and during the day he chews on raw hide bones. What else can I do for his condition?**

It sounds as if you're doing more than most owners as far as oral hygiene goes. As with human beings, daily tooth brushing helps prevent the build-up of plaque and tartar, which can lead to periodontitis and tooth loss.

I recommend using toothpaste specifically designed for dogs, available from vets and pet shops. You can use a finger-brush, a small child's toothbrush or even a small electric toothbrush to clean the teeth.

bacteria to attach to, which leads to plaque developing. Pellicle begins to re-form immediately after brushing, and plaque will start to build up again within one to two hours.

If plaque isn't removed, it will combine with minerals and other components of the saliva to form a hard, cement-type product called tartar. This is the yellowy-brown layer on the teeth of dogs and cats that don't have their teeth brushed. It's impossible to remove just by brushing and needs to be scaled off in much the same manner as when we have our teeth cleaned by the dentist.

If tartar isn't removed, it acts as a further source of infection, as oral bacteria just loves to multiply. This then causes gingivitis, or gum infection and inflammation. As this progresses, the infection works its way deeper into the sockets of the teeth and causes tooth

root abscesses, wobbly teeth or even far-flung infections elsewhere (like the heart or kidneys), which are spread via the bloodstream.

As far as your dog is concerned, your daily tooth brushing protocol and raw hide chews are the best means of preventing – or at least slowing down – the development of plaque, tartar and staining.

Some owners use a diluted chlorhexidine solution after the toothpaste, but this isn't strictly necessary. Hill's and Royal Canin pet food companies also make a special food to help the process. Ask your vet for details.

Unfortunately, the bright white teeth that young dogs have often darken with age even when all oral hygiene advice is followed, but at least they'll have clean teeth that are free from infection.

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