

; global citizen how najib is like obama 32 ; global citizen indonesia's new dance 33 ; pov how a death could save lives 34

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IN YOUR 28-PAGE
LIVING PULLOUT

■ DRINK

TOKYO'S WHISKEY CULTURE

■ TRAVELLER

MELBOURNE'S MARKETS

■ CAR

ALONG CAME
AUDI'S SPYDER



CHUNG LYN-YI
she said



In a jam over strawberries

Or how Generation Y lives with the 'Strawberry Generation' tag

After a grand total of two days on the job as a graphic designer, one of my friends called it quits. She was ticked off at being asked numerous times to photocopy large piles of artwork and decided it was not what she had signed up for.

This was hardly a testament to the tenacity she spoke of in her resume. It also puzzled and disturbed those of us who got wind of it, not least because it served as a juicy tidbit for those who have labelled my peers the "Strawberry Generation".

The term, made popular by Taiwanese media a few years back, refers to young adults born in the '80s into sheltered environments. Like the fruit, they are easily crushed under pressure, especially when it comes from marginally hard labour.

In essence, these people fancy themselves as the cream of the crop. But come crunch time, they more often than not get creamed.

A headhunter friend of mine says she has encountered many of these spoilt "strawberries", along with some berry bad behaviour. Some take multiple MCs within the first few days of their jobs. Others sulk daringly at their superiors, with outrageous, diva lines such as "Listen, even my own mother doesn't scold me this way!"

One bad apple, or strawberry in this case, does not spoil the bunch. And having a terrible upbringing certainly spans across all ages. But her account got me thinking about generational stereotypes and to what extent they hold true.

I am aware that '80s kids, or "Generation Y" as we are known, get a lot of flak. (This is even though we

survived psychedelic and spandex fashions from that era like everyone else older than us.)

We are at best seen as articulate, assertive and goal-oriented. By the same token, we are at worst whiny, demanding and impatient.

For example, if things are not progressing fast enough in terms of recognition and pay, some feel the urge to switch jobs after a year or two.

Like the fruit, some claim us Generation-Y folk are easily crushed under pressure. They say we fancy ourselves as cream of the crop, but come crunch time, we more often than not get creamed.

With firms doling out annual performance bonus cheques over the next few months, I can name a few friends with one foot out the door, ready to speed up their corporate climb.

Some unabashedly declare that they need to do this to fulfil visions of being CEO one day. I am not sure if this will be a job-hop, skip and a jump away, but one of my pals has already become an assistant vice-president at age 27.

As a buddy, I think: More power to them for chasing their ambitions. To others grappling with a high turnover rate though, it can make for a bad track record.

"Your generation wants to be

movers and shakers," said one of my older friends, with an eye-roll. "I see a lot of moving around, but that's it. They will go nowhere without experience."

In her opinion, the notion of experience seems to count less with my batch. There is the suspicion that we think we should advance quickly, without paying our dues. Much as I feel maligned from the sweeping generalisation, I can see why she would think so.

Having been brought up on a diet of technology, Generation Y appears to have a culture of shortcuts. We often turn to the all-knowing Internet for answers, and network thrice as fast with new media tools such as Facebook and instant messaging.

Still, some of us may be paying unfairly for the few strawberries in our fields. And we have plenty of stories of not being taken seriously because of age.

I have been asked rather bluntly by seniors at important meetings: "Why are you here?" My common response is a hapless grin, given that few answers would not sound snarky. And note that trying to dress "older" does not help in dodging such questions.

This "strawberry" tag may make us ripe for the picking on, but there is little else to do but keep at it, and hope our work eventually speaks louder than we do.

And when that happens, it would be just peachy. ☺

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