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Boomer Dad to Millennial Grad: Listen Up!

By JOHN MARTIN

The June high school graduation ceremonies start the next chapter in our children's lives - college, armed services, or gainful employment. It is a rite of passage that comes with mixed emotions -- hopes, dreams, and aspirations for a bright future.

Building on the insights we see in our generational research, we offer boomer parents 10 guiding principles -- "new rules" -- to share with their newly minted millennial generation graduates for their next phase of life:

(1) Learn well so you can help shape a viable future for everyone.

Look, we boomers grew up with G.I. or Silent Generation parents who walked the walk, but rarely talked about themselves. They gave us a remarkable life. Our "Wonder Years" were full of possibilities and constant reinforcements that we could do it all. Our size as a generation, coupled with our fortitude to challenge the status quo and transform our culture, meant we could change things. From women's rights to gay rights to civil rights to local causes, we made a difference. But what we've done isn't enough. It's your turn to build on our work and help move our society to an even more enlightened place.

(2) Keep growing your volunteer spirit and faith in civic ventures.

Thanks to the focus on community service found in schools and churches today, you're off to a great start in transforming the



volunteer movement. Keep it up. In the years ahead, every organization, government, and civic venture will have to do more with less. What we have come to expect from the government will be replaced by what we do for our fellow citizens and neighbors. More than any other generation since our parents, your generation needs to lead the way.

(3) Go offline as much as you are online.

Google will make you stupid. Learn the benefits of deep and creative thinking that come from focusing your attention, concentrating, contemplating, and reflecting.

As digital natives, you have never known a world without e-mail, text messaging, and instantaneous answers. One consequence, however, is that rapid, disjointed sampling of small bits of information from many sources has wired your brain to thrive on skimming and scanning.

Nicholas Carr, in his widely quoted Atlantic essay, eloquently crystallized this point. Our time tethered to technology sacrifices our ability to read and literally think. If you don't believe us, just "Google" (by the way, that's not a real word) the latest science. Dr. Gary Small, a UCLA neuroscientist, in his book *iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind*, makes a scientific case of how the human brain is actually being rewired by the constant presence and pace of technology. Read the recently released *The Shallows*, a book by Carr that explores how our brains change in response to our experiences. The way we search, find, store, and share information literally reroutes our neural pathways.

You will have an unparalleled advantage in the real world if you learn to learn how to take deep dives -- intellectual gorging. Learn to thrive in both the digital and non-digital world when it comes to your ability to read and think.

(4) Keep honing your social skills.

Your rewired neural circuitry has come at a price -- traditional face-to-face social contact skills. Facebook postings, texting, tweeting, etc. have hyper-connected you to your friends 24/7. While everything meaningful has been experienced as a group of friends, your digital dexterity means reading face-to-face subtle facial expressions is now harder than reading *War & Peace*.

Upgrade your human contact skills. Take control of your own neural circuitry. From

time to time, just go out with your mobile phones turned off. Learn how to connect with new friends without being hyper-wired to old friends. Live in the moment.

(5) Know what you don't know

Yes, we bought into the idea of giving you trophies for just showing up to soccer games. We wanted to reinforce just how special you are. Your "can do" attitude and ambition are now part of your DNA. This will serve you well for years to come. But now is the time to practice and celebrate humility, read the room, and realize there is more you don't know than you think you know.

(6) Eat this, not that.

For 18 years, we have been serving you what you like to eat. What you probably didn't notice is that most of those home-cooked meals were healthy and well-balanced. Now, you'll become your own dietary czar. Make good choices to make your body strong. Get the book *Eat This, Not That* by David Zinczenko and Matt Goulding. Follow it and you'll be amazed how you can avoid what will happen to most of your peers as they move to a diet predominately made up of liquid and solid starches.

(7) Realize the 'Bank of Mom & Dad' has closed.

The Great Recession was well-timed in only one regard -- you. You got to see how we boomers have cut back at home, how our friends were affected, and how we have embraced a new ethic in spending and saving. Take this life lesson with you. Don't accept all the credit card offers that will rain down on you. Create a budget. Live by it. Work toward the reality that you need to create a means and live within that means.

(8) Don't involve us in every decision.

When we were your age, our parents didn't help us apply to college, select our majors, or hunt down job opportunities. At most, we called our parents once a week. Besides, the hall phone in the dorm never worked.

Yes, we hovered over you for years and delighted in texting with you on a daily basis. But now we're bringing our helicopter parenting style down for a soft landing. Your new life is, well, your new life. You're not trying hard enough if you don't make a few mistakes on your own.

(9) Make it a small world after all.

When it comes to race, your generation is truly colorblind. Your exposure to divorce and familiarity with alternative family structures have made you more accepting of diversity than any previous generation. In the years ahead, you'll meet people from all

over the planet, people with different values, intellects, passions, and convictions. Build on your appreciation of diversity to show all of us how to become more accepting of an increasingly diverse and globally interconnected world.

(10) Follow your passion.

Pursue your passion, not ours. You are blessed to be part of a generation of Americans who can pursue happiness through an unlimited number of specialties and careers. Do so and work will be your hobby. Follow whatever passion you choose and the money will follow.

All this shouldn't come as a surprise; we have been sharing these ideas with you for years, you just haven't stood still long enough to hear them as one list.

Now, if we could just figure out how to get you to read the newspaper . . .

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