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Raising the Bar

There's been a lot of buzz lately over a report released by Indiana University researchers that claim today's young people are becoming detached from social lives and are bored in school. The two may or may not be related. This story has even generated a news piece that appeared a few weeks ago here in The Salem Leader.

The researchers, along with many adults, say I'm detached. They think everyone under the age of 20 is an iPod-toting, bored little brat and they're right. I know a lot of people that own iPods, myself included, and I'm usually bored with most things I do during the day. I just returned from the Post Office because I needed stamps. That was hardly the most exciting thing I could have been doing.

The researchers indicate that high school students are easily bored in the classroom because they're not being challenged. The report goes on to say that high school students aren't being challenged because they're not being stimulated. Lack of stimulation typically does cause boredom. I'm glad IU had a crack team of researchers on tap to crack that nut. Maybe next they'll finally figure out why people who don't sleep well at night are tired the next day.

From my perspective, these findings only back up what I've thought all along: challenges are hard. I just want to be stimulated by something new so I can say I'm one of the first people to do whatever is new. It's a good feeling that makes me feel good. If the stimulation can come around, the challenges will too because I'll want to incorporate my new-found knowledge or technique into my life.

I'll give you an example. Older generations today claim the iPod and other portable music players are a flashy trend and that gay marriage will someday destroy the world. When those people were younger, their parents thought poodle skirts were a flashy trend and that communists would someday destroy the world. If you go back far enough you'll likely find a generation of people that thought toilet paper was a flashy trend and that Zeus would destroy the world. Alas, we're all here today on the same earth to bask in the glory of listening to our iPods while using toilet paper.

I'd say it's safe to assume that each new generation of young people raises the bar in contrast to the last. My generation gets MTV and the Internet to captivate our minds and somehow teachers can't figure out why their students don't want to listen to a documentary on the mating habits of moths.

My beef with this report from IU isn't that they likely spent thousands of dollars just to determine what the better half of us already knew, but that so few people will likely do much to change the way things are currently done.

For example, I already mentioned I just came back from the Post Office because I needed to buy stamps. What I didn't tell you is that it's 9:30 in the evening and the Fishers Post Office closes at 7. I merely rode my bike around the corner and down the street, walked into the lobby, shoved my credit card into the stamp machine, pushed three buttons, took my stamps, receipt and credit card and pedaled back home. During this entire endeavor I was never in the dark or in danger because I was constantly under a street lamp, never pedaled on a roadway shared by cars because I was on the bike path and never spoke to anyone because I didn't need to. That's truly raising the bar. I don't need to speak to someone for something I'm more than capable of doing myself and I don't need to risk life and limb on a cool spring evening by biking on an actual road with cars. That's simply what I've come to expect. My only regret is that I still have to buy stamps in the first place because I can't do business with everyone online (yet). I'll even go as far to say I could be more independent than my peers a generation ago that relied on a guy to sell us stamps.

It's this sort of convenience, speed, usability and comfort that I've come to expect from the mundane chores in my day. I'd consider most of my classes a mundane chore, too. As would many high school students I'm sure. There's something that could be resolved by hosting virtual classrooms, training teachers how to use *real* modern technology (PowerPoint doesn't count – try podcasting or blogging) and doing something as simple as painting the walls. White walls don't inspire anyone.

Alas, in the next generation things will change. At least I have toilet paper now.