



## Bridging the Generation Gap



PHOTOS BY JUDY WATSON TRACY  
BACKDROPS BY LARRY MOORE

*An interesting generational confluence fills the Rollins halls between classes these days. An aging, predominantly Baby-Boom professoriate now finds their former Generation X students finishing Ph.D.'s and returning to college as faculty. Occupying the current student role are the so-called Millennials (or Generation Y, to some). The first Millennial cohort entered college three years ago after graduating as the high-school class of 2000 (hence their name). Now that Millennials dominate college student bodies, the Silents, Boomers, and X-ers are taking notice. Perhaps these collegians will become "The Next Great Generation," as Neil Howe and William Strauss subtitle Millennials Rising, their best-selling text on these children of the late Baby Boomers.*



### Millennials: The New College Generation

Remember learning to ride a bicycle? For me (growing up in the '60s), it was a red, pawn-shop special with pedal brakes. Dad ran behind with one hand on the plastic banana seat, letting go without my knowledge at some point. Of course, I fell and skinned my knee. "Get back on," he encouraged. Contrast that scene with the education of a Millennial. First, there is the bike itself: a European or Japanese import that costs a little less than my '72 Malibu did back in high school. Next, Mom and Dad have probably read *Teaching Your Child to Bicycle Safely* or watched the DVD. Perhaps they've sent Junior to bike safety school or hired a training consultant. On the appointed morning of initiation, Mom, Dad, and little Millennial set off for the park, bike nestled on the roof rack of the SUV. The entire event is being recorded by video camera. Before mounting the bike, little Millie is encased in a suit of plastic armor: helmet, kneepads, shoulder pads, chinstrap, gloves. Yet, like all of us, she falls. She cries because her arm hurts, so she gets a visit to the hospital for an MRI because no one wants to ruin her chances of being a violinist (lessons at 6) or a softball pitcher (practice at 3).

How do Millennials differ from their elders?

They are the most protected, watched-after, structured, achievement-driven generation in American history. They are, as one Millennial parent actually said to me, our little investment. Born 1982 and after, their formative years saw seemingly unbridled economic prosperity. They have never known a world without computers as a household appliance. Information has always been a click away (a double-click for really hard-to-find things). The latest music has always been something you can "see" ("Have you seen Justin Timberlake's latest song?"). Phones have always been something you don't really "dial." And a TV with 13 channels? Please—that's so 20th century!

While no generation can be defined with monolithic characteristics, the several key themes dictate the overwhelming majority of Millennial childhoods.

BY ROGER CASEY

**1** Millennials have been protected and warned of external dangers at every crossroad, whether we're talking about bicycle safety equipment, CD ratings, the V-chip, child molestation, date rape, the Amber Alert, or sunblock with an SPF of 30. Yet, the Millennials have arguably grown up faster than any of their predecessors. They've been sexualized from an early age through media images of Britney, Internet sites, Abercrombie & Fitch (who sell thongs for teens emblazoned with the phrase "eye candy"), and Congress investigating one President's sexual misadventures while his opponent sells Viagra on TV.

**2** Millennials are sedentary and/or sedated. Though this is a generation obsessed by X-Treme sports, most live the extreme vicariously through the Internet or video games. Teen obesity is rampant. Couch potatoes have been replaced by "surfers" who ride the virtual wavelength in front of a computer screen. The children of those who were a part of the '60s drug culture have a

pharmaceutical culture of their own—but this one is prescription-based. Those coping with attention-deficit disorders may have been on Ritalin for years. Many are on anti-depressants. In fact, what used to be called "adolescence" may now be called "depression," and numerous Millennials seek medical relief from its pressures.

**3** Millennials are heavily pressured by "branding." Their world is bombarded with advertising texts and messages. Brand consciousness is enormous. Pepsi and Coke vie for exclusive contracts in certain school districts. Marketers pay to have trademarks like Nike or Gatorade mentioned in textbooks (from an algebra text: "How many pints of Gatorade does it take..."). Millions are spent to convince this generation to use its considerable disposable income on certain products or to look a certain way. Many eating disorders emanate from this cultural programming to look perfect.

**4** Millennials' lives have been hyper-structured and programmed. They go from school to soccer practice to violin lessons to Boy Scouts to the church choir, then return home to volumes of homework emanating from back-to-basics or testing-based curricula. The enormous backpacks many teens carry to school make them look more like astronauts preparing for space travel than kids. Millennials were tested at age 3 to get into the best kindergarten so they could get into the best grammar school programs that led to the best high schools that led to the best colleges. Indeed, by the time many actually reach college, they are burned out or have little ability to organize their own lives in the relatively structure-free world they discover there, where no one else takes responsibility for their time. But even in college, many continue with lifestyles that leave little room for reflective space. Try scheduling a meeting with a group of our best students and watch them pull out their Palm Pilots and struggle to find a common free moment.

**5** Millennials are tech-savvy and gadget rich. For them, the Mouse does not refer to Disney. Information is instantaneous—just a click away. PC's, Palm Pilots, digital phones, Googling, MP-3s, Wi-fi, e-mail—they are "connected." Remarkably, some college students e-mail or "cell-phone"

their parents four or five times a day. I remember wanting my parents to set my things out of the station wagon on move-in day, drive away quickly, and not return until graduation. Which brings us to...

**6** Millennials love their parents. Good news for Mom and Dad. But bad news for independence. Some sociologists have suggested that Baby Boomers are reliving their teen and college years vicariously through their children. Parents thus have become much more involved with their children's college educations, for example. Most X-ers and Boomers couldn't imagine their parents calling a professor or dean, yet such behavior is the norm for the Millennial parent. As an example, almost every phone call our office received last summer regarding fall course scheduling for first-year students came from parents, not students themselves. I'm amused when parents use the possessive "our" to refer to a student's schedule, as in "We received *our* materials about fall term..."



Again, these descriptions are not meant to stereotype but rather to provide a sense of how today's Millennial college student differs from her predecessors. Indeed, *she* is more likely to be a *she*. Women are becoming the significant majority of college students. And this *she* is more likely to be non-white. The percentage of Millennials who are Asian or Hispanic is significantly higher than for the last generation.

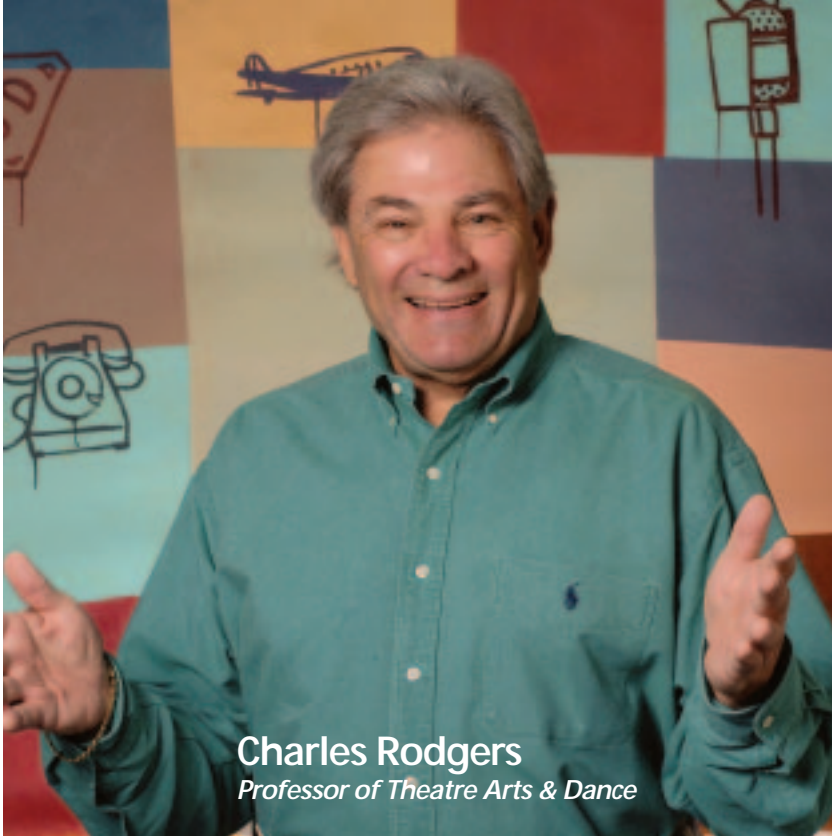
Understanding the Millennial generation is key to educating them. At Rollins we have expended considerable effort to create a technologically rich, yet personally focused learning environment conducive to the needs of this "next great generation." With their orientation toward achievement and the support of their elders, the Millennials have a tremendous future ahead. It's our job to prepare them for it, and in our post-9/11 world, never has the breadth and focus of a liberal-arts education been so in need.

*Roger Casey is dean of the faculty at Rollins College.*



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PROFILES BY ANN MARIE VARGA '82



**Charles Rodgers**  
Professor of Theatre Arts & Dance

### Silent Generation

*Born between the years of 1925 and 1942, members of the Silent Generation came of age during a period of quiet prosperity. Sometimes called the Swing Generation, this relatively small group of Americans exhibits “swings” in its behavior because it is caught between the two powerful forces of the more casual Boomers and the more conservative G.I. Generation. Silents were the earliest-marrying and earliest-babying generation. Silent men outpaced their predecessors in educational achievement, while women of this generation showed no gain. The Silent Generation accounted for the 1960s surge in the “helping professions” (teaching, medicine, ministry, government), produced virtually every major figure in the modern civil rights movement, and still head many of the nation’s corporations and top positions in federal, state, and local government. Unless economic conditions change substantially, this may be the last generation to enjoy real affluence in their retirement years.*

Dr. Charles Rodgers nodded toward the laptop computer behind him and laughed heartily, “I’m absolutely the last professor on this campus to get a computer. People who know me will get a kick out of that. Admittedly, I’m technologically challenged.”

Well, technology may not be his thing, but teaching certainly is. And after more than three decades on the Rollins College campus, Rodgers is perhaps one of the best-remembered and most-asked-about professors.

Many things have changed since he arrived on the scene in 1969. “I’ve seen many changes physically in the mode of dress and in hairstyles,” he said. “I’d look out over the classroom in the ‘70s and, regardless of what sex you were, almost everyone had long hair. I saw numerous graduates cross the stage barefoot and with their robes open so you could see the so-called hippie look. That wouldn’t happen now. People in those years were more irreverent than they are now. That was, after all, just one decade removed from the ‘sex, drugs and rock ‘n roll’ attitude of the ‘60s.”

But Rodgers doesn’t necessarily think students today are any smarter than they used to be. “I taught a lot of really intelligent people back in the ‘70s and ‘80s,” he recalled. “But the difference is that I don’t think that most of them took college as seriously as students do today. Students now realize what the job market is like and the necessity of an advanced degree.”

With a double Ph.D. in theater and communication, Rodgers has taught courses in public speaking, film history, and theater history over the years. “I haven’t changed my teaching approach that much. I teach history today the same way I did decades ago,” he said. “History is history. I simply revise my notes as history moves along.”

## Baby Boomers

*The single largest generation of Americans (primarily due to the post-World War II “baby boom”), Baby Boomers were born between the years of 1943 and 1960. Most Boomers were raised by young, stay-at-home mothers to be independent and in control of their own destinies. This upbringing manifested itself in the anti-authoritarian counterculture movement of the ‘60s. It then translated into the “see-how-fast-I-can-get-rich materialism” of the ‘80s. In the 1990s, Boomer individualism was apparent in increased entrepreneurialism, the self-help movement, and the rise of New Age spiritualism. The sheer size of the Boomers generation has impacted society in many ways—from the popularity of the mini-van and sport-utility vehicle to the overwhelming demand for housing to the uncertainty of the future of Social Security benefits. The Boomers will continue to impact the American culture and economy for years to come.*

While he hasn't changed his teaching style, he has observed significant change in the way students do research. “ Their research has evolved from books to computers,” he explained. “ I'll ask my students, ‘How do you know that? What are your sources?’ Every one will say, ‘I got it from the Internet.’ Every single one.”

Rodgers admits that he has to be more careful today in how he presents some of his material. “ Some of my phrases are timeworn, and I do have to watch myself [and historical materials] to make sure what I say is politically correct,” he said, recalling phrases used in World War II newspaper headlines that were then considered acceptable but today are ethnically offensive. “ That's one way that I've changed. Now I think before I say something. Or I define it beforehand so the students understand what I'm saying.”

Rodgers treasures his colleagues (who “ just keep getting younger”) and absolutely loves what he does. “ It's just ideal here. There's nothing I prefer to do,” he said. “ If I get to a point where I dread Monday or the coming of August, then I'll know it's time to move on. But I can't imagine not coming in here. I'll stay as long as teaching is fun... and as long as I can remember which classroom to go to!” ■



**Wendy Brandon**  
*Assistant Professor of Education*

Wendy Brandon admits to finding much of herself in the description of the typical Baby Boomer.

“ I was really a part of the anti-authoritarian counter-culture movement,” recalled Brandon, who marched against the Vietnam War while a student at the University of Georgia in Athens.

Born in Miami, Florida, and raised by a

Pan American pilot father and a stay-at-home mother to be independent and in charge of her own destiny, she “ was expected to go to college and have a career.” Her parents were Republican, so, of course, she became a Democrat (and is now a self-proclaimed Leftist). This environmentally conscious social activist would never drive an SUV.

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Brandon arrived on the Rollins campus in 1985, and she does what she loves. “I love what I teach. I teach about social justice issues, which is what I grew up doing . . . activism,” Brandon said. “In my department, the students are the kids who want to make things better. That’s why they want to teach. They know they’re not going to make a lot of money. They want to teach because they’re really passionate about it. Most of them want to work in urban schools where they’ll be in classes that have diversity. It’s cool to work around kids like that.”

In her nearly 20 years of teaching, Brandon has taught two generations of students—Generation X and the Millennials. She found GenX students to be more inclined to “negotiate assignments and deadlines.”

“Millennials are very obedient and polite. I always say they ‘perform politeness,’” she said. “They have definite likes and dislikes, but they won’t really tell them to you to your face. If I give them an assignment that seems like it’s too much, I think they’ll rebel, but they never do. They grumble about it when they leave.”

Last year, there was discussion about apathy on the Rollins

campus—and campuses around the nation—in light of the lack of student opposition to the War in Iraq. Brandon, however, doesn’t believe it is apathy. “I think this generation really respects authority. When you’re speaking out against America or saying ‘Bush did this and Bush did that’ and you’re being critical, the way you’re supposed to be in a democracy and at a college, they find that disrespectful and unnerving.”

She finds today’s students to be very hard workers. “Grades are everything. They ask, ‘What’s this going to count for?’ They look for extrinsic rewards as opposed to intrinsic,” she said. She also believes they prefer active learning, struggle with large reading assignments, and are very competitive. “They’re very competitive with each other. Group work is harder.”

Brandon admits she’s had a bit more difficulty connecting with the Millennials. “It’s really hard for me to be an authority figure because I want to run the class in a way that’s more egalitarian. And they really want an authority figure. Since I kind of adhere to anti-authority . . . don’t trust anyone who is an authority . . . that’s really hard for me. I just realized that,” she said in an epiphany. ■

## Generation X

*Members of the Thirteenth Generation—or Generation X—were born between 1961 and 1981. Due to the Supreme Court’s Roe v. Wade decision, this age group was affected by abortion more than any other in American history. Divorce also struck X-ers harder than any other American generation. The term Generation X actually comes from the novel of the same name by Douglas Coupland (the story of three overeducated, underemployed friends whose Bohemian lifestyle and apathy was thought to be a reflection of this generation’s attitudes). Members of this generation, however, don’t believe they are apathetic or any more laid back than the Boomers were during their own young adulthoods. X-ers had the misfortune of striking out on their own during difficult economic times. They are, therefore, cautious and somewhat pessimistic about their long-term economic prospects. Employers find them more competent in using technology but more interested in reduced work hours than increased salaries. In a volatile job market, X-ers have less faith in staying in one place for long, having seen people old enough to have draft numbers laid off after many years of service. This generation is far more technologically advanced than Boomers—the Internet is to them what television was to their predecessors.*

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**The books *The Official Guide to the Generations* by Susan Mitchell, as well as *Generations* and *Millennials Rising* by William Strauss and Neil Howe, were consulted to prepare insights into the four featured generations.**

Bill Boles clearly remembers attending a junior faculty meeting early in his Rollins career at which President Rita Bornstein asked each of the faculty members about their teaching and research. "When she asked me about my research, I said, 'I'm not really concerned about my future, I'm not concerned about my research; I'm more concerned about having the time to be at home with my wife,'" said Boles, today the proud father of 3-year-old, Emma. "I do put a lot of time in with the students, but I also want to have the time at home with my family. And that may be because, growing up, both of my parents were working. There has to be a balance."

Boles is grateful that Rollins offers that balance. And perhaps it can because it is a different kind of environment than a corporation. "There's a little more freedom here to be able to make those choices," he said, "to kind of shape your own hours."

Good for Boles and great for Rollins. Boles has what he considers probably one of the 10 best dramatic literature jobs in the country because of the freedom Rollins offers its professors to create different kinds of courses and still work within their discipline. In the fall of 2002, Boles started a film studies minor at the College, which will boast seven graduates in 2004 and already has close to 20 students. "Not a lot of places allow that kind of freedom for the faculty to develop as intellectual beings and engage with students that way. I like that a lot."

Boles respects his colleagues and enjoys working with them, but he does find a generational divide between him and some of his Boomer contemporaries. "I see a lot of my colleagues not trusting authority...questioning the dean, the provost, the president...believing that the faculty should have more involvement or more of a voice than it does," he said.



**Bill Boles**  
*Associate Professor of English*

"As I see it, that's what those people are hired to do. I don't see where the distrust lies. I don't have the suspicions they have."

And he's beginning to notice a bit of a divide with students. When Boles first arrived on campus in 1995, he was 29 years old. "The seniors were 21 or 22, so we were still in the same decade and we shared the same kind of cultural signifiers," he said. "I've noticed in the last three years there is becoming a gap—especially musically. I think we're still on the same wavelength with regard to movies and television (I'm completely hooked on those reality shows), but not with what they're listening to."

Boles finds the Millennials are a "go, go, go" generation. "They can be working on the computer, listening to music at the same time, while e-mailing their friends," he said. "They don't see that as being a negative in terms of quality of life. They can't just sit down and read a book. There has to be something going on constantly."

He's also seeing a difference in cultural references. "They've always had more entertainment choices, being raised with cable. For me, there was very little on television growing up. I learned to live with *The Andy Griffith Show* and *Sanford and Son* every day."

Boles is not sure that Millennials love their parents any more than any other generation does, but they definitely communicate with them a great deal. And the parents are very involved. "They are actively involved in their students' education in a variety of ways—from micromanaging it to the larger macro view. They ask, 'What can this student do? Where can she go with this degree? What majors does she need to think about? Here's what she's talked about doing—is it even realistic?'"

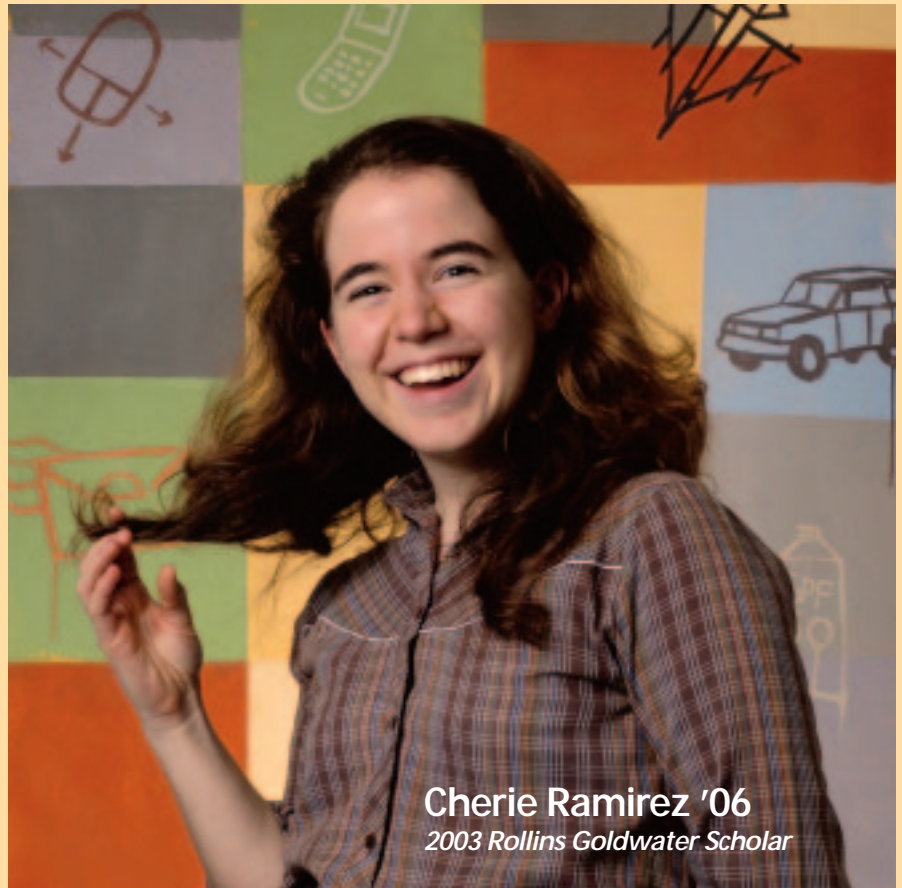
A far cry from 1984, when Boles' dad drove him to Wake Forest, walked around a little bit, and then was gone. "It is much different now." ■



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### Millennials

*While a smaller generation than the Boomers, Generation Y—more often called the Millennials—is the result of a population burst unlike any since the heyday of the baby boom. Many of their parents were born in the waning years of that first baby boom. The Millennials were born after 1982—most to parents who desperately wanted them—and into a world so different from the one their parents entered that they could be on different planets. The changes in families, the work force, technology, and demographics in recent decades no doubt has affected their attitudes. Most have mothers who work outside the home, most have had a computer in their home since elementary school, and many live in single-parent homes. They are the first generation to take the Internet for granted—for Millennials, computers are as basic a piece of equipment as the pencil and paper. In addition to being technologically adept, this generation is growing up environmentally conscious, achievement oriented, and more tolerant of racial and ethnic differences than their parents were.*



**Cherie Ramirez '06**  
2003 Rollins Goldwater Scholar

Cherie Ramirez admits she's motivated. . . actually, she says, "it runs in the family." Born in McLean, Virginia, Ramirez and her family moved to Central Florida when she was 10. In high school, through dual enrollment, she took courses in community college and earned high school and college credits at the same time. Like her older sister, Michelle '05, she was valedictorian at her high school in Celebration, Florida and entered Rollins with sufficient credits to be a junior. She believes she'll stay at Rollins for all four years, however, because Ramirez definitely "wants to experience as much during college" as she can.

A dedicated student, Ramirez is also multi-faceted. She played the flute when she was in elementary school and the trumpet in high school, and the last two semesters she took voice and piano lessons at Rollins. While never really an athlete, she decided to join the Rollins crew team. "I didn't realize how much it took. The dedication, the pressure from the coaches...it's

really incredible. It was a great life experience."

Ramirez prefers, however, to invest her time in studying. "When I don't have time to do my school work, I become an average student," she said. "I don't think that intelligence has all that much to do with it; it's the ability, and the commitment, to do the work."

Double majoring in biochemistry and classical studies, Ramirez exhibits that commitment. She says she has to. "I love learning things and being able to have intelligent conversations," she said. "Why would anyone want to be bored or just sort of float by?"

And Ramirez finds that, like most Millennials, she depends heavily on the computer. "How can you do an assignment without typing it? Even for my Latin homework, I have to have the computer in front of me so I have the dictionary, the thesaurus, and a grammatical reference," she said. "As for research, a lot of mine is on genetics,

and since that subject matter is relatively new, it's difficult to find articles in the library. I really am an Internet person."

Two of her favorite professors, Thomas Moore in physics, and Stephen Klemann in biology, are Boomers, and a third, Gretchen Meyers in Classical Studies, is an X-er. "It doesn't matter what generation the professors are from," Ramirez said. "They all have a real passion for their discipline."

Ramirez is inspired by that passion. She also says that she is a relationship person. She can't imagine why other students wouldn't want to "hang out" and connect with their professors. "Even though it's important to look at the ways that being from a certain generation affects how people act or how they view authority, it's also important not to over-generalize, to consider the person," she observed.

So what's next for Ramirez? "I may 'Rush' in the spring, just to see what it's like," she said. "And I want to study abroad. . . I want to do it all." [R](#)