MILLENNIAL WORKFORCE: PERSONALITY TRAITS AND MOTIVATING FACTORS

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Abstract

Children born in the 80s and 90s, the Millennials are today’s 20 to early-30-somethings, poised to make up the majority of the workforce by 2025, and already an important part of the working population. The Millennials, also known as Generation Y, Gen Y and at least a dozen other labels, is now the largest single generation (35%) in the workforce. That makes Millennials a force to be reckoned with. That is a problem for companies who are still trying to figure out how to attract, manage, and retain a younger generation with very different values than the Baby Boomer. Millennials can no longer just be a buzzword thrown around the board room like a hot potato—it is time for organizations to embrace the new workforce majority and start understanding millennials in the workplace, and as a result, embrace the new world of work.

Keywords: Millennials, Workforce diversity, Attract, Workplace

Introduction

In the next two years, half of the workforce will be made up of the millennial generation. This generation has changed and influenced almost all aspects of the world-politics, media, communication, and business. This generation is continuously marching towards change while driving growth for organizations around the world. Millennials have entirely influenced the way businesses to innovate, market and engage with customers.

Millennials have a drastically different outlook on what they expect from their employment experience. Millennials are well educated, skilled in technology, very self-confident, able to multi-task, and have plenty of energy. They have high expectations for themselves, and prefer to work in teams, rather than as individuals. Millennials seek challenges, yet work life balance
is of utmost importance to them. They do, however, realize that their need for social interaction, immediate results in their work, and desire for speedy advancement may be seen as weaknesses by older colleagues.

Millennials appreciate and work for organizations that function as social enterprises and businesses that do not operate just for profitability towards C-suite executives and stakeholders. Abhishek Humbad, Founder of Goodera, shared, “Millennials have access to a lot of data, they want mission and impact from their work, and their values are different from Gen X. They believe in credibility and credibility comes from how they contribute to the society.” Active engagement across systems, not following a single path and accessing different aspects of succeeding are the critical drivers for millennials. Learning from mentors and experienced professionals to seek purpose and wanting to be an essential part of an organization creates the impact in attracting and retaining the new task force.

**Literature Review**

“The millennials,” a wistful F. Scott Fitzgerald might have written today, “are different than you and me.” Managers accustomed to using certain practices to engage boomers are going to have to change their ways – and practices – if they hope to engage and retain the newest heavily scrutinized employee cohort, the millennials. This author recently completed an important study and he offers valuable advice that managers can use to make millennials feel wanted and respected.

For years, employers have been aware of employee engagement and retention issues in their workplaces. These organizations have engagement policies that typically address engagement for the organization under one policy, without any differentiation for the generations of employees. As the millennial generation (also commonly known as Gen-Y and includes births from 1982 – 2000) grows in the workforce and baby boomers retire, managers and human resources professionals will need to develop new engagement models that take into account the generational differences between baby boomers and millennials. This paper will highlight some
of the characteristics that differentiate millennials from other generations and explain why employee engagement should be top of mind for managers.

**The Millennial difference**

Millennials - the most influential generation of our times as also the most populous in the Indian workplace are changing the corporate landscape as never before. Born in or after 1985, they are over 700 million in number and account for 40% of the Indian workforce. The liberalisation, privatization, globalization wave and the tech revolution characterized their formative years. Research suggests that in another 5 years-time, by 2020, they would constitute more than half of the entire working population in India. Much has also changed the way work gets done across the globe. Work ethos has changed, workforce has become as diverse as it has ever been, and subsequently workplace dynamics today is multilayered. Thought leaders who helm high growth organizations in India are faced with a critical challenge - of managing a generationally diverse workforce and catering to their distinct career aspirations. And the most dominant of all generations at work today are millennials. In this research piece, specific emphasis will be placed on strategies for managing talent from this generation most effectively, averting conflicts of interests with their co-workers from other generations while ensuring the entire workforce is at its productive best.

In a 2014 study, the workforce was found to be comprised of five distinct generational cohorts identified, namely:
Free-Gens (Born between 1945 and 1960)
Gen X (Born between 1961 and 1970)
E-Gen (Born between 1971 and 1980)
Gen Y (Born between 1981 and 1990)
Gen Z (Born after 1990).

Conforming to this definition, millennials are constituted by one half of Gen Y and Gen Z in entirety.
Millennials are creating a change in how work gets done, as they work more in teams and use more technology. Their social mindset, however, is also a significant factor. As Leigh Buchanon writes in *Meet the Millennials*, “One of the characteristics of millennials, besides the fact that they are masters of digital communication, is that they are primed to do well by doing good. Almost 70 percent say that giving back and being civically engaged are their highest priorities.”

Coupled with the socially minded millennial comes their desire to be creative. Millennials have grown up in a time where information has become available instantly. Through a Google or Wikipedia search, answers to even quite complicated questions can be found. As such, millennials have developed into a group that wants to work on new and tough problems, and ones that require creative solutions. In a 2009 article by Tamara Erickson, a millennial who had been struggling in her role, admitted to peers that, “I guess I just expected that I would get to act on more of my ideas, and that the higher ups here would have figured out by now that the model’s changing.” (*Gen Y in the Workforce*, Tamara Erickson, Harvard Business Review, February 2009).

The millennial employee is interested in feedback on his or her performance. But traditional semi-annual reviews are too infrequent for millennials. They want to know that they’ve done a good job, and they want to know now. A 2008 article in *Nonprofit World* provides readers with a checklist on the topic of providing millennial feedback. The list includes: give them checklists, offer plenty of help, reward them for innovating and taking appropriate risks, engage them with frequent feedback, provide them with mentors, create a collegial and team-oriented culture, etc. Feedback must also be given in such a way that millennials are receptive.

Not only are the timing and frequency important, but so too is the way in which feedback is framed and delivered. In Joanne Sujanski’s article “Don’t be so touchy! – The secret to giving feedback to millennials,” she writes, “Instead of feeling appreciated, however, the few short accolades of “good job” were overshadowed in the employee’s mind by the more frequent criticisms he received – without guidance as to how exactly he could improve.” (*SuperVision*, December 2009). Sujanski reaches an insightful conclusion: Whether positive or negative,
feedback needs to be structured in a way that leaves no room for misunderstanding. Feedback needs to be clear and specific to be effective.

Objectives

1. To study the personality traits of millennials
2. To understand the motivating factors of millennials at workplace

Research Methodology

This research paper is descriptive in nature and is based on the secondary data attained from the various secondary resources such as websites and other available sources. A systematic review of collected literature was done in detail.

1. Personality Traits of Millennials

1. Millennials Are Motivated by Meaning

Millennials are constantly on the lookout for a job that provides more “meaning”.

77% of Millennials stated that their ability to excel in their job is contingent upon deriving meaning from their work. Unfortunately, less than half report feeling that they actually get this sense of “meaning”. Clearly, the structures currently in place by most organizations to motivate Millennials simply aren’t cutting it.

According to the 2013 Millennial Impact Research Report, organizations will know their message is resonating when Millennials are compelled to share their content. It is an instant feedback loop that tells organizations what this audience finds interesting and worth disseminating. Sharing, in fact, is a form of indirect advocacy, in that it furthers education about the cause and draws other people to the issue.
2. Millennials Challenge Hierarchical Structures

Millennials are not afraid to share their opinions and ideas, nor challenge those of their superiors. This comes not from a disdain for authority, but from the notion that the best possible outcome for the company will come from listening to everybody’s point of view.

They prefer a cross-functional way of working that transcends the constraints of rank, genuinely believing this is better for the business than blindly following orders passed down from the top of the totem pole.

3. Millennials Want a Relationship with Their Boss

Millennials want a manager that they can regard as a mentor, even a friend. They want to feel comfortable asking for feedback and advice and establishing a rapport of frequent communication. They work best in companies where they feel they have a “work family”, with co-workers and superiors looking out for them as individuals, not just trying to retain them as a “resource”.

4. Millennials Are Tech Savvy, To Say the Least

Millennials breathe technology – though that may be an understatement… 53% of millennials said they rather get rid of their sense of smell than their digital devices! These “Digital Natives” grew up playing educational games in middle school and expressing themselves on social media in high school. In the work setting, Millennials don’t just approve of using social media; they insist on it, with 56% saying they would not accept jobs from companies that ban social media. They disagree with the notion that social media is a productivity-suck, having a keen understanding of the many ways that it can support a company’s business goals. Millennials have a firm grasp on how to use these tools to do things like build relationships, crowd source solutions and research information on demand.
5. Millennials Are Open to Change

Millennials don’t agree with doing something a certain way just because that’s how it has always been done. They recognize that the business and technology landscape is constantly changing and that our ways of working should change with them.

This gives them the reputation of sticking their nose up at the status quo, but with how quickly things are changing.

6. Millennials Are Task (Not Time) Oriented

69% of Millennials say they believe office attendance on a regular basis is unnecessary and 89% prefer to choose when and where they work rather than being placed in a 9-5 position. This is because they measure productivity by work completed, not by time spent in the office. They see no point in tracking an employee’s “facetime”, finding more importance in the actual value that he or she delivers to the organization. They are comfortable telecommuting and don’t mind working late nights and weekends, while recognizing the importance of taking personal time to recharge, for themselves and for their work. The ability to be flexible with when and where they do their work allows them to make more room for family and personal pursuits, aspects which they hold in high regard. For this reason, 45% of Millennials will choose a workplace with more flexibility over one with higher pay.

7. Millennials Have a Hunger for Learning

Just because Millennials are out of college, doesn’t mean they want to be done with learning. They are eager to continue expanding their skill sets and amassing knowledge, holding intellectual stimulation as a top factor in workplace motivation.

Beyond understanding how to perform a task – Millennials want to know why. 95% said that they are motivated to work harder when they understand the importance of a particular task within the context of the company’s big-picture goals.
Also, social media is a key channel for learning and information transfer. According to the 2013 Millennial Impact Research Report, Millennials who want constant updates on an organization no longer rely on or return to websites to receive that information. Instead, they use websites first to learn about the organization, and then to connect with its social networks to stay updated. The smoother and more integrated the online experience, the better.

8. Millennials Crave Constant Feedback

80% of Millennials said they want to receive regular feedback from their managers. They don’t want to have to wait for their mid-year review, preferring to receive bite-size feedback more often. They want to have clarity on how they are doing day-by-day, seeing performance management as an ongoing journey, vs. a one-off event.

9. Millennials Want Recognition

Millennials also expect recognition for their hard work and accomplishments, with 89% saying a reward should be given for a job well done. This isn’t because this generation is needy and self-centered, rather – it is because they crave indications that their superiors approve of their work. Unlike previous generations, they are not holding off for the promotions and raises promised down the road – they want to know if they are being successful today.

10. Millennials (Don’t Just) Want To Have Fun!

Arguably, everyone wants to have fun – but Millennials want and even expect it in the workplace. With their less formal, task-oriented approach to work – they want to be able to have light moments in the workplace. This shouldn’t be confused with laziness or lack of professionalism – indeed, Millennials find business value in bonding with teammates and taking a break for creative inspiration. Not surprisingly, 90% of Millennials want their workplace to be social and fun, and 88% say that a positive company culture is essential to their dream job.
2. Motivating factors of Millennials

The keys to motivating this generation can be found in harnessing these aspects of the work relationship: Work Direction, Personal Development, Social Interaction, Feedback and Praise and Meaningful Rewards.

2.1 Work Direction

Millennials want and expect to be constantly excited about how they are spending their time at work. They are consummate multi-taskers, very capable of managing a multitude of activities at once. Easily bored, they want and need to be challenged, which is a blessing for managers who want to take advantage of their energy, skills and resourcefulness. Provide clear work expectations, but allow Millennials to bring their own imprint to their jobs. Show them the “big picture” as to how their jobs relate to the mission, strategic objectives and core values of the organization. Ask for and use their ideas as much as possible or encourage them to pursue their own ideas when those have merit. This generation is very socially conscious, so linking them as directly as possible to the mission of your non-profit organization would be highly impactful, likewise for volunteering. For example, if the organization was Meals for Wheels, let the Millennial go on home visits to see directly who the organization is helping and hear their appreciation or task them with helping to increase the organization’s online presence to expand the reach of the organization’s mission.

2.2 Personal Development

Millennials are committed to constant learning and personal development and growth and their manager can easily serve as a coach and mentor to meet them at that expectation. Talk in terms of “development opportunities” and in long-term time frames that exceed any given task or assignment. If you shape the context for your relationship with a Millennial as extending years into the future in how you will help them grow and gain experience they will be more likely not to look to change jobs at the first sign of frustration or disappointment. A Millennial’s manager needs to take the time to help coach Millennial employees and in the process show them how they can make a positive, meaningful impact at work. Redefine the timeframe for this
generation’s focus and show them how the things they are doing now can lead to things they want to be doing later. Talk with them about their interests and ways they can apply their skills; talk about career paths and needs of the organization; discuss opportunities that they can pursue, and help them get prepared to meet future opportunities.

2.3 Social Interaction

Millennials are very social and perhaps more peer-group oriented than previous generations. Most of their upbringing and educational experiences were in groups as was the bulk of their social experience, be it playing video games, group sports, or connecting on Facebook with their friends. Use these generational preferences to your advantage by allowing them to work together on projects and assignments and set up frequent non-work social situations such as team-building activities and celebrations. If they tend to work best with others and the way they get into a project is to talk it through with co-workers – great, let them do that. Make it clear what you need the end result to be, but let them bring the imprint of who they are to the task so they can be excited about the work and even have fun getting it done. You may not need to have your job be fun to get it done, but don’t fault them if that is their preference.

2.4 Feedback & Praise

One of the most defining characteristics of this generation is their significant need for constant praise at work. This can be frustrating for other generations to understand, e.g., “I just told him last week that he was doing a good job, do I really have to tell him again?” and easy to dismiss as being a symptom of a generation whose parents spoiled them, showering them with constant praise and protecting them from any of the harsh realities of life. Instead, consider this perspective: The Millennials have learned in times of change one needs a constant source of feedback (think “video game”) to be on the mark and adjust their performance accordingly. Since job requirements and expectations are constantly in flux, yesterday’s feedback may no longer be relevant today. Constant feedback, thus, is not to pump up a frail ego as much as to assure the employee is on track to continue to do good work day after day for their employer. Feedback and praise serve as reinforcement as well as a corrective mechanism for this generation.
By this we don’t mean “micromanaging,” a negative term that is almost always associated with an ongoing stream of negative feedback and corrections that a manager makes in working with his/her employees. No one feels micromanaged when his/her boss tells them in explicit detail what he/she most liked about a great job the employee did. As such, we’d recommend making it a high priority to provide greater and more frequent praise and recognition in a greater variety of forms. Equally important, but far less often (quarterly?) would be having “developmental discussions” in which you can focus on ways the employee can improve. When you build on a strong foundation of ongoing positive feedback, employees are more likely to trust that you are on their side and thus be willing to accept constructive criticism from you when it is offered.

2.5 Meaningful Rewards

Millennials want rewards that are meaningful and exciting to them when they have done good work or an outstanding job. This includes financial incentives, and, of course, EVERYONE wants to make more money, not just the Millennials. The Millennials, however, may have the least realistic expectations as to what is needed to earn more money (especially if their role model is P. Diddy, Lindsay Lohan or A-Rod) and that is where you can help them out. Show them the skills they need to learn and the contribution they need to make in order to make more money, and show them the path as to how they can get there working for you in your organization.

Conclusion

There are many reasons to be frustrated by the newest generation in the workforce, but a greater number of reasons to be excited about what they have to offer any employer that is willing to meet them at their expectations in the workplace. In many ways, what this generation wants is what all employees want. Perhaps now is the time to consider making your work environment more meaningful and exciting for Millennials and every other employee as well.

Corporate landscape has always been under evolutionary influences of the times and with millennials becoming the majority in the workforce, a definite paradigm shift has happened with regard to the average employee’s approach towards work - what they aspire for, what drives
them to a career, how they prefer to work and what alienates them at work. To conclusively comment, scope for rapid growth is the primary career aspiration of millennials. They are less conservative about work values and are most effective in autonomous, flexible settings. For discerning organisations to leverage the in-house millennial talent for their best interests, leaders who lead millennials need to be inclusive - be flexible and adaptable, encourage collaborative working and be open and authentic. And rest assured that the future of organizations is secure with a generation that is perhaps the most collaborative and social of all.

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