



# Are MILLENNIALS A Good Fit for Your Practice?

*Generational differences matter*

BY LYNN HOMISAK, PRT

“Hiring people is the best part of my job!” said no doctor ever.

And yet, here you are, back in the hiring seat. Another valuable staff member just left the practice and it's time, once more, to search for a replacement. The HOW of hiring has become almost routine—you've done it all too often. With a slight shuffling of the letters, the challenge you face moving forward lies not so much in the HOW, as in the WHO. Unless you want to keep repeating the same hiring mistakes that have placed you in this position (again!), the question you should now be asking yourself is “Whom should I hire that will stay with me until the day I retire?” Teaching a new hire proper skills, (skills that match your practice) is simple compared to fixing a personality flaw or dubious character. Senator Alan Simpson said, “If you have integ-

riety, nothing else matters. If you don't have integrity, nothing else matters.”

Aside from having the necessary soft skills (emotional intelligence), the “right” person is also defined as one who fits best in the culture of your practice. You might ask yourself, would that be someone who is

perience, and skillset. Have you given any thought to how generational differences fit in? You should.

### Hiring Options

According to Pew Research, today's workforce is made up mostly of these three sectors, revealing their

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young or more “mature”?

Rarely, if ever, do new staffers hired out of desperation work out well. The only way you can make a calculated choice is to set up interviews with applicants of all ages and take the time to talk with them, learn about them, and review job requirements with them. In doing so, you will likely take into consideration personality, ex-

own unique set of characteristics:

- **Baby Boomers** (born 1946-1964)—known as a “resilient” generation who, thanks to being post-war babies, demonstrate a strong work ethic. They aren't afraid to put in a full day's work, but prefer the status-quo.
- **Generation X** (born 1965-1980)—dubbed the “MTV genera-

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tion” is a younger, more educated, self-sufficient generation of workers who value more of a work-life balance. It has been said that Gen-Xers work to live rather than live to work.

• **Millennials** (born 1981–2000) aka Generation Y, now make up 35 percent, the largest of the work force according to a 2016 Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data, and expected to rise to 75% by 2030. Millennials bring new, innovative ideas to the table along with the vision of a more relaxed (less structured) workplace.

### **Younger vs. Older Arguments: There's Good in Both!**

Generational hiring is definitely a consideration for some doctors who generalize in their minds about the pros and cons of each. Some common complaints are that the “older” generation moves too slowly, can’t acclimate to new technology, and find it difficult adapting with their younger counterparts. For some, these traits [or job limitations] equate to an unsatisfactory hire.

Yet some insist Boomers are more dependable employees because they are more inclined to follow the rules. Also, because their children are grown and out of the house, they have fewer family obligations, making them a stable employee—less likely to job-hop. It should be noted, however, that people born between 1957 and 1964, the tail end of the Baby Boomers, held an average of 11.9 jobs from age 18 to age 50, according to government data. That’s about one job every three years.

As for alleged job (in)-stability of Millennials, perception is reality to some degree. A 2018 Deloitte survey states that forty-three percent (of Millennials) envision leaving their jobs within two years; only 28 percent seek to stay beyond five years, a 15-point gap that has increased seven points since last year. The number one and number two reasons why Millennials leave their jobs? They set off in search of higher wages or opportunities to advance, according to an Ernst and Young poll. Statistics from the BLS (Bureau of Labor Statis-

tics) show that although they are better educated on average than previous generations, with its members being more likely to have at least some college experience, their income is the lowest. That being the case, it is not surprising that many take the risk and move on to find better, more equitable work environments, rather than

ed history and are nothing new. The older generation criticizes the younger and the younger crowd laughs at the old-timers—that is, until the younger crowd becomes the older generation who then scorn the next generation after them. It’s an ongoing cycle. As Heidi Shierholz, senior economist and director of policy at the Economic Pol-

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staying put in a low-paying job just because it offers steady employment.

There are, of course, employers who stay clear of the “younger generation” based on their past experiences or on societal rumors that they are seen as flighty, more likely to leave due to marriage or children, unreliable, irresponsible, entitled, emotionally immature, glued to their cellphones, and have zero loyalty to their job. Along those lines, Time Magazine released an article titled “Millennials: the Me Me Me Generation” that called them out for being “lazy, entitled, self-obsessed narcissists”, explaining that it was their high levels of self-esteem that accidentally boosted their narcissism. Author Joel Stein writes, “Self-esteem was great for getting a job...not so much for keeping a job.”

Unfortunately for Millennials, their reputation precedes them and has become somewhat of a silent warning to the more skeptical employers. And yet, progressive employers see them differently. They view Millennials as intellectual change agents. Their element of imagination, remarkable tech savvy, and candidness are seen as positive attributes. Employers look specifically to hire them because they sense it is good for business and can bring a spirited enthusiasm into the workplace to re-ignite productivity. Even Stein concludes in his article that “They are earnest and optimistic; pragmatic idealists who find new and better ways of doing things.”

Generation-bashing and age-related prejudices have gone on since record-

ing. The Institute put it, “It feels like every generation gets pegged with an unflattering narrative when they’re young.”

### **Millennial Attraction**

What kind of workplace successfully attracts and retains Millennials? The keys to Millennial loyalty include flexibility of hours (in exchange for successful outcomes), and working in an ethical, diverse, positive, collaborative environment. Other priorities include working for someone who:

- Respects them as a person, their knowledge, their talents and abilities (Millennials are said to have a readiness to reciprocate this respect as well).
- Thrives on inspiration and progress and has a vision for the future of the practice/company. If they are unable to see the big picture and where they fit into it, it can restrict their immediate focus and productivity.
- Is encouraged to use their superior communication, tech savviness and social media skills to bring value to a business. (“Paper? What is paper?” Everything is done more efficiently on a device.)
- Makes them feel comfortable, offers freedom to express their views and be heard, can experiment and make an impact, and is not restrained from discovering new avenues of efficiency—“This is the way we’ve always done it” is a sure fire way to get them to walk.
- Offers autonomy and can showcase their talents. Being stuck in a job that smothers their ability feels

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like a waste of time to them.

- Makes certain that their role and expectations are clearly defined, with feedback being a necessary factor.

## **Is the Millennial Employee Right for You?**

Of course, we don't discriminate because of gender, race, religion, etc. and that includes age. Who you hire and who will be your best employee is influenced by a number of key factors based on your individual beliefs and unique practice preferences. Before you go on a search, it would help to prioritize YOUR needs first. Ask yourself:

- 1) What kind of practice do I have?
- 2) What are my views regarding change?
- 3) What are my goals and vision for the practice?
- 4) What is my training philosophy?
- 5) What is my definition of a successful business?
- 6) What type of patients do I want to attract?
- 7) What is my overall management style?
- 8) Is my practice in a position to offer flexible work hours?
- 9) Do I have a well-defined job description BEFORE I hire someone to fill the position?
- 10) How do I show my employees that I value them?

If you have not first identified these requirements, how can you possibly know what kind of employee would best support your practice, be on the same page, and move forward with you? Ignoring your preferred staff person is just another hiring blunder. Those who are unfamiliar with best strategies often hire the first air breathing bi-ped who walks through the door, claiming "slim pickins". They do not take the necessary time to vet applicants and choose the best fit. Stop and think about that for moment. Why wouldn't you? Don't you deserve the best? Don't you want to surround yourself with forward-thinking staff who fit into the care/work values you have painstakingly built into your practice, or are

you satisfied with just "another pair of hands" to fill a position?

## **Stop the Revolving Door**

Let's get serious. Are your philosophies, values, and beliefs more in line with "a" or "b"? The following exercise could offer constructive insight into whether or not the millennial worker is a good fit for your practice. Just as important, it will help you to determine if your practice is a good fit for them.

Take the following questions one at a time and in each case, choose a, or b:

### **1) What kind of practice do you have?**

a) You have a progressive practice if you are excited to explore the newest medical trends, flexible in your strategies to improve, stay current with techniques and equipment,

won't work here," feel that change is difficult, too disruptive, and requires too much energy. Basically, that the pain of moving from Point A is greater than the pleasure of arriving at Point B.

### **3) What are your goals and vision for the practice?**

a) You operate with direction and purpose, are determined to reach goals by writing and following specific action plans, engage the team to participate, assign/document responsibilities, set deadlines, and necessitate follow-through. You also see purpose in setting goals are that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely (SMART).

b) You live by a "one day at a time" philosophy, feel that you and patients are comforted by staying on the familiar path, prefer to focus on the here and now (present circum-

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welcome technology (embrace EMR), are motivated to increase practice visibility, and hire employees from diverse backgrounds to broaden the office's cultural pool.

b) You have a more conventional practice if you rarely deviate from traditional tried and true treatments, still struggle with (or reject) EMR, deny automated services such as patient reminder calls, believe the Yellow Pages offers marketing value, subscribe to "that's the way we've always done it" management, and generally hire employees who fit familiar characteristics.

### **2) What are your views regarding change?**

a) You understand that change is constant, are a "leap frog" visionary and a risk-taker who sees change as instrumental in achieving growth and prosperity.

b) You feel comfortable and safe embracing the status quo, often turn down new ideas justified by "that

stances), and find it hard to stick to goals regarding why (purpose) and where (vision) the practice is headed.

### **4) What is your training philosophy?**

a) You understand that training staff takes time and believe a well-trained staff pays off in the end. Your methods include orientation, mentoring, and shadowing, note-taking and hands-on instruction.

b) You employ an "on-the-job-learn-as-you-go" philosophy and believe that taking time to actively participate in the training process yields a poor return on investment. Your approach to training involves delegating current staff to teach procedures to new hires.

### **5) What is your definition of success?**

a) Purposeful, individual achievement, behaving in an ethical way, and doing what you enjoy. Work is a means to an end.

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b) Ambition lies in accumulating wealth and having a busy practice. Independent, hard-working, and career focused.

## **6) What type of patients do you want to attract?**

a) I am working towards building a podiatric-specialty practice.

b) I enjoy having a practice that focuses on all aspects of podiatric medicine.

## **7) What is your overall management style?**

a) Theory Y Management—believe that people have immense potential, are generally self-directed individuals who will act responsibly towards their work, can achieve beyond their capabilities, are valuable members of the team, and are given the recognition they deserve and long for. Their work contributions would increase to the point where the benefits of their efforts are mutually rewarding.

b) Theory X Management—feel it is necessary to take on a commanding, autocratic-type role with employees; believes that people inherently do NOT want to work (will in fact avoid it if at all possible), are irresponsible, have little ambition, require constant supervision, are motivated by money and fear, and require an environment where structure, hierarchy, and consequence factor in.

## **8) Is my practice in a position to offer flexible work hours?**

a) Possibly. I would be willing to juggle our hours if we can still accommodate the working patient, i.e., start and end our schedule earlier in the day.

b) No, our patients have certain expectations (of our hours) and we need to stick to what works for them.

## **9) Do I have a well-defined job description BEFORE I hire someone to fill the position?**

a) Yes. It is important for them to know up front what expectations are, including salary, benefits and job duties. We have them review a written job description at the interview to

assure they are comfortable with all tasks and responsibilities as outlined.

b) No. Typically, during our interview we offer a general idea of what the job involves. Once they are on board, we go into more detail regarding what we need them to do and what is expected.

## **10) How do I show my employees that I value them?**

a) I've recently adopted the concept of PTO days, offering employees more flexibility regarding when and why they take days off. The number of days they can take is quite lenient, taking into consideration unexpected civic duties and family emergencies. We offer a Sep IRA and health plan,

likelihood that a Millennial (Echo Boomer) hire might not meet your fundamental needs and that you might have better success employing a more “mature” individual. In fact, you might be more comfortable with the experienced employee who is more likely to think like you do, is more inclined to adopt pre-arranged workplace philosophies and goals without reservation, prioritize job security over earnings, is willing to conform to structured policies, hours, etc., and respect the hierarchy distinction of management vs. employee.

On the other hand, you may find yourself in sync with the Millennial worker if you believe in a work-

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and more health-minded productivity bonuses (i.e., annual gym membership or a gift card to a local natural food store). I know sometimes staff has to stay later or come in earlier than expected, so I make sure to thank them every single day for their commitment.

b) I offer a certain amount of sick and vacation days based on their length of employment. Additional time off (i.e., bereavement and jury duty) is given by approval and if the schedule allows. Employees (and their families) can join our discounted group insurance plan at their own expense. We currently have no bonus program; however, when employees deliver outstanding work, I always tell them I appreciate their efforts.

## **Choices Matter**

Now, to be clear, there are no right or wrong answers. Answering “b” to all questions does not necessarily mean that hiring a textbook Millennial would be an all-out disaster for the practice or that in a month's time the person will end up leaving you. Conversely, selecting all “a” answers is no guarantee that should you hire a Millennial, the employee will stay with you forever.

That said, if you chose “b” in each case, there is an increased

hard, play-hard approach, accept new ideas, promote team participation, and advocate open communication with feedback. And you may feel better quality and productivity is achieved in an environment where staff feel they are working WITH you, not FOR you.

At the end of the day, the key message is rather simple. First, clarify what you want and need in an employee, then look to hire someone who is more inclined to meet those needs—not the other way around.

## **Something to Think About**

Perhaps you've given thought to having a mixed age group, allowing the best of several generations. On second thought, would the stark differences between them only be a recipe for unwanted conflict and confrontation? Not necessarily. Have you seen the movie, *The Intern*, starring Robert Di Niro and Anne Hathaway? The plot follows a seventy-one year old male retiree who, under a senior citizen intern program, is hired to work in a fast-growing startup company. Admittedly, his technical knowledge is near zero and he feels totally awkward and out of place. So do his co-workers. However, eventu-

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ally he proves that what he lacks in skill, he makes up for in sage advice, valuable knowledge, and respectable behavior. The movie demonstrates how the collaboration of generations and acceptance of shared contribu-

*Dope*—We realize that the word “dope” already has several implications (information from a reliable source, as in the inside dope, or when referring to someone of lesser intelligence, or to an illicit drug). All are still relevant. However, you should know that it is now also used

*Word*—You can now use the actual word “word” when you refer to something well said, in response to something you agree with, or is true, i.e., if someone says to you, “I hope you understood everything I told you,” you would of course reply, “Word.” (With a straight face.) I wish I’d said that!

Is one generation better than another? I defer to George Orwell who offers his profound perspective on the topic. “Each generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it.” **PM**

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tions can be super-productive, resulting in new ideas, an innovative team, and a thriving business.

### Some Final Words

If you are planning to welcome Millennials into your practice, you’d better know your audience. They function on a slightly different vocabulary and words you once thought meant one thing now mean something entirely different. So, fair warning! If you are over 50, and you think “awesome” is a “cool” word to use, your era (and age) just gave you away. In fact, grab a pencil. You will probably need to write the following words down to help you remember them. This is by no means an all-inclusive word bank of millennial terminology.

*Bounce*—If your employees tell you that “It is 5pm, time to bounce,” they are not referring to a large, inflatable jump castle or to hurdling, leaping, or springing in any fashion. Just wave goodbye because they have just announced that they are leaving.

*Cazh*—Proper spelling yet to be determined. Reference: casual, as in “Can Friday be a cazh dress day?”

*Chill*—Has nothing to do with temperature or what you feel when you’re getting sick. It’s just another way of saying “relax” to anyone who suffers from a bit of anxiousness. “Chill! I’ll handle this.” Note the creative combo offshoots: Chillax, chillaxed; chillaxing; chillaxes. (Yes, Merriam-Webster recognizes these as intransitive verbs.)

as a term of excellence or referring to something that is very good. “The new treatment chair just arrived and it is dope!” I would think hearing that good news would make you chill.

*Fam*—Isn’t it obvious? Family is way too long to say.

*Shook*—Shake, shook, shaken, right? Wrong. It means surprise. “I was shook when I got a raise!” or “I was shook to learn that this past-tense word had nothing to do with how my martini was prepared.”

*Salty*—A taste preference? Try again. Your staff may refer to a patient as “salty” as in, “Our 10 am patient walked out after I measured her for shoes. She was really salty when I told her that her foot measured an 8, not a 5½!” Realize that they are telling you that your 10 am patient was irritated or angry. Needless to say, hearing that your patient angrily walked out is reason enough to be shook!

*Slay*—Disclaimer: no dragons were injured in the innovative context of this common storybook term. Instead, it is used when describing a task that was executed. “I completely slayed that low-Dye strap today!” Feel free to respond, “That’s Dope!”

*V*—Still the 22nd letter of the modern English alphabet. Now, also an abbreviated substitute for the word very. “Are you comfortable doing this task?” “v!” Again, because two syllables are too long-winded?

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