

FLASH *FORWARD*

Ever wonder what the working world will look like in 35 years? Here's a peek at 10 trends shaping the offices, tools, and work practices of the future. BY MICHELLE GOODMAN

ROBOTS as co-workers. Staff meetings populated by holograms. Women outnumbering men in boardrooms around the globe.

It may sound like the stuff of sci-fi movies. But if the business world's leading futurists are on the money, these are just a handful of the workplace trends coming soon to an office near you.

To mark NAFE's 35th anniversary, we asked several leading futurists and trend watchers to give us their top workplace predictions for the next 35 years. Here's what career women can expect to see in the year 2042.

1 THE DEATH OF CUBICLES.

IN THE BRAVE new work world of 2042, flexibility will be king (and mobility queen), say the experts. With a majority of information workers—rather than today's lucky few—working when and where they want, the cubicle will mercifully be put out of its misery and the once-coveted corner office will lose its appeal.

Of course office life as we know it won't entirely vanish, says Maddy Dychtwald, author of *Cycles: How We Will Live, Work, and Buy* and co-founder of **Age Wave**, a San Francisco-based think tank that studies the aging population. Social creatures to the core, we'll visit the mothership periodically to collaborate with colleagues and converse with someone other than our computer. But rather than today's fixed office spaces, "there will be pods set up that people can use, and you'll put your name on the door for the day," Dychtwald says.



TO 2042



2. THE RISE OF ROBOTS.

THIRTY-FIVE YEARS FROM now, “some of your most important colleagues may not be human,” says Paul Saffo, a technology forecaster who teaches at Stanford University. In fact, robots will be as prevalent in the workplace as today’s PCs.

This doesn’t mean you’ll be making water cooler banter with HAL 9000’s cousin. According to Saffo, we’re probably 100 years away from seeing robots in the office with intelligence indistinguishable from our own. Instead, he says, physical robots in the workplace will resemble “Roomba on steroids.”

But the real robot revolution will be online. The “electronic advisors” we’ll rely on most at work will be web-based software bots that fill support, logistical, and decision-making roles. And playing nice with them will be key: “Without a doubt,” Saffo says, “these robots will contribute to your job evaluation.”

3. THE STAFF MEETING WILL BE HELD ON THE HOLODECK.

GOOD NEWS FOR those who dread attending Monday morning staff meetings: In 35 years, you’ll be able to make like Princess Leia of *Star Wars* and “beam” yourself to the conference room via hologram, says Dr. James Canton, author of *The Extreme Future: The Top Trends That Will Reshape the World for the Next 5, 10, and 20 Years* and founder of the San Francisco-based **Institute for Global Futures**. And while no one (except maybe Steve Jobs) can predict what smart devices we’ll see in 2042, Canton says such telepresence technology is just the tip of the advanced mobility iceberg.



4. BIG BROTHER SQUARED.

MOVE OVER, MICROSOFT. Step aside, Walmart. “If you think we’ve seen the biggest of big companies, you ain’t seen nothing yet,” Saffo says. “The biggest companies of this new economy are going to grow by accessing the many and the small,” similar to how Amazon and eBay aggregate their armies of users and reviewers.

But don’t expect these mega-conglomerates to be local. “The big organizations that we see in the future are going to come out of places like China and India,” says Jennifer Jarratt, principal at **Leading Futurists**, a Washington, DC-based think tank.

5. THINK LOCAL, WORK GLOBAL.

IN THIS SUPERSIZED marketplace, cultivating firsthand knowledge of other countries and cultures won’t just be the domain of journalists, politicians, and international business majors. “Many more people will spend part of their careers in another country or working globally,” Jarratt says. What’s more, they’ll regularly collaborate with multilingual teams spanning several continents, Canton says.

6. THE RIGHT-BRAINED SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH.

“TO SURVIVE OVER the next few decades, people are going to have to do work that’s hard to outsource and hard to automate,” says Dan Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*. “Abilities characteristic of the right hemisphere—artistry, empathy, inventiveness, big-picture thinking—will be the ones that matter most.”

In 2042, being a marketing maven or a technological innovator will only be half the picture, says Jarratt. For example, creative thinkers who can turn the massive amounts of data culled by sites like Google and LinkedIn

It won't be a big deal having a female boss. It will be the status quo.

into new products, services, marketing campaigns, and companies will be in the catbird seat.

7. FREE AGENT NATION 2.0.

ACCORDING TO STAFFING agency Kelly Services, one-fifth of today's workers are free agents—temps, contractors, freelancers, and small business owners. By 2042, Saffo says, job security will have become a distant memory and we'll see “mass customized employment,” where a majority of workers choose from a smorgasbord of projects, schedules, workspaces, and benefits packages. “It will be like going through a cafeteria line and saying, ‘I'll take this and I'll take that,’” he says.

“Gone are the days of the patriarchal workforce where the company takes care of you,” Dychtwald says. Portable health and retirement perks that you manage yourself and carry from job to job—whether you're an employee or otherwise—will become standard.

8. SEVENTY IS THE NEW 30.

IN 2042, “MIDDLE age will be in your 70s,” says Canton, who anticipates that medical advances will boost life expectancy to age 130. More conservative estimates still have us leaving today's average expiration date of 78 in the dust: The National Institute of Health gives seniors in the year 2025 a life expectancy of 90 to 95 years, notes Age Wave's Dychtwald.

No matter how you do the math, when you factor in today's declining birth rate (and the impending

talent shortage), you get a 2042 workforce that relies on the 55+ crowd just as heavily as its youngest workers, Dychtwald says. Long story short: The retirement age rises, and people enjoy multiple careers throughout their lives.



9. SEE THE GALAXY! WORK IN SPACE!

NOT SURPRISINGLY, “the largest marketplace in the 21st century is going to be health enhancement, predicting and preventing disease,” Canton says. Other hot jobs will involve managing climate change and developing green technologies and alternative fuels. But the sexiest gigs of 2042 may be out of this world: By then, Canton predicts, the space tourism industry will have taken off and people will be working in space architecture and space agriculture.



10. THE GLASS CEILING SHATTERED.

THE WRITING'S ON the, uh, ceiling: Today's women not only graduate from college at a higher rate than men, we've begun to out-earn them. By 2042, the futurists say, the glass ceiling will be a historical footnote and we'll be filling up those virtual board rooms like nobody's business.

“The workforce is going to be female led,” Dychtwald says. “You'll see more women out-earning men in their families, more men opting out. It won't be a big deal having a female boss. It will be the status quo.”

Michelle Goodman is the author of The Anti 9-to-5 Guide: Practical Career Advice for Women Who Think Outside the Cube (Seal Press, 2007).

ISTOCKPHOTO