

Gen Y in Never Never Land: are you a “Peggy Pan”?

- By: Diane Lanzillotta Bobis, bizMe writer

Once upon a time there was a girl named Peggy, who decided not to grow up. “I will not be an adult! You cannot make me!” she exclaimed. “I will live off my parents, shop by day and cocktail by night. I want always to be a girl and always to have fun. In Never Never Land I am forever 21!”

Perhaps you’re more familiar with Peggy’s male counterpart, Peter. Peter is that cocky, devil-may-care guy whose social IQ appears to be lower than his actual age. He’s the incessant “adulolescent.”

And while it’s true Peter Pan Syndrome (the pop psychology diagnosis for who remain childish and fail to assume appropriate adult social roles and responsibilities) more often affects men, some Gen Y women are also eschewing entry into the adult world of plans and responsibilities. Instead, they’re flying “second to the right, and straight on till morning,” into their own version of Never Never Land.

No worries—just livin’ the high life



Just envision a magical island where you get all the perks and freedoms of adulthood, without any of the adult responsibility. It’s a place for playing, partying, obsessing over trends and appearances, and over-over spending.

“Come with me where you’ll never have to worry about grown-up things like jobs, relationships or finances!” the impish Peggy persuades. But for some, never can be a very long time. It’s all too easy to get stuck in all the delusory pleasures and comforts of Never Never Land—especially if you’ve got parents (or an imaginary Prince Charming) prepared to bail you out.

Blame the parents?

This kind of “enabling” just may be what landed you in Never Never Land in the first place. Many experts, including nationally recognized psychologist [Dr. Susan Bartell](#), believe the Peter and Peggy Pans of this generation are truly a product of parents who failed to teach the hard truths of fiscal and personal responsibility.

When Gen Y was growing up, “there was an emotionally overindulging psychology movement that spoke to parents about being your child’s friend; about not damaging your child through setting limits or disciplining them,” Dr. Bartell asserts. “Parents nurtured Gen Y self-indulgence in childhood and never said ‘no’ to them for anything. So now, Gen Y can’t say ‘no’ to themselves. It’s not so much a fear of growing up as it is a need for immediate gratification.”

Gen Y life coach and author [Christine Hassler](#) agrees that Gen Y’s “grandiose” upbringing has much to do with the “I’m just here to have fun” mindset. But she also points the finger at society. “Gen Y grew up with the modeling of young people being very rich and famous; a celebrity culture where people got famous for not doing much,” Hassler explains. “On reality television, people are living the high life for really no reason at all. Media so often depicts this young and fabulous sort of thing; not the you’re young and you should be paying your dues sort of thing.”



Do you need a little more Tink?

But did well-intentioned parents and trash TV really produce an entire generation of Lost Boys and Girls flitting and floating about Never Never Land with a “slacker-entitlement” mentality? Truth is, there are plenty of Gen Y women who’ve gracefully learned to accept the virtues of adulthood (they’re the Wendys of this story). It’s just that the Peters and Peggys have created enough drama to give the whole of Gen Y a bit of a naughty reputation—particularly in the workplace.

Women who are stuck in Never Never Land are “more guilty of bringing their problems to work. And they expect more coddling,” says Hassler. In more extreme cases (like the ones Dr. Bartell has seen), these adultolescents are constantly bickering with co-workers and throwing temper

tantrums if required to re-do work or stay late. And they may not even realize that's how they're behaving and being perceived.

Dr. Billie Blair, organizational psychologist and President/CEO of the international management consulting firm, [Change Strategists, Inc.](#) sheds a little more light: "The early life experiences of Gen Y have led them to believe they are special and deserve special treatment. The marketplace has an alternative perception. Employers see this kind of behavior as selfish and self-centered. They can also interpret this behavior as an unwillingness to be a team player, which is greatly needed in today's workplace."

Fearlessly self-assured

And yet we also know that Gen Y is extremely passionate about their work. You really want to make a difference in this world. So what's really going on in the mind of Peggy Pan when she's reluctant to take on a position that requires longer hours—or resistant to commit to a more serious personal relationship?

Underneath Peggy's party girl exterior, there just may be a twenty-something who's just a little insecure or unconfident. Did your parents always make life easy for you? Do they continue to make life easy for you? That only makes it harder to let go and assuredly find your way.

And then there are those expectations. Some Peggy Pans stall in Never Never Land waiting for the illusive day when their life's purpose or passion will just hit them like a lightning bolt. "They have unrealistic expectations of what they're waiting for, rather than just getting started on life," Hassler suggests.

The poor economy can also play into these unrealized expectations. Says Dr. Bartell: "There are a lot young people coming out of school whose expectations were they would find a job and they've been having a hard time. Part of what I'm seeing with that is a layer of depression. When you're depressed, you're not motivated, and the ego takes a tougher hit."

"Second star to the right and straight on till morning"

In many ways, a visit to Never Never Land is nothing more than an escape or denial about your lack of faith in yourself in the Real Real World. And while it's true Gen Y has been slower to grow up than previous generations, it's not always such a bad thing.

"In the past we had to become adults so quickly that didn't take time for self-discovery," notes Hassler. "Today there are a lot of twenty-somethings who are seeking. There's a higher level of consciousness. They're saying, 'Before I figure out what I want to be and who I want to brush my teeth next to for the rest of my life, let me figure out who I am.'"

When you do figure that out, you just might realize there's a very magical sort of power in growing up—in taking charge of your own life, making your own decisions, paying your own way and committing to your own definitions of fun and success. Being an adult is an awfully big adventure.