

Finding ourselves

Adaptation of 'lost generation' demands rejection of traditional work ethic



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What's wrong with young people today? Elder generations claim that this generation has rejected the value of the traditional American work ethic. This rejection is readily apparent, so I won't argue with reality. But the contention that this trend is "what's wrong" is false. Contrary to popular belief, it was not naivete but necessity that brought about this adaptation. The criticism of complacency has bombarded my generation since before the term "Generation X" was coined. Kids today have no direction. No one appreciates the value of an honest day's work anymore. Young people are more concerned about finding themselves than finding a job. And for a generation that originated the indifferent clarion calls of "whatever" and "anyways" as popular means to settle arguments, perhaps this apathetic moniker is warranted. Such criticism stopped being news five years ago and, thus, doesn't belong in a newspaper, despite the contentions of condescending senior editorial boards across the nation. Rather, it is the purpose behind this collective indifference that demands notice, and the depreciation of the traditional work ethic is a deliberate step toward that positive adaptation.

Since I usually contain such abstract musings to my own head, I feel the need to interject with a disclaimer: I despise sophomoric, self-important writers who use omnipresent terms to assume the personal to be universal, using the word "we," when they really mean "I." So I wouldn't crawl out on this abstract limb if I didn't think it was important. And revealing what is popularly considered an ineffectual trend to be a movement unto itself is important enough to take that risk. It is popularly accepted that the progeny of the '70s and '80s will be the first generation since the Depression to be less successful than the preceding generation. I don't doubt it. Many contend that this deflation of the standard of living is the fault of the economy, and blue-collar work doesn't command the wages it once did. Others point to the devaluation of the work ethic, and the popular pursuit of getting the most for doing the least — also a popular pastime among college students, I understand. But I would argue that young people today simply have a different concept of success and have been more stubborn than past generations in avoiding the disillusionment of this ideal. Generations past have placed the family and the means to support that structure above all other pursuits. The traditional Puritan work ethic was necessary to sustain those family values. As the selflessness of the traditional value structure was questioned by self-seeking individualism, divorce and abortion rates climbed and "dysfunctional" became a household word, as well as a way of life in many households. Baby boomers began to suspect the legitimacy of providing for a family as a lifelong pursuit; many suffered mid-life crises as a result. Young people today are simply bearing the mistakes of past generations in mind, and caution is being mistaken for indiffer-

ence. Members of the contemporary "lost generation" are wary of being railroaded into unhappy marriages and dead-end, cubicle-bound jobs because, in many cases, their parents were. This is to be expected in a nation where the skilled work force is shifting from primarily physical to largely cognitive labor. People are increasingly making a living with their heads rather than their hands, leading to the necessity of a college degree in the job market. Today, one in five Americans has a college degree, and that figure will continue to increase as the intellectual demands of the market grow. Considering this labor shift, a phrase once used to encourage the traditional work ethic — "idle hands are the Devil's playthings" — is in need of

topical revision: Idle minds are the Devil's playthings. I think; therefore I am. I think too much; therefore I suffer. Indeed, many young people today find their only outlet for misery to be the neurosis of self-abuse, contracting such afflictions as alcoholism, drug addiction and eating disorders. Unfortunately, this is the price to be paid for the generational trend toward self-seeking introspection. Elder generations contend that young people today cannot comprehend true suffering, as all those when-I-was-a-boy stories confirm. But while the economic hardships and social injustice of these tales have

often been overcome, we can never escape our own thoughts. Communist philosopher Karl Marx was a firm believer in the satisfaction gained by a job well done, thus establishing his commitment to a relatively basic belief: Work sets us free. This simple truth is the key to releasing Generation X from the sort of pervasive individualism that has been carried to a neurotic extreme. The traditional work ethic has inevitably — and legitimately — been rejected, paving the way for a new philosophy, linking the pursuit of passion with the necessity of work, to be defined.

Just how that philosophy will be defined is up to us ... provided we get off our lazy asses and do something about it.



SHAWN BALLARD/DN

A tough nut to crack

Squirrely ASUN write-in candidate uses columnist's ability to increase publicity



TODD MUNSON is a senior broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Pop quiz, hot shots. Guess the question I've repeatedly said no to lately: A) Hey Todd, you wanna go see if AquaNet is really flammable? B) Would you please let me know why they call you Dr. Thunder? C) Are you gonna run for president again? D) It looks like a long way down. Why don't you jump first? If you picked "C," you're eligible for a night out with Todd, some donut holes, a vintage Meatloaf cassette and the back seat of a 1986 Toyota. What a feeling! Just send in a glossy 8x10, and my assistants will start the screening process. As much fun as making a mockery of the Association of Students at the University of Nebraska election was last year, the reasons not to run outweigh any legitimate reasons to run. First off, I'm currently working on a documentary on this year's ASUN election, which, if things go well, will be on NETV sometime in the near future. Since we've been following the

candidates around more often and better than any professional stalker could, they might stop being so gracious if I suddenly jumped from behind the camera and started to taunt them. Also, Bobbi and Jordan, my esteemed partners in this endeavor, would slice me open with a Garden Weasel and stomp on my innards if I flew off the deep end and sabotaged our grades on the aforementioned documentary. Second, being president of ASUN is hard work. Not in a working-in-a-coal-mine sense of hard, but really hard. I'm a slacker to the nth degree. The two mix together about as well as oil and water. During her reign as the Supreme Ruler of the university, Sara Russell has spent only about 50 hours per week in her office, just to make things a little bit better for the apathetic slob around her. Being trapped in an office like that much means personal sacrifice. And just like Homer Simpson, all work and no play make Todd something, something, something. Go crazy? Don't mind if I do! Finally, six years of college? No thanks. As much as I enjoy living below the poverty level, the dream of making more than minimum wage is one I hold dear to my heart. And, if I want to retire by 30 like I'm planning, I'd better start pumping gas soon. The ASUN election will be all day Wednesday, and after following both sets of headlining candidates around for almost a month, I've come to the conclusion that they're just like Playboy Bunnies — pick whomever you choose, and I guarantee you can't go wrong. They are all that good. Or as Jordan would say, they're all

"bread." What's really interesting about producing a documentary of this sort is the research involved. A while back, I dug deep into the annals of the DN and found out something most interesting. I wasn't the first crackpot with the surname of Munson who ran for ASUN president. Way back in the spring of 1980, for those of us too young to remember, or who weren't alive for that matter, (man, I'm getting old) a mop-topped fellow by the name of Tim I. Munson ran for president as a member of the LSD Party. Judging by his ragamuffin appearance, I'd wager that LSD stood for Let the Students Decide, not Lysergic Acid Diethylamide, that crazy postage-stamp flavoring. The controversy he stirred up made my antics of sunshiny days and lollipops look like the work of an altar boy who had a little too much sugar. He was quoted like this across a front-page headline. "Munson: I would be UNL's Christ." Also, he wanted to turn UNL into an academic institution of the highest degree — no pun intended. He finished off in third, just like I did, and went on his merry way. I literally spent hours this week, trying to hunt the fella down in hopes of having him be the special guest today to see what has happened to him since his political days at UNL. Lately, though, I've grown accustomed to learning the world in which we live isn't exactly perfect. My 7-Layer the other day was way too heavy on the lettuce side of things, and Tim

I. Munson is a bit hard to contact. The only facts I had were that Tim Munson was an attorney who was last known to live in Omaha. But lo and behold, he returned an e-mail. Turns out he's A-OK and living in a cabin out in the West. He didn't respond in time for this week, but look for an interview with him in the coming weeks. The Internet: Not just for porn ... good for stalking, too. If you're still reading this, good news, you've reached the good part. I've got this talent, you see. It's a good one, not good enough to get the name Dr. Thunder, but still, it's pretty good. Just like Yar in "The Beastmaster," I have the ability to understand what animals say and to communicate with them. The other day, I was on campus when a squirrel came over to talk. The rabbits told him I was the chosen one. It seems Ricky has lived on campus for a few years and feels it's his time to make a dent on how things are run around these parts. He isn't a student, since squirrels can't register, but has listened in on many classes here at UNL. He's a squirrel who appreciates the classics, a good poli sci course and The History of American Jazz. Ricky claims to have learned so much living on campus, he attests his GPA would hover around 3.5. Damn rodent is smarter than I am. When our discussion turned to matters a bit more political, Ricky stood up tall and proud on his hind legs and said, "Hey brotha Todd, you think you could help out a little squirrel like myself as I run for ASUN President? I'd throw my hat into the

ring, but the bookstore doesn't sell hats for squirrels." What could I do? I am the chosen one and all, and as the chosen one, it's my obligation to help out the critters only I can talk to. So reluctantly, I had to say yes. BIG TIME DISCLAIMER: The following is Ricky the squirrel's opinion, not Todd's. Todd is merely helping Ricky get the word out to students more normal than Todd who can't, or don't, talk to animals. Todd is in no way for or against Ricky. As ASUN President, Ricky vows to move classes where they belong, outside and up in the trees, so all God's creatures can get the education they deserve. He also wants to see more trees on campus, especially ones with those tasty acorns. He also wants to build a "Truman Show"-style dome over UNL and keep the temperature at a consistently mild 77.5 degrees year-round. The money to start construction on the dome would come from a huge slash in the ASUN budget. Squirrels need nuts to get the job done, not money. Finally Ricky gave me the money he's squirreled away the last few months (this pun was intended) to make him a few signs in support of his cause, since squirrels aren't allowed in Kinko's. Nor do they have the reach needed to hang signs. So, with a \$1.57, allow me to introduce Ricky the squirrel as a write-in candidate for ASUN. I still think the candidates running are rock-solid as all get out, but in the spirit of good-natured fun, here's Ricky.