

Alabama Voices - Ken Scott: Millennials getting soft treatment

Back in the 1960s and 1970s, during my generation as a Baby Boomer, we had this thing we'd use to express our anger with the older generation. It would go something like this: "Man, that old dude just doesn't want to hire me because of my long hair. He's part of The Generation Gap problem!" Fast-forward to the Millennials, and suddenly this is a special group of young people who have lost their way because of "the older generation" — as if this is some sort of new phenomenon that has suddenly cast itself upon the American landscape. Or, as it was stated recently, "The truth is that we — those of us in the older generations — have failed the Millennials."

I suppose this is very much different from the turmoil during Vietnam, race riots, Kent State, Woodstock, LSD, Watergate — all of which weren't created by the Baby Boomers but the generational leaders in power at the time, including their predecessors, and the predecessors' predecessors.

The generational conundrum can best be defined by the following quote: "Like my Gen Xers before them, the Millennials didn't create this economy. They inherited it from people of earlier generations who, when in charge, made bad policy choices, some of which led directly to our current economic woes and some which have simply made life worse for younger people attempting to get ahead in the world."

This is precisely what we Baby Boomers also faced in the turbulent '60's and '70's. No one made exceptions for us.

Suddenly, it seems politically fashionable that the Millennials have been the most abused generation in history due to failed leadership of the "older generation." However, they are the generation with the Internet in their pockets. They can text faster than Superman can leap a tall building. Their technological prowess is beyond comprehension to us "golden oldies."

When my hair was down past my shoulders during Vietnam, until I was drafted, I had to work twice as hard as everyone else to demonstrate my work ethic. I was called vile names, told to "get off my lawn," and was turned down for jobs more often than I can remember because I looked and acted like "my generation."

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When I and other Baby Boomers were treated so poorly by our older generation, we weren't selected as special because we had it rough. We learned to be self-reliant, tough and determined to succeed.

I recently attended a professional development session on how to teach Millennials. It was a litany of do this and don't do that, be careful that you respect them to earn their respect, and so forth.

I am not excusing the situation that this Millennial generation faces; however, stop making allowances for them as if they are unique to our political and economic upheaval. Every generation has had its political and economic upheavals to overcome. Every student that I teach, I give respect, empower them to learn and motivate them to be responsible for their lives.

If we as a nation want to give Millennials and every older individual opportunity, our nation must produce more and better jobs, innovative technologies to solve real problems, and a national work ethic that has made this nation a place where life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is available to all generations. Stop fostering this generational conundrum that solves nothing.

If you want the Millennials to be successful and hold them accountable as every other generation has been held accountable, stop making excuses and apologies.

JFK had it right when he said, "My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." This truth, however, presupposes that your country has a leadership committed to pro-business, citizenship and national pride.

Ken Scott

is a Montgomery educator

The generational conundrum

For Alabama Voices

- **Original Title and Article**

Back in the 1960's and 70's, during my generation as a Baby Boomer, we had this thing we'd use to express our anger with the older generation. It would go something like this, "Man, that old dude just doesn't want to hire me because of my long hair. He's part of The Generation Gap problem!" Fast forward to the Millennials and suddenly this is a special group of young people that have lost their way because of 'the older generation'—like this is some sort of new phenomenon that has suddenly cast itself upon the American landscape.

Or, as it was stated recently, "The truth is that we—those of us in the older generations—have failed the Millennials." I suppose this is very much different from the turmoil during Vietnam, race riots, Kent State, Woodstock, Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD), Watergate—all of which weren't created by the Baby Boomers, but the generational leaders in power at the time, including their predecessors, and the predecessors' predecessors!

The generational conundrum can best be defined by the following quote: "Like my Gen Xers before them, the Millennials didn't create this economy. They inherited it from people of earlier generations who, when in charge, made bad policy choices, some of which led directly to our current economic woes and some which have simply made life worse for younger people attempting to get ahead in the world." This is precisely what we Baby Boomers also faced in the turbulent 60's and 70's. No one made exceptions for us!

Suddenly, it seems politically fashionable that the Millennials have been the most abused generation in history due to failed leadership of the 'older generation.' However, they are the generation with the Internet in their pocket. They can text faster than Superman can leap a tall building. Their technological prowess is beyond comprehension to us 'golden oldies.'

I've been an educator for 28+ years, and in the technology arena for 41 years. Older people can learn as much technology as they determine to learn. Just because you can text at $e=mc^2$ doesn't mean you can write a coherent sentence, or work as a team member, show up on time, be respectful to customers, and so forth. When my hair was down past my shoulders during Vietnam, until I was drafted, I had to work twice as hard as everyone else to demonstrate my work ethic. I was called vile names, told to "get off my lawn", and was turned down for jobs more often than I can remember because I looked and acted like 'my generation.'

Now—the Millennials have it worse than any generation before them. The economy and global unrest is the result of poor leadership in many areas of the nation, particularly in Washington, DC. This chaos is not perpetuated just by older generational leaders, but by younger leaders emerging in today's economic, social, and political domains. When I and other Baby Boomers were treated so poorly by *our* older generation, we weren't selected as 'special' because we had it rough. We learned to be self-reliant, tough, and determined to succeed.

I recently attended a professional development session on how to teach Millennials. It was a litany of do-this-and-don't-do-that, be careful that you respect them to earn their respect, and so forth. I am not excusing the situation that this Millennial generation faces; however, stop making allowances for them as if they are unique to our political and economic upheaval! Every generation has had its political and economic upheavals to overcome! Every student that I teach, I give them respect, empower them to learn, and motivate them to be responsible for their lives. If we as a nation want to give Millennials and every older individual opportunity, our nation must produce more and better jobs, innovative technologies to solve real problems, and a national work ethic that has made this nation a place where life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is available to all generations! Stop fostering this generational conundrum that solves nothing. If you want the Millennials to be successful and hold them accountable as every other generation has been held accountable, stop making excuses and apologies!

JFK had it right when he said, "My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." This truth, however, presupposes that your country has a leadership committed to pro – business, citizenship, and national pride.

Ken Scott
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Article that instigated this response on next page

Millennials got this economy from rest of us

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It's fashionable these days to mock the supposed traits of the "Millennial" generation. It seems that these days twenty-somethings aren't quite as flawless as I was when I was a twenty-something, back when national media outlets mocked us for being "slackers." Then, as now, the economy was coming out of a recession, job prospects were bleak, and somehow that was the fault of the people who came of age at that time.

Fortunately, the recession of the early 1990s, my recession, was relatively brief and the recovery was both strong and long. Still I remember how, for a time, things seemed to be incredibly bleak. The economic rebound certainly benefited me, but to be honest, I actually had nothing to do with it. The condition of the economy did not depend on my actions or those of other people of my generation. It depended on a combination of fortune and the decisions of policymakers at that time, most of whom weren't in their early 20s then.

Like my Gen Xers before them, the Millennials didn't create this economy. They inherited it from people of earlier generations who, when in charge, made bad policy choices, some of which led directly to our current economic woes and some which have simply made life worse for younger people attempting to get ahead in the world. Sure, they have some nice toys that we didn't. Millennials can carry the entire Internet around in their pockets. This technology has probably changed our society and culture more than any technology since the invention and development of the railroads. Those of us who did not grow up with it can't know what it is to grow up with the Internet being "normal" instead of "new." The kids today are different than their parents and probably quite a bit more different than I was from my parents.

But those of us who came before had other advantages growing up. Public university tuition was affordable. Students could actually work their way through college with summer jobs and part-time work while being full-time students. Tuition plus room and board at my public university for my freshman year came in just under \$5,000 (\$9,400 in today's dollars) in 1989. The entrance fee to a supposedly respectable life was, well, set at respectable level. The new normal, in which so many people begin their working lives servicing a massive debt, was not yet in place.

I see too many people who should know better thinking that their role is to stand athwart history, yelling "get off my lawn" to those kids who are congregating there. This is a particularly flawed view, given that after several years of drought the lawn isn't such an inviting place. The kids just don't have anywhere else to go.

The truth is that we -- those of us in the older generations -- have failed the Millennials. We gave them a bum deal, and then proceeded to mock them for their plight. I frequently become enraged by the amount of scorn heaped upon the younger generation by too many older people who didn't face the challenges that Millennials are currently facing. Apparently it's hilarious when people start life unemployed, while already facing the equivalent of a monthly mortgage payment.

The truth is, the kids are all right, and if they aren't, it's because we've failed them. They're certainly a lot more knowledgeable and savvy than I was back when I was being a slacker, going to graduate school and earning my Ph.D. Remember, they carry the Internet around in their pockets. Knowledge is always at their fingertips. We haven't done right by them, but that isn't their fault. It's ours.

Duncan Black is a fellow at Media Matters for America.

Guest column

Duncan Black

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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