

Wednesday, February 27, 2008

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CURRENT ISSUE



Mary Crane

- [Bridge the Latest Generation Gap](#)
- [Walker, Davis: Pair Of Giants Exit The Scene](#)
- [The Budget News: IT Continues to Rise](#)
- [All Cloudy On the Personnel Front](#)

PREVIOUS ISSUES

- [February 6, 2008](#)
- [January 23, 2008](#)
- [January 8, 2008](#)
- [December 15, 2007](#)

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- [Unsubscribe](#)

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TOM TEMIN - A trusted member of the Federal community, Tom has had a seat at the table from which to inform us on the issues of the day for more than 16 years. As the editor of FedInsider.com, Tom will continue to bring you viewpoints on the issues of the day. [Read Tom's Bio.](#)

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[BRIDGE THE LATEST GENERATION GAP](#)

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[WALKER, DAVIS: PAIR OF GIANTS EXIT THE SCENE](#)

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Complete Articles for February 27, 2008

■ [Bridge the Latest Generation Gap](#)

In many ways, the government is the ultimate sandwich generation. You know, struggling to take care of its aging folks while figuring out how to cater to the younger generation.

That's true not only for the citizens at large, but also for the federal workforce. The federal government has a constant need to refresh its ranks with new talent. Attracting recent college graduates and slightly older, but still young, people has become something of a cottage industry.

Recent studies, including research done by the Partnership for Public Service in Washington, show that young people in many ways aren't that much different from anyone else. They want good pay and benefits, reasonable job stability, and the chance to make a contribution to the organization that hires them. Those factors would seem to mitigate in favor of federal employment.

But where baby boomers and their forebears might have seen a federal job as a good place to make the mortgage payments and look forward to a secure retirement, such inducements mean much less to those born between 1976 and 1982.

This generation, roughly 30 percent of the U.S. population, "is entering the work force with high expectations," says Mary Crane. Crane is proprietor of a Washington, D.C. [consultancy](#) bearing her name. Crane—who will be speaking at the upcoming [IRMCO](#) conference—has spent considerable time studying this fascinating group.

"This is the most technology savvy generation the country has seen," Crane says. "They are looking for a workplace with up-to-date IT. They have been connected and online since the day they put their hands on a keyboard." For most them, that means about the time they stood up and started walking.



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Mary Crane
Bridging the Generation Gap

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Deputy Commissioner, Information and Communications Technologies, New Zealand

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That might be obvious to anyone observing such people intently thumbing on their communication devices. But there are more subtle cultural differences between the '76-'82 generation and those still around to supervise them.

"Boomer bosses came up expecting a lot of face time" with their own bosses as well as their subordinates. Lots of time jawing with the boss for generation y-ers? Fugettabout it, says Crane. For them, even coming to the office on a 5-day, nine-to-five basis seems strange. If you are connected and engaged, what does it matter where you work, they ask.

"They need to understand, a little face time is needed," Crane says.

Crane describes the y-ers as the T-ball generation. They grew up working in teams. That means supervisors should look for ways to foster teams, whose members may not even care about having a private office.

They also value so-called green workplaces. Crane says a survey of summer associates at a major law firm revealed the Number One complaint was that the conference room lacked a recycling bin.

Crane counsels supervisors to become more coach-like and less boss-like. She points out, when boomers entered the work force there was high unemployment and inflation. People figured, "If I'm lucky enough to have a job, I'll do anything to keep it." Crane adds, "Now we have to encourage people to stay with us. This generation is looking for a tremendous amount of feedback. 'If there's a problem I'll let you know' won't work."

Be sure to check out Mary Crane herself. A Midwesterner who went to George Washington law school in D.C., she subsequently trained at the Culinary Institute of America in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., eventually becoming executive chef to First Lady Hillary Clinton. This work led to a consulting practice that includes business and social etiquette.

Young people "are often aware they don't know the rules, but are afraid of asking about them," Crane says.

[Return to top](#)

■ Walker, Davis: Pair Of Giants Exit The Scene

Whatever preoccupation federal managers may have had with the presidential primary drama in mid-February, it was likely eclipsed by the departures of two giants.

One was Rep. Tom Davis, the Northern Virginia Republican who chaired then became ranking minority member of the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee. The other was David M. Walker, Comptroller General, leaving the Government Accountability Office with five years left on his term.

What do these departures mean?

Davis, who will of course remain in office until his term expires in just under a year, has a deep understanding of and enthusiastic interest the nuts and bolts of government management—acquisition, IT, work force issues, outsourcing and the District of Columbia. (And baseball, bless his heart.) He maintained a deft balance between the needs of career government managers and the contracting community on which the government has become completely dependent.

When General Services Administration chief Lurita Doan got into hot water last year over a spat with her department's inspector general, Davis provided a balance Waxman (D-Calif.) Waxman, who suspects scandal and abuse in almost everything, grilled Doan. Davis' questioning showed the IG was no choir boy.

Davis has anointed Rep. Darrell Issa of California vast 49th district. I interviewed Issa Feb. 15 on Federal News Radio AM 1050 and he appears to have a grasp of the issues affecting feds. Note, too, that among his accomplishment, [Issa](#) founded a company called Directed Electronics, which made automotive technology products, and was chairman of the Consumer Electronics Association.

David Walker's sudden announcement on Feb. 15 was not, in retrospect, a huge surprise. Walker, an auditor's auditor, was appointed to the 15-year Comptroller's job by President Bill Clinton in 1998. In recent years he has tangled with GAO's professional staff to the point where they joined a union and recently ratified a pay increase that matches what other feds in D.C. are getting but was higher than Walker wanted. Moreover, Walker was restless with his own boss—the U.S. Congress—for its inaction on addressing the actuarial deficits looming for the nation's entitlement programs. His [Fiscal Wake Up Tour](#) and award-winning documentary movie in which he starred, "[I.O.U.S.A.](#)" couldn't quite satisfy his urge to speak out even more