

WHERE IS MY FLYING CAR?

The future is uncertain and predictions are often wrong. Life is not like *The Jetsons*, says Terry Williams, although many bosses act like George's boss, the ill-tempered Mr Spacely.



WHAT WILL THE WORKFORCE

of the future be like? What will the future be like? If there's one thing I knew in the past about the future, which is now the present, it's that we were all supposed to have flying cars. Where is my flying car?

The problem with crystal ball gazing is that we tend to extrapolate more and slightly better versions of what we already know. Anyone surveyed in 1887 about better personal transport might've asked for bigger, stronger or sleeker horses.

The concept of an automobile probably didn't come up and an airborne one certainly didn't. The same limitations subvert and constrict our predictions about future workforces.

There'll be robots of course, obviously.

PILOT PROGRAMME

Back in the 1950s, Ford had refitted one of its factories with the first machines as part of a pilot programme to automate the car manufacturing process. The machines didn't shout "Run, Will Robinson!", nor have any awareness of Asimov's laws of robotics, but they were certainly predecessors of workplace robots.

A union chief and a manager who may or may not have been Henry Ford's grandson were touring the factory. Jokingly the boss quipped how unlikely it would be if any of these robots would ever pay any union dues.

The union boss quipped back,

not so jokingly, how unlikely it would be if any of these robots would ever buy a car.

Point well made sir. That future is now our present.

Amazon.com's proposed airborne drones delivering their packages would mean fewer drivers and logistics staff. Although, there may be an increase in jobs repairing drones when they're shot down by teenage boys, and more jobs in healthcare when drone rotor blades start injuring customers.

MORE OPTIONS

In the future, the truly talented will have more options. They don't have to work for you. They could work for themselves, work overseas, trade online ...

They could work for themselves, work overseas, trade online AND work for you at the same time, but how engaged would they be with your work?

I think the employers who can figure out a simple and effective way of managing those people in that messy network will have some really motivated and talented people making some amazing things happen.

Those who let it happen but don't manage it will have some burnt-out and conflicted zombies on their hands.

So, the future will have robots AND zombies, obviously.

The fortune tellers of carnivals and psychic mediums on television have their little tricks, starting with fuzzy universal generalities then

narrowing down as more specific info is fed from naive and subconsciously collusive marks. So too do futurists.

SOCIAL HR

A popular pick for the near future for employers amongst business futurists is the rise of 'Social HR.' How can everyone being up to their armpits in social media be leveraged by employers?

The seeds of this lay in simple checking of potential employees on Facebook to see what percentage of their time was spent comatose, naked and/or fixating on kittens but, according to the futurists, you'll need to do more in the future.

Next meeting you have, suggest to the team that you must "integrate social technologies into our recruitment, development and engagement practices!" I'm not entirely sure what that entails but I've got you started, I'm sure you and the team can firm up the details—unless you're a "digital immigrant" struggling to fit in.

Forty-seven percent of Millennials now say a prospective employer's online reputation matters as much as the job it offers. (A 'Millennial' is a young person. They are digital natives.)

If you are talented and you've got your online act together, the 'Big Data' future means potential employers will be able to find you specifically before you even knew you were looking for a job you didn't know existed.

It's like how when you change your Facebook status to single, suddenly the ads change to dating sites and antidepressants. It'll be the same with jobs except you won't have to change your status, the cloud will already know. In the future, breakups won't be "It's not you, it's me," they'll be, "It's not us, it's Google."

ARTISTS' IMPRESSIONS

A common form of futurism is those billboards near prospective construction sites and building developments—artists' impressions of what it will all look like when it's finished and no longer a messy, noisy moonscape.

In those artist's impressions, the sun is always shining, the grass couldn't possibly be greener, the people are all energetically happy consumers and racially and socially diverse. Traffic is perfect and there is plenty of parking.

I think the same artists also produce the pictures of hamburgers in the big brand burger outlets. Structurally sound, gigantic and shiny with nary an asymmetric sesame seed to be seen. Your odds of actually receiving a burger that looks like that are the same as me getting my flying car. 

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