

What the well-dressed teenager will be wearing

Erik Talvila February 20, 2013

Welcome everybody! Er...attention please. HELLO! PLEASE BE QUIET!! I've got this microphone as loud as it will go. Don't make me hit you with another round of Prozac mist. There, lights off. DARKNESS. That'll shut you up. Thank you for giving me your attention. And stop smooching. Okay, lights on. Hi. I'm Gavin Peabody and I am President of the NAT. Since I'm 19 years old this is definitely the last time I'll be addressing you. After that, I'll be on the *other side*... No need to boo yet.

Let's welcome the new folks. Who here is 13 years old? Let's see some hands. Or, better yet, please stand up if you're 13. Come on. I know you're gangly, embarrassed, awkward and pimply but everyone here is like that. So, this is your first NAT meeting. Great. Welcome aboard. Is anyone else here for their first meeting? That's great. Come on everyone, let's welcome all the newbies with a big hand.

This is, of course, the Annual General Meeting of the National Association of Teenagers. Besides holding a presidential election, which will happen at the end of the meeting, the most important item of business is to figure out what is going to be cool next year. Oooh, yeah. It's our job to determine what new trends all teenagers will have to follow to avoid being dorks, geeks and losers. By the end of the meeting we'll have the complete package for the 'with it' teenager of 19--. What music they listen to, how long their hair is, what slang they use, what food they eat, how they address their parents, etc., etc. Yes, question? You thought trends and styles for teens were set by rock bands, retail stores and people in California? Oh no, my dear. We set

the trends right here... Uh, yes, the stores and rock bands may *implement* our dictates but ground zero is right here. We tell them what to do. And, we happen to have some very active NAT members in California who really get things rolling there... Okay, California guys. That's enough cheering. Please don't stand on the seats. We have to pay to rent this place.

In a little while we'll be splitting into groups to work on different subcategories. There will be about 100 groups and there are about 1000 of you fuckers (That's one of last year's words! Time is running out to use it.) so there will be about 10 people per subgroup. Soon we'll be handing out ballot cards and you can rank your choice of committee from the eight major areas: Food, Hair, Clothes, Wheels, Music, Attitude, Language, Sex. The cards will then be scanned by our computer and we'll try to get as many people on their preferred committee as possible. Committee leaders from amongst the older teens have already been chosen. They'll fill you in on how each committee works and what the various subcategories are. Each of the eight major areas has many subcategories. For example, in Clothes we have Boys' Shirts. One year, that subcommittee recommended that all cool boys had to wear plaid. Who knows what it will be next year? That will be your job, to re-invent the teenager of 19--.

To help those delegates who haven't been through this process before, we've prepared a slide show of some of the highlights of previous years. Don't forget the most important criteria. Irritate adults! Make teens who don't follow the new trends feel like left-out losers! Be cool or be cast out! No paper airplanes please.

Okay, I'll just move off to the side of the stage here so you can see the

screen. First slide. 1958, Rock music. Well done. You can't get much more rebellious than that. Don't forget, before we okayed rock and roll, many teens listened to big band dance music and schlocky stuff like Frank Sinatra. 1959, drag racing. In those days, there was a committee on Dangerous Activities, now disbanded. Also from 1959, slouching. That's been a perennial favourite. Over the years, many committees have recommended slouching, dragging feet, not making eye contact when speaking with adults. It's perfectly okay to use these things again. I mean, come on, they're classics! Please, there's no need to demonstrate in the aisles. We all know what slouching looks like. And, remember, these are just two of the 1959 recommendations. That year they made several hundred recommendations. A lot of them don't sound so hot nowadays. Wearing beanie caps? Give me a break. But from 1960, the bikini! 1961, premarital sex. This was a natural outcome of the bikini. I'll jump ahead a few years here. 1968, smoking weed. 1969, dropping out of school! Also that year, bell bottoms, beads and calling everyone 'man.' 1970, long hair, dropping acid. Come on. Don't laugh at the pictures. These guys were cool back then. We don't expect every teenager to manage to do all these things. But, you're supposed to try. 1974, sleeping all day. Definitely a keeper. And fairly easy. You there in the third row. WAKE UP! From 1978, 'I'm with stupid' T-shirts and calling everybody 'turkey'. Okay, those were kind of lame. But, also that year, New Wave. Then 1983, keyboards. That unfortunately led to a lot of bad 80s music. Here's one that's been used lots of times, 'Having giant parties and wrecking your parents' house while they're away.' Ooh, that is a photo of a very trashed house. 1985, boys wearing pants half way down your butt. Somehow that didn't catch

on. Maybe it can be brought back later. Meanwhile, a big hit was 1991 with suicide. Teen suicide rates went up 17% that year. Suicide has been a strong contender many years. 1992, wearing retarded-looking wool toques all year round. Who would have guessed that would work so well. It was coupled with 'Not dressing warmly in winter.' The juxtaposition drove many parents crazy. Their kids were wearing warm toques in the summer but flimsy baseball hats in the winter. Great stuff. This was the brainchild of one our Canadian delegates. 1994, obesity! Teenage obesity went up 23% almost overnight. Well done, former teens. And shame on the losers who stayed thin that year. Ooh, she's chubby, isn't she. But that was A-OK back in '94.

Now I'll highlight some decisions from each committee that I thought were especially significant. 1977, wearing work boots and carrying Adidas gym bags. I don't get it. Look at this picture of Mr. Cool. In 1977 he was supposed to be cool? Adidas obliged by making over 20 million of these idiotic blue and red vinyl gym bags. But, so what? They were hard to carry and the handles almost always broke off. Nevertheless, they were neat, spiffy and wunderbar that year. That was from a subcommittee of the Clothing group. A few years later that subcommittee got its act together and recommended teens carry backpacks to school. Work boots fell by the wayside. Smooth move. Backpacks are very practical and were more widely adopted by girls than the Adidas bags. One year later it was ordained that all teens should carry their backpacks using only one shoulder strap. A few years later and we had backpacks *designed* with only one strap! You can see the natural evolution of an idea through the years.

Feet off the seats, please.

Here's an example of what can go wrong. 1974, streaking. You know, running nude through a public place. This was from one of the Attitude subcommittees. It was a perfectly good idea but it went mainstream. By the end of that year there were far more adult streakers than teenagers. Let's face it, most people would rather see a naked adult than a naked teen; either female because they're sexy, or male because women think men look funny without clothes on. Gotta keep it at the teen level, guys. That's the genius of the pants-at-butt-level edict. No adult male, not even someone 21, would want to look like this. Keep it teen.

Here is one that is a bit controversial, swarming from 1993. A lot of people dutifully did it. For some it was an innocent prank. A large group of teens surround some adult and pull off their shoes or rough them up a little. Others pushed it farther, robbing, beating, or even killing their victims. There was a bit of a public backlash over this one. Don't forget, although we're setting trends and telling teenagers what to do, we can't control them.

So, you can see the Attitude committee has made some pretty edgy choices in the past. In some years they've played it safe, with things like 'Don't do your household chores until mom nags you'.

Every year we have a subcommittee of the Language group come up with some new expressions. Here are a few from past years that you still hear some times: nifty, keen, far out man, dude, cool, like wow, radical, totally. One year people from the Language and Attitude groups got together, brainstormed, and came up with the idea that we should just say everything sucks. Good idea. This recommendation has been repeated several years running. Usually, there is some variation on the word 'fuck'. I introduced 'fuckening'

a couple of years ago. I'm sad to say it never really caught on. But, I still think it was a good...Hey! Don't put gum on the seats. They might charge us a clean up fee. Another subgroup of Language is graffiti. We've had some tremendous success there recently. From scrawling 'fuck' or 'Ginny does it for free' on a fence, we now have spray painted works of art on buildings, trains and bridges. Hats off to the graffiti committees of the past.

Over the years the Sex committees have advocated many things. Teen pregnancy has been put forth lots of times. Closely related is unprotected sex. But some years they recommend using condoms or coloured condoms or flavoured condoms. We've had big upswings and downswings in committee recommendations for abortions, gay sex, lesbian sex, bi-sexual behaviour. There is plenty of variety there.

Look, you guys. Feet off the seats. If we have to pay a clean up fee...

The Wheels committee has changed a lot over the years. I'd call it changing with the times. Skateboarding was recommended a lot in the early 1960s, the late 1970s and quite consistently for the past few years. The bicycle subgroup had us riding ten speed racers in the 1970s, without fenders or such useful things as front baskets or rear racks. These bikes didn't work on gravel and couldn't go over curbs. You got your butt crack wet every time you rode through a puddle. But, hey, if you want to be cool... Then committees in the 1990s brought in mountain bikes. Now we have fat tyre bikes and BMX stunt bikes with no brakes. A few years ago they had us riding coaster bikes that looked like they were from the 1950s. What teen of 1985 would have been caught dead on a coaster bike? A few years later and they're in. That's the power we have. If you're on the car subcommittee, don't forget

‘Use mom’s car without asking’. And never underestimate drunk driving or driving before you have a licence.

The Music committee has a big responsibility. Will you guys stop yelling ‘Iron Maiden’! It’s all very well to recommend The Monkees in 1966 and again in 1967. (This was also co-recommended by the television subcommittee.) But, if you accidentally catch an oldies radio show, they’re still playing The Monkees today! Decisions we make now can affect future generations for years. Our committees repeatedly tell teens that The Monkees are no longer in but we can’t control the old folks.

Various music committees of the past have made inspired choices or particularly bad ones. Madonna. We’re following in the footsteps of trendsetting geniuses. Backstreet Boys. For some of the 13 and 14 year old girls this may have been fine. For most teens, no.

The Food committee makes choices that affect our lives every day. Take ‘Getting drunk and vomiting.’ This has been recommended every year since the formation of the NAT in 1958. Of course, many twenty-somethings also do this. No matter. They may do it but we do it best. There is a certain unmatched quality to the colour and smell of the vomit of an under aged drinker. As President of the National Association of Teenagers it gives me a great feeling of accomplishment to see one of our own writhing in a parking lot at two a.m., dry heaving their guts out, knowing that ‘Party till you puke’ was one of our behaviour rules for this year. A warning, if you’re on the alcohol subcommittee, there will be great pressure to put in a ‘Get drunk and barf’ sort of thing. Previous committees have taken this as a challenge to their creativity. We’ve had rules that emphasized drinking only B-52s, or

Jägermeister, or from the parental liquor cabinet. There will be no beer at lunch. Yes, lunch is coming soon. Will you guys stop yelling 'Iron Maiden'! The delegate selection process was supposed to weed out trouble makers.

A subcommittee of Food is also responsible for smoking. Now that most adults have quit, it's a good idea for the savvy teen to take up the habit. We've also had anorexia. With mixed results, I'd say.

Hair has subcommittees on length, styles, colours, washing, beards, mustaches, side burns, head shaving, body shaving, pubic shaving, ear piercing, body piercing, tattoos, makeup, and accessories. Take colour, for example. This used to be a fairly bland subcommittee, usually just advising girls to go blonde or use a bit of henna. Then in 1978 we had a very talented group recommend punk rock hair styles. Lately, there has been a return to the strong colours mandate.

You two girls in the front row have been talking the entire time you've been here. Will you please shut up!

Here is the 1981 statement from the makeup group. 'All girls should aim for the raccoon eyes look. Wear heavy eye shadow, eye liner and mascara. This should be applied in the thickest amounts possible. Wear very dark red lipstick at all times.' This was in cooperation with an Attitude group that suggested girls who have difficulty putting on makeup in front of their parents should arrive at school early and make up in the washroom.

As delegates to the NAT you have a special responsibility. You will, of course, be making the recommendations governing all aspects of teenage life, as I've been illustrating. That will happen this afternoon, after lunch. You are also expected to be exemplary teens. This means that when we've

finalised the list of edicts, you will be the ones who immediately begin acting in the specified manner. You'll leave here with a long list of things to do. Take it to heart! You will be the trend setters and the leaders. If this year we recommend driving drunk, then get out and do it! If we recommend wearing jeans cut so low they show pubic hairs then you be the first one at your school to get a pair. Don't worry, they will be available at many stores. That is the job of the Executive Action Group. You have a heavy responsibility but I have great faith in you.

That should give you an idea of the fun ahead. Before you go to lunch, fill out your ballot cards to select which committee you want to be on. When you come back from lunch, check the boards in the hall to see which main committee you're on. You'll then meet with your committee leaders to make up the subcommittees. When you're at lunch, be sure to eat sushi, it's on the hot list for this year!