Monday, November 5. 2007

The age of AWTeen's Caretakers

Eric (XelNaga) recently made a post in the Activeworlds forums regarding the age of AWTeen election candidates. The topic has stirred up quite a bit of controversy in recent days. Some believe that the world should be For Teens, by Teens, while others believe that older people will have more experience and be more suited to the job.

I subscribe to neither. Nobody should care how old someone is if the person does a good job.

To illustrate, imagine that someone is chosen for AWTeen Governor and has been in the position for six months. She has done an excellent job, earning the respect and admiration of everyone who visits the world. World visitors double under her Governorship, and the world sees events the like of which Activeworlds has never seen before. AWTeen's petty bickering and squabbling dies away, forgotten in the sands of time.

Then someone reveals that the Governor is actually 30 years old. She had never disclosed her age before.

Ask yourself truthfully if you would change your vote in the next election simply because you found out her age. Here's someone who has turned around a struggling community, and you say you're going to vote her out because she's older than 19? Come on.

It would be far better if, in this election cycle, people didn't even ask what age anyone is. A forum post was made last week criticizing Strike Rapier for being too old, and Matthew for being too young, all in the same topic!

I've seen people in the non-virtual world who are excellent leaders and are young, and I've seen people who are poor leaders and are old. Making a blanket statement such as "everyone 13 or under is too immature to run a world" ignores strengths such as the 13-year-old's energy and new ideas. Likewise, stating that someone over 20 is "out-of-touch" ignores that the person may have been privileged to be a supervisor in a paying job or have college education, which certainly must provide some benefit to leadership capabilities in Activeworlds.

I think what many people forget, especially on the older rather than younger, side, is that old people were once young people too. Our society seems to look at elderly people as, well, "non-people," as if they are from a different race, and that they are "out of touch" with the "real world." But if you talk to an elderly person and ask him or her about his or her youth, you'll hear all the same crazy stories as you might hear about today's young people. And while Citizens in their twenties are hardly "elderly" by any means, some of AWTeen's visitors still hold onto this notion that these older AW visitors are "out of touch."

In schools, the older students generally head organizations that are staffed by younger people, serving as mentors to them. In the entertainment industry, it's common for the star to be older than the intended audience. Take Hanna Montana, for instance, with tickets to concerts selling for up to $5000/seat nowadays. I don't know anyone who's 15 who watches the show, but Destiny Cyrus (who plays the lead) is that age.

AWTeen is a world that has long ceased to be for teenagers. It wasn't a world for teenagers as far back as five years ago, and it certainly isn't one now. It's time for the world's leadership to acknowledge that truth. The next leader should work on creating a world that appeals to both teenagers and adults, and the community should support this goal by ignoring age when selecting that leader.

Posted by Brant in Commentary at 10:52

I don't think anyone's making the argument that a non-teen wouldn't be capable of doing a good job. The issue, for me at least, is about providing opportunities for teens to take hands-on leadership roles in dealing with the affairs of their own community.

I guess we differ on the assessment that "AWTeen is a world that has long ceased to be for teenagers." Whilst there have always been folks older and younger involved in the community, its content and programming are still oriented towards the wants and needs of teens.

I think its great that non-teens can come and share the experience, as I by no means advocate forcing people to adhere to social categories, I just feel that they should "step up and step back" as it were, feeling free to participate and offer their perspective but respectfully straying from official leadership roles.
Anonymous on Nov 9 2007, 14:55