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## BUSINESS

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### THE BALANCING ACT

#### Meeting in the middle: Generations X and Y

The 30- and 40-year-olds who make up Generation X can help twenty-somethings navigate -- and change -- corporate America.

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I marvel at young reporters who turn in stories on deadline while sipping a cappuccino in Starbucks. The concept of working from anywhere at any time is second nature, something they never even question. It's an option my generation never had when we came on the work scene, when laptops, Wi-Fi and compassionate bosses were scarce.

Now, here we are, the 30- and 40-year-olds who make up Generation X, managing the twenty-somethings as their supervisors and mentors and trying to figure out why they have such a different attitude about work and what to do about it. Most of us haven't really thought about the important role we play in molding this new generation of workers.



Miami Lakes attorney Karen M. Gilmartin helps young associates such as Christina Totfalusi Blakeon learn the tools for balancing work and family.  
AL DIAZ / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

In The Miami Herald's Business Monday this week, I wrote about how the recession has been a giant slice of humble pie for younger workers, turning bold and brash Generation Y into generation Comply.

From their first entry into the workplace a few years ago, Gen Y, smart and brash, has bumped up against corporate cultures steeped in the chained-to-your-desk mentality. Nationally, advocacy groups are putting up a good fight to coax workplaces to be more accommodating about where and when work gets done. The White House even launched its own push for flexibility. But Gen Y consistently says their biggest obstacle is managers who can't let go of the need to exercise authority over employees -- in person.

Jaret Davis, a 35-year-old partner at the law firm Greenberg Traurig considers himself "a bridge between two extremes." He's smack in the middle of the younger attorneys who want flexibility and work life balance, and the older lawyers in top management who want to preserve a corporate culture where tradition and face time are valued. "The Gen Y perspective is not foreign to my generation," Davis explains. "We came with the mind-set to work hard, do what it takes, but we're open to Gen Y who looks at it as 'how can I work hard and master my craft while not sacrificing my life?'"

## **INNOVATIONS**

Davis says he's working with young lawyers at his firm to figure out how to tap into innovations that would give Millennials flexibility and still get the work done.

A few months ago, while working on a Father's Day column, I learned that new fathers who work in corporate America are using informal flexibility at work, rather than the formal flexibility many mothers use. They said their immediate managers (Gen Xers) as opposed to top executives (boomers and matures) were from dual-career households, too, and were quite supportive of the work life challenges they face. That was the first time I saw my generation as a bridge.

Like Davis, Karen Gilmartin, a Miami Lakes workers compensation attorney, understands her role in modernizing the workplace. The old schoolers believe "we worked hard, why should we give someone a break?"

## **LEAD BY EXAMPLE**

The young lawyers need Gen Xers to teach them that they can have success but they have to earn it, she says. Gilmartin, 49, leads by example, role modeling for her young female associates that it's possible to be a respected law partner and a mom. "I'm here at 7 a.m. but I might cut out early to go to my child's hockey game."

Clearly, we were the pioneers who suffered the perils of flex time and allowed personal schedules to take us off our career paths. But maybe as pioneers we can help the next generation build on our experience and figure out how to do it even better, how to use a flexible work arrangement without it taking someone off the path to the top.

Behind the Millennials come an even different bunch, already being referred to as the iGeneration. As a mother of a 13- and 14-year old, I see how different they are from the twentysomethings. This generation would rather text than talk. They want to be constantly connected, available and multitasking in a way even the Millennials don't quite get. They don't remember a time without the constant connectivity to the world via sophisticated handheld devices. In a decade, when they enter the workplace, I bet they won't be able to fathom why they can't split early to go to a baseball game when clearly they can handle any client need from their smartphones.

It's telling that even in this time of high unemployment, Millennials don't feel compelled to take any old job offered to them. According to an annual survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, 41 percent of college grads who were offered jobs turned them down and 57 percent believe another, better job opportunity will come up in just a few months.

Meanwhile, they are comfortable with economic uncertainty and content to live with their parents and hold out for that perfect opportunity or start their own businesses on a shoestring. "They are still searching for what is purposeful," explains Tamara Bell, founder and editor in chief of Y Gen Out Loud, an online news organization.

Gen Y is telling us they are not going to put up with unappreciative workplaces and arrogant bosses, particularly after the economy recovers. I see my generation as smart enough to realize that companies need young workers to keep them relevant in the digital age. We need their perspective, energy and know-how. We are the current and future bosses who will try to hang on to Gen Y workers, incorporate their ideas and work styles and make sure they advance. From my view, we're up to the task.