



MILLENNIALS 101

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT
THE CHARACTERISTICS,
DIFFERENCES, AND GOALS OF THE
NEW WORKING GENERATION

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Millennials 101

It's happening, the last of the millennials are entering the working world in full force. Millennials, otherwise known as Generation Y adults, are those individuals born between 1980 and 2000, and are roughly between the ages of 36 and 16. Employers are beginning to realize they may need to make changes to their business in order to attract these bright new minds, but where do they start?

Considering characteristics of millennial workers, their differences from other generations, and what these young professionals want from their careers will help prepare executives, managers, and older coworkers to work effectively with these new minds. If business leaders gain an understanding of what drives the new generation of workers, they can better attract these young professionals and ensure the company and all its employees are able to work together by adapting to the different work styles.

What Are Their Qualities?

By observing the qualities that make millennials "millennials," business leaders can be prepared for the integration of a new generation of workers. Millennials have often been associated with various negative adjectives like laziness and narcissism, however these generations also have some admirable qualities that cannot be ignored. Generation Y workers tend to be self-confident, open to feedback, and technologically savvy. Because their understanding of technology has habituated them to

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access information instantly, millennials want constant learning and question everything. They often ask "why" but this should not be taken as disrespectful or rude, in most instances millennials want these answers in order to connect their task with the bigger picture or goal. A way to combat an overload of questions is to ensure transparency on company projects and goals. A National Society of High School Scholars (NSHSS) survey says "adding transparency to short and long term goals gives millennials a sense of purpose, because they can see what they're striving for, what their peers and even managers are working on, and how their work fits into the bigger picture."⁵ Leaders who provide transparency make overarching goals of the business clear to millennials and may even answer their questions before they can think of them.

These young workers learn quickly, enjoy working on a team, and feel comfortable taking risks. They also embrace diversity, support green initiatives, and want their work to be meaningful. Having been exposed to

the realities of things such as terrorism, crashing economies, and the deterioration of our planet since a young age, Generation Y individuals have a greater-than-expected realization of the hardships in the world. This idea, along with their compassionate qualities, add to the notion the younger generation is more civic-minded in their outlook on life.¹ They care about the community and want their work to reflect that idea. Millennials also tend to like informality, which can sometimes cause them to be outspoken or blunt. These terms may carry a negative connotation, however younger workers view this outspokenness as being truthful and innovative rather than insolent or impolite.

The younger generation tends to dislike rigidity and slow paces in their workplace, feeling that these components limit their creative abilities. According to a Millennial Branding study, 2/3 of millennials say they enjoy multitasking.² Allowing these new, young workers to multitask and stay busy means more work gets done at one time and the creative juices keep flowing. Millennials also dislike being talked down to simply because of their age or lack of experience. They have innovative ideas and new skills to offer and want to feel like their views are appreciated and taken seriously.

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By knowing the attributes, likes, and dislikes of the millennial generation, employers are better equipped to keep their young employees engaged which leads to increased retention. In a time when so many different generations of employees are working together, it's important to understand how these various qualities will affect the workplace and how these individuals will get along with others. The millennial qualities bring an efficient pace and honest feedback into the workplace, but their ideas and personalities may clash with previous generations.

What's The Difference?

While each generation is too-often stereotyped by certain qualities, there are some key differences commonly recognized between the various age groups. Quite often, there are discrepancies between the older and younger generations about the millennials' eagerness to advance. For instance, while some baby boomers may feel the younger generations are resisting structure and authority by trying to evade the chain of command, the millennials may feel they will never see the day when an older manager or executive retires and vacates their upper-level position.⁷ This difference can give rise to retention issues as young professionals feel they are not able to advance in their companies because older generations already hold the high-level positions. To prevent this issue from forming, employers should do their best to create

equal advancement opportunities for all employees. By offering growth opportunities to everyone, and not just those who have been in the business longer, employers make millennials feel valuable to the industry while also showing them there are opportunities for development. Likewise, this also ensures the employer fills the vacancy with the individual best-fit for that position, not just someone who has been there long enough to deserve it.

Another common difference between varying age groups is their attitude towards change. Individuals in the older generations are perceived to be reluctant to change and content with the way they do their jobs. On the other hand, younger workers are often seen as constantly eager to try new ideas.⁷ Finding a good balance between progressive change and already-in-place practices can begin to help employers manage this problem. Giving all employees time to incorporate any changes into their habits and procedures eases the transition and also creates an opportunity for mentoring. Millennials can help older generations understand the new changes and older generations can help millennials incorporate those new ideas into established procedures. Change is inevitable and if management can motivate their employees to be accepting of the adjustments and work together when dealing with the new notions, all employees can begin to enjoy adapting new ideas.

Different generations may have dissimilar definitions of workplace qualities. An example is how these generations view the qualities of a dedicated employee. “Older generations may view willingness to work long hours, professionalism and punctuality as defining employee dedication, while younger generations seem more likely to view dedication in relation to the quality and quantity of work completed” says an article from the Society for Human Resources Management.⁷ The same report also discusses how the differing generations define what a work day looks like because there are often times discrepancies between coworkers on acceptable work hours. Older generations may view a typical work day as in the office from nine to five.



However, younger generations may view their work hours as less traditional, coming into the office only when necessary or starting and ending different work days at different times. It's difficult to change how certain people define a good employee, but ensuring that everyone is meeting their deadlines and contributing to the

company in a productive manner can ease these differences. Having the

company focus on the quality completion of projects, rather than hours in the office or time spent on projects, gives workers a common goal to strive toward and can motivate everyone to work together.

A more expected difference between older and younger generations is found in their use of technology. According to a survey report conducted by the Society of Human Resource Management, 45% of employees responded that coworkers from other generations were over/under reliant on technology.⁷ While older workers may view many meetings and discussions as better communication, millennials may view emails or collaborative documents as easier to work with. Finding a happy medium for required technology use at the office can decimate strains between the generations while still keeping the workplace up-to-date on modern business practices. Allowing individuals to communicate the way they prefer, when appropriate, can also keep differences from escalating. Recently, a Millennial Branding study revealed that contrary to assumption that young workers want a continuous connection to technology, a majority of Generation Y respondents said they prefer in-person communication with managers.² This demonstrates that regardless of age, the real use of technology in communication differs from person to person. Just because the millennial generation has a stereotype of being constantly connected to their electronics does not mean all millennials fall under that category in all circumstances. The only way to know how your millennial employees, as well as other employees, use their gadgets is through communication. Employers could utilize such tactics as in-office surveys to find out how their employees prefer to communicate. Learning about how your workforce uses their technology will help employers gain an understanding of how the employees operate and what they can do to be better communicators.

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What Do They Want?

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What grabs the attention of a millennial employee? There are many benefits and conditions that excite these individuals, but the criteria that draws in the most millennial professionals is the ability to advance in their careers. A study performed by the Boston College Center for Work and Family states that when it comes to selecting an employer, the most important criteria for millennials is career growth opportunities.³ Forbes magazine attests that “one of the primary reasons

millennials are more likely to change jobs is because they are not willing to stick around if they do not believe they are receiving any personal benefit or growth. If a millennial employee feels like their bosses are invested in their personal growth they will be more likely to develop a stronger relationship not just with the company but with the people in it.”⁴ By demonstrating a concern for employee development, companies build their reputation as an employer with new opportunities to give and ensure their employees stay happy and properly challenged in the workplace. If there are chances for development and new positions in the future, under a leader who wants success for all his or her employees, millennials will not feel a need to leave a company.

Another way to gain points with potential millennial employees is to foster a strong culture of work-life balance. Millennials are big believers in the saying “work to live, not live to work” and look for companies who understand the importance of seizing all life has to offer. In the recent NSHSS survey, 68.1% of respondents said that work-life balance was the most important work atmosphere and environment factor in choosing an employer.⁵ Here at Helios, we prefer to call this balance work-life integration. Our CEO Kathy Albarado understands it’s nearly impossible for your life not to affect your work, so she invites all her employees to be appropriately open about their personal lives. Kathy recognizes that sometimes home happens at work and work happens at home, so she allows her employees to focus on imperative, personal responsibilities so long as their work responsibilities are covered. This tactic builds relationships between individuals and makes employees feel less pressure about balancing their personal lives with their professional ones. One way to show your millennial employees you care about their work-life balance is by instituting flexible work hours. In the same survey, 69.6% of respondents said the biggest perk they look for when choosing an employer is a flexible work schedule.⁵ Another way to promote work-life balance is to incorporate certain benefits or paid time off procedures that not only meet market standards, but exceed them. These policies can put less pressure on workers, motivate them to be more vigilant about completing assignments, and allow them to enjoy their work time and their free time. The policies will also help millennials recognize their boss views them as more than an employee, but as a person with a life outside of the office too.

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Generation Y workers also look for positive management when job hunting. Knowing their employer cares about their personal and professional goals motivates young workers to achieve the goals they've set for themselves and that have been set for them. A study conducted by AARP says that "millennials tend to be motivated when their managers connect their actions to their personal and career goals."¹ By acknowledging a young person's contribution to a project and connecting that task back to their predetermined goals, employers allow for the young worker to learn, connect ideas to the big picture, and strive toward

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the next goal, all while demonstrating caring beyond the completion of a task. Having discussions and knowing their employer cares about their goals makes the employer more approachable and more favorable to the employees. Forbes describes how millennials are no longer interested in a boss, but more so a coach. "Millennial employees expect greater accessibility to the leadership in their offices and are looking for more mentorship rather than just direction" states the article.⁴ Having managers advising and communicating with

these young people, rather than just telling them what to do, builds their self-esteem and encourages them to tackle new projects in the future. Millennials also like feedback, positive or negative, to ensure all the correct steps are being taken and all the correct procedures are being followed. Having a leader who coaches instead of bosses allows for the natural flow of feedback and strengthens the relationship between management and others in the company. If executives and managers are willing to really motivate, excite, and coach their employees, millennials and other generations of coworkers will excel.

Knowing millennials are civic-minded can help employers understand their new employees are seeking a career which gives them a sense of purpose. Young professionals are eager to make a difference and want to see how their company or organization can benefit the greater good. Many are interested in businesses with strong corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices or those that are enthusiastically involved in community or charity work. In the NSHSS survey, almost half of those asked about company image and perception reported CSR as a main factor when choosing an employer.⁵ CSR develops goodwill with clients, creates an opportunity to bring media attention to your business, builds employee leadership skills, and facilitates team building. At Helios, we frequently substitute typical team building dinners and activities with events that allow us to give back to the community instead. Our team has

done such things as plant gardens at homeless shelters, sit on community boards and committees, host donation challenges, and volunteer at local fundraising events. These activities not only help our employees bond with one another, but they also help us connect with our community and benefit the greater good. The key to promoting a strong sense of social responsibility is by incorporating the idea into the culture of the

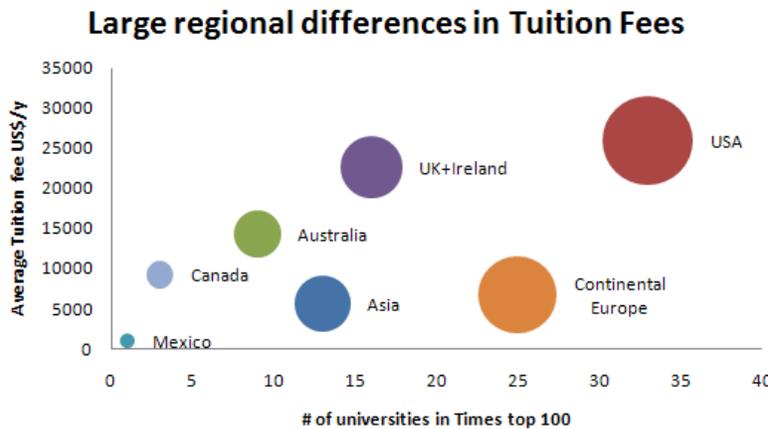
company. Many businesses create CSR committees that focus on what the organization can be doing to give back and help connect their business with others in the community. They create fun ways for the company and its employees to volunteer their time in a meaningful way, and ensure the company is benefiting



from their charitable actions. Energizing employees to become involved can be difficult but if the ideas are supported by top leaders in the company, employees will begin to develop a positive attitude about these initiatives. By endorsing acts of corporate social responsibility, employers demonstrate to the millennial generation their business is about more than just profits. This appeals to the civic-minded millennials and gives them a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

The ideas of work-life balance, caring employers, and a sense of purpose also contribute to the greater idea of a positive company culture. Millennials want to enjoy coming to work every day, and employers can make that happen with an inviting workplace. The NSHSS survey reports that environmental responsibility, commitment to global sustainability, and national and financial security are all factors that make a place of business attractive to new, young employees.⁵ Beyond that, many offices add nontraditional perks such as break rooms with video games or Ping-Pong tables, candy walls, and casual dress codes to attract millennials. These types of rewards benefit all employees and allow workers to be relaxed, take a break to clear their minds, and ease their restless legs for a few minutes before returning to work. By instituting similar policies, and thus loosening up the workplace, you invite your employees to get their work done comfortably and develop a positive workplace culture that stimulates all individuals.

An important benefit that is enticing millennials across the globe is monetary aid. The two biggest types of this aid often come in the form of student loan aid or housing aid. An article by the Society for Human Resources Management writes “Help with student loan and housing costs, and other nontraditional benefits, is being offered by more employers to attract and retain the best and brightest young employees. Particularly in the case of educational loans, the need for assistance is staggering.”⁶ Currently the total United States student debt is \$1.2 trillion and the average student debt for a 2014 college graduate is \$33,000.⁶



Employers can make themselves more appealing by offering student loan payment options or even money toward degree advancements, such as finishing an undergraduate degree or obtaining a graduate one. Not only is the employer ensuring he or she is

hiring people with the proper education for the position, but providing student loan aid demonstrates to employees their employer cares about the growth and education of their people, and is willing to make an investment in their workforce. Another important monetary aid for millennials is relocation and housing support. For young professionals just entering the workforce, housing subsidies can go a long way in making an employer look alluring. Again, this sends the message the employer is willing to make an investment in their workforce and dedicated to the success of their employees, but it also makes millennial employees feel valued since they are getting a different type of monetary support. These benefits could be circumstantial and/or regulated by certain time periods or conditions, but just the notion of offering these opportunities to a new, young worker helps them start off their careers on the right financial foot.

The final key to attracting millennials may be a more obvious one-technology. Providing access to the most cutting edge of technologies and gadgets really draws the interest of this new generation. The Millennial Branding study states that 81% of Generation Y respondents like to work with technology to help them accomplish their goals.² To many, this comes as no surprise since millennials have had access to such technologies since childhood. Updating software, machinery, and office electronics puts these young workers in their element while also making things more efficient for the company. As an added bonus, millennials are often quick to understand and work with new technologies. Having this

generation in the office means there is someone around to understand the new tools and help others understand them as well.

Millennials understand these benefits will not simply be handed to them by a company or employer; they realize they're going to have to work to earn certain rewards. But if managers and executives can treat those in this young workforce like individuals instead of a group of laborers, they will motivate these workers to be more efficient and hardworking. By making the workplace inviting, offering valuable benefits, and helping millennials achieve a good work-life balance, employers are welcoming these new workers and making the office more enjoyable for everyone.

Conclusion

After looking at the qualities, differences, and goals of the millennial generation, employers can begin to understand what motivates them. Their ideas give rise to the thought of a more relaxed yet efficient and connected workplace, while placing an emphasis on compassion and mutual respect. Generation Y's desire for constant learning and ability to learn quickly makes these new, young workers easy to mold and integrate into the workplace. Their ability to embrace diversity, work with the community, and find a sense of purpose in their work brings togetherness and passion to the office. Their technological savviness and new way of thinking helps to bring a modern touch to the workplace that benefits all employees. Millennials are determined to matter to business leaders and not simply be just a piece of the corporate machine. They're excited about entering the workforce and want their time to contribute to the betterment of the company and society. If employers and coworkers can embrace the generational differences and help guide millennials without limiting their independence, these young workers will be passionate and productive in their efforts.

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