

★ Millennials and their Impact on the Workplace¹

The Editor would like to thank Les Pickett, who has very kindly allowed us to reprint his presentation to participants in an executive roundtable at Victoria University.



In a presentation this year at Victoria University for the executive roundtable discussion at Office of Knowledge Exchange and Industry, Australia, I said:

“The earth beneath the feet of the workplace as we know it is shifting. As they have done throughout every stage of their lives Millennials are impacting the world around them.

“They are refusing to adapt to age-old models and assumptions and are insisting – either directly or by virtue of their non-conformity – that the status quo change to meet their needs”.

It is critically important that organisations invest both time and money in both listening to their people and conducting research and analysis into what drives and motivates them.

Learning and development professionals have an important role to play in optimising the potential contribution of the Millennial – aka Gen Y – generation.

What we know about Millennials in the workplace

The NextGen study conducted PwC, the University of Southern California and the London Business School attracted more than 40,000 responses.

This makes it the largest and most current global intergenerational study conducted into the attitude of the “Millennial” generation (those born between 1980 and 1995 and currently under 33 years of age).

The survey findings both confirm and dispel stereotypes about Millennials and provide compelling advice and guidance on how employers need to modify their companies to accommodate the demands of both Millennial and non-Millennial employees. Survey highlights:

- Many Millennial employees are not convinced that excessive work demands are worth the sacrifices to their personal life
- Millennials want more flexibility, the opportunity to change hours. They do not believe that productivity should be measured by the number of hours worked at the office but by the output of the work performed
- They tend not to place as much emphasis on pay and development opportunities as do non-Millennials. They are more likely to leave if their needs for support, appreciation and flexibility are not met. Non-Millennials are more likely to leave if they feel that are not being paid competitively or due to a perceived lack of development opportunities
- Many are prepared to give up pay and delay promotions in order to have a more flexible work schedule. 15% of male employees and 21% of female employees said that they would give up some of their pay and slow the pace of promotion in exchange for fewer working hours
- Millennials place a high priority on workplace culture and desire a workplace that emphasises teamwork and a sense of community

¹ This article is based on two survey reports that the author feels should be read and studied by senior executives & HR professionals.

- Although they have a natural aptitude for electronic forms of communication, email and social media platforms are not always their communication vehicles of choice especially when it comes to discussions with their managers about their careers
- They value transparency especially as it relates to decisions about their careers, compensation and rewards
- They want to have input into their work assignments and need the ongoing support of their supervisors
- Millennials expect that technology will be integrated into the workplace to provide greater flexibility and increased efficiency. They expect to have access to the best tools for collaboration and execution.

“I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on the frivolous youth of today, for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words. When I was young we were taught to be discreet and respectful of elders but the present youth are exceedingly disrespectful and impatient of restraint”.

Hesiod, circa 750-650BC

While there is a common perception that Millennials are not as committed or as hard working as their more senior colleagues the study effectively busted this myth by revealing that Millennials are as equally committed to their work.

What organisations can learn from the NextGen study is to:

- Address the overwhelming desire for enhanced work/life balance understanding that productive employees are not exclusively those who work long hours
- Create a flexible work culture giving employees options for work schedules and locations
- Balance the integration of technology into the workplace enabling workers to harness technology in ways that give them greater flexibility and increase efficiency
- Take the mystery out of career decisions by providing greater transparency on decisions related to career development and giving employees more opportunities to explore overseas assignments
- Build a sense of community emphasising teamwork, appreciation and support from supervisors
- Understand the generational differences that are in play and manage employees on a personal level so that their own individual needs are met
- Leverage Millennials as a positive factor when developing a contingent workforce strategy
- Utilise objective based individual development plans that are prepared in consultation with individual employees.

This will provide organisations with better control over variable costs and enable a more flexible dynamic workforce, able to be scaled up or down to meet changing organisational needs.

“What is happening to our young people? They disrespect their elders, they disobey their parents. They ignore the law. They riot in the streets inflamed with wild notions. Their morals are decaying. What is to become of them?”

Plato, 429-347BC

An Australian Perspective

Further, the Australian Institute of Management (AIM) surveyed 2,223 business professionals. In their report, published in 2013, they found that Australian Gen Ys, aged between 18 and 33, are:

- the age group least concerned about the future of their organisation

- more likely than other age groups to resign over the next six months
- more likely than any other age group to say they are 'bored' and 'disengaged' with their current job
- more likely than any other age group to believe it is important to be liked in the workplace
- more likely than any other age group to want acknowledgement for their work
- least likely to hold positions that are interesting and challenging
- the group that values training the most and they are most likely to believe that their employer should pay for it.

Developing Millennials into leaders

The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) conducted its own survey to find out how organisations are preparing the millennial generation to manage and lead effectively now and in the future with 592 business and learning professionals participating.

In this study, Millennials are defined as those born between 1977 and 1997. They are highly qualified in technical skills, socially networked but not necessarily socially savvy.

They are entering the workforce lacking the skills and competencies they need and are moving into management roles without adequate preparation.

They need to work on their communication, listening, patience, relationship building and diplomacy capabilities according to a survey conducted by American Society for Training and Development in partnership with the Institute for Corporate Productivity.

As a group their diversity, creativity, technological skills and know-how is unprecedented but they are perceived by other generations in the workforce as lacking in soft skills.

"Millennials are a generation mostly of teens and 20 somethings known for constantly holding up cameras, taking pictures of themselves and posting them online. They are narcissistic, overconfident, entitled and lazy. Their self-centeredness could bring about the end of civilization as we know it or they're the new greatest generation" *Joel Stein, Time, 20 May 2013*

Millennials want more from their work than to simply make a living – they want to make an impact.

But the generation that is beginning to lead businesses now and will increasingly do so into the coming decade needs support in developing leadership competencies. They want to work for those organisations that will invest in them as they shape their careers and their lives at work.

Many survey respondents reported that they believe programmes designed to meet the needs of Millennials are of critical importance in the current landscape in which linear career paths are a relic of the past.

Like many others Millennials want a clearly defined path for advancement with frequent and clear performance appraisals, clear and specific expectations, mentoring programmes, coaching and training and opportunities to learn more.

These expectations are sometimes interpreted by members of other generation groups who see Millennials as wanting a fast track to the executive suite, constant recognition and validation and rewards whether they had earned them or not.

Millennials have grown up in a period of breakneck technological advancement, global terrorism and prolonged economic uncertainty. They are coming out of universities with unprecedented debt burden and trying to enter a tighter job market than any generation in recent history has encountered.

They live digital lives, are hyper connected, are open to change and are accepting of diversity. They want to make an impact by doing meaningful and valuable work.

Well over half of the respondents to the ASTD survey said that Millennials require specialised leadership development while around thirty percent said that they do not need specially designed leadership development programmes to succeed.

This is both a critical challenge and an opportunity for the senior executive team.

“The world is passing through troublous times. The young people of today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient on all restraint. They talk as if they know everything and what passes for wisdom with us is foolishness with them. As for the girls they are forward, immodest and unladylike in speech, behaviour and dress”.

From a sermon by Peter The Hermit 1274AD

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