

OPINION

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EDITORIAL

Our younger generations are dealing with real challenges

For the bulk of the baby boomer generation life has mostly played out pretty simply. They enjoyed the benefits of technological change and relative global stability at a time of growing social freedom.

They left school and got a job or went to university and got a job, were able to achieve the great Australian dream of home ownership and managed to have enough cash, too, for a bit of travel.

Of course, the above synopsis is a major generalisation, and everybody has their own stresses and setbacks along the road to deal with.

But it seemed for some time that the pattern of modern life was set, and that the generations to follow the baby boomers would continue life's upward trajectory.

Not so. As The West Australian reports today, according to a recent report of the American Psychiatric Association, those aged 20 to 37 are the most anxious generation.

And a study by LinkedIn found almost 80 per cent of Australian millennials say they feel pressure to succeed before they hit the ripe old age of 30.

Some are graduating from university with a degree rendered unusable, little to no chance of entering the housing market and in the jobs they do find they are seemingly faced with stagnant wages — making them the first generation since the Great Depression to be worse off than their parents.

On top of that, their elders can all too readily play down the problems of the younger generations, who are often the subject of accusations they are lazy, whingers, or members of the "snowflake generation".

A feature in Marie Claire highlights cases such as that of Phoebe, 26, who said: "Managing expectations is the hardest part of being a millennial."

"My family has certain expectations, social media expectations and you do, too. It feels like you're meant to go to uni, get a good job, get married and have kids by 25. It's hard to meet them all."

The issue is widespread enough to have led to the term "quarter-life crisis".

Thankfully, it is not all gloom as far as our younger generations are concerned.

The paper has told the stories of many who have volunteered their time and talents to help others, and today we highlight the contribution of Fremantle Sea Rescue president Mark Zuvela, 31.

The contribution of Mr Zuvela and others like him are becoming ever more valuable as they replace those of more mature years who are slowing down with the advance of time.



While Alston is on leave we are reprinting some of his popular recent cartoons.

Office etiquette slips to all-time pongy low

GARY MARTIN

Early in my career I shared a small office with a more senior colleague who had a serious flatulence issue.

He would thunder down under without batting an eyelid and to this day I don't recall hearing him apologise. I had all but forgotten how that one year of co-tenancy seemed like 10 as each day I endured an unpleasant and steady stream of roars from his rear.

That was until I read about the Australian worker who took his employer to court, alleging bullying behaviour by his former supervisor who repeatedly broke wind at and on him.

The aggrieved worker said the behaviour caused him depression, anxiety and physical injuries, though he failed in his \$1.8 million negligence claim against the employer.

This court case has acted as a catalyst for many water-cooler discussions about the often unchecked, annoying, frustrating, disrespectful or downright repugnant behaviours of some of our colleagues.

And the common conclusion is a belief that workplace etiquette standards have slipped to an all-time low.

Everyone has stories to tell about the disgusting or annoying behaviour of a colleague.

From the repulsive colleague who clips fingernails at their desk causing nail fragments to ricochet into your morning coffee, to the noxious

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fitness-keen colleague who fails to shower after a lunchtime jog on a hot summer's day, to those unappetising workmates who cause your nostrils to flare by imposing their pungent-smelling culinary pleasures on you at lunchtime — some of our workmates do have vile habits which, if left uncorrected, can make our office life miserable.

And let's not forget a couple of my favourites — colleagues who kick off their shoes and allow a rancid foot odour to waft through the workplace, and or even "un-scent-tive" colleagues who douse themselves with irritating perfumes to cause your eyes to water and nose to run.

While clipping nails or even belching in close proximity to others might hit the extremely offensive end of the courtesy continuum, there are a raft of lower-key yet highly annoying and mildly disgusting behaviours that just might start to make your skin crawl. Think slurping coffee, constant throat clearing, nose picking, sniffing and heavy breathing.

Maybe the rise of our slob-like behaviour is simply a result of us overstepping the mark with some of our feel-good, people-focused management practices.

Have we reached a point where we

have made some of our workmates feel so comfortable and relaxed that the line between their office cubicle and their own living room has all but disappeared?

Even worse, it is possible the incidence of such nauseating behaviours has skyrocketed because of a rising bystander mentality of many in the workplace.

We fume in silence while observing disrespectful or discourteous workplace behaviour. But we relinquish responsibility for addressing the problem because we assume one of our colleagues will "call out" the problem.

The reality is that more often than not our colleagues don't step in. And it is that very type of flawed assumption that results in annoying, disrespectful and even the most insidious of all behaviours persisting in our workplaces.

Perhaps we have been at rock bottom for years and simply haven't realised it. Has it been the meteoric rise of the open plan office, which has given us a more intimate, accurate and realistic view of our colleagues' unenviable personal habits?

Whatever the reason for the apparent rise in stomach-churning workplace behaviours, let us make a pact to return to high standards of workplace etiquette by being more considerate and respectful of our colleagues.

And start with the golden rule — if you find a certain behaviour annoying, offensive or disgusting, make sure you don't commit it.

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