

Strategies to Effectively Manage Multigenerational Teams—Part 1

Here's a roadmap for working with millennials.

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Note: This is the first of a 3-part series offering strategies to effectively manage multigenerational teams. This segment deals with millennials.

the school of hard knocks, we have learned a little about how to work with others. Today's work environment, with its ever-increasing reli-

Generational issues in the workplace have continued to increase. Conflicts and differences arise from the many different events and actions that

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Whether our learning process is based on a college or graduate degree or has come through

ance on technology and the increased speed of change, leads us to think about each individual worker and how we can best optimize the experiences that we all have.

have occurred during key development times in the life span of each generation. We are now faced with five distinct generations in the workplace. The

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categories are based on birth years:

- Traditional: 1945 or earlier;
- Baby boomers: 1946 to 1964;
- Generation X: 1965 to 1980;
- Millennial (Gen Y): 1981 to 1997; and
- Gen Z: 1998 and later.

Soon the greatest portion of the workforce will consist of people who were born between 1984 and 1997, give or take a couple years on either end of the scale. This generation is referred to as the millennials, or Generation Y, or the Gen Y cohort. This set of employees comes with some interesting characteristics that must be recognized as part of any organization's future. How, then, can we work to develop and retain this valuable aspect of the future? If your goal is to become a high-performing medical practice, understanding and investing in the millennial employee will lead to long-term success.

Key characteristics of employees in the millennial age group—generalized, yet relevant to the perspective of working with millennials—include the following:

- They are technologically savvy, highly skilled, and almost instinctively knowledgeable about the mobile phone, tablet, and all associated apps.
 - They are more ethnically diverse than any previous generation, and, as a result, they are tolerant, and more readily accept differences.
 - They may be less team-oriented and more individually focused than previous generations.
 - They are less structured than previous generations, preferring more casual attire and more flexible work hours.
 - They have been raised to believe they are “special” and therefore have expectations of entitlement.
 - They are impatient and do not wish to wait in line.
 - They have a tendency to be optimistic. (At the same time, the indicators show that they may be less well off financially than previous generations.)
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- They do not believe in lifelong employment but, rather, focus on lifelong learning opportunities. Therefore, they have a tendency to job hop or shop for a better alternative.
- They cherish a program of personal development and growth opportunities in the workforce. They may be underemployed in their current position.
- Many have been raised by “helicopter” parents or even “snowplow” parents, which has helped lead to many of the above characteristics.

Think about your knowledge worker as an asset that needs, at a minimum, to be maintained.

A Pew Research report revealed that millennials are not politically affiliated (50%), are unaffiliated with religion (29%), belong to and post to social media sites, and receive at least 50 electronic communications per day. In addition, only 19% believed that others can be trusted.¹

In the workplace, they are electronically addicted, with many choosing to BYOD (i.e., bring your own device) to work, which may create significant cybersecurity issues. They look for a satisfactory work environment and, if they cannot find one, are more likely than not to post their findings. Due to their affinity for social media, they are more likely to react to and follow their friends than respond to a mass marketing approach to their lifestyle. In the past, multitasking has not proven to be an effective way to work, but this generation may prove to do it more successfully than others. They are less likely than the previous generation, Gen X, to have the skills to build or fix electronic devices. They are less likely to support or become loyal to organizations. If their initial reaction to a job is negative, they will not stay long and find it easy to move on.

According to a Gallup report in 2016, 29% of millennials are engaged in their work, whereas the other 71% are not engaged or are fully disengaged. In addition, 50% of respondents indicate they will be in another position within a year.²

A great deal has been written about the millennials and their impact on the workforce. They currently make up the largest segment, with a third again as many in the workforce compared with baby boomers. When you examine the two “competing” generations, baby boomers and millennials, they have much in common, and there is much they can learn from each other.

Some key characteristics of the millennial generation include the following:

- They share core values such as confidence;
- They tend to be social beings;
- They are educated, but face a huge financial burden;
- They communicate through phone or tablet, focusing on text and various social media options;
- They work as a means to an end; and

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- They tend to work to get funds to spend, not necessarily to develop a savings plan and a work-life balance.

What this means in managing the millennial is that an entirely different approach is needed than in dealing with previous generations. The need to implement effective employee development programs is at the top of the list. This requires an investment which many organizations find difficult to make, especially in the age of declining and revised reimbursement models. Add to that the fact that the turnover rate of millennials is significant, and how can you justify training? Employees, or “knowledge workers,” should be considered an asset.

sary to develop managers and leadership so they can understand and support the new knowledge worker. These programs should help with understanding the characteristics noted previously. In addition, there should be an emphasis on meeting your knowledge workers’ individual needs. Personalized training in the use of technology, efficient processes for learning, and recognition of their successes are key to gaining support and long(er) term employment from millennial employees. A key approach is to enhance the manager’s ability to be a “coach.” A coach offers support, including constructive criticism, but is there for the benefit of the employee.

Millennials also need goals, effectively sharing the organization’s mission and its plans for the future,

that loops in the Gen Xers and the millennials.

This plan should define the role of the “president” and other officers, as well as the retirement plan, buy-out plan, and the like to ensure that all parties involved have a clear and consistent understanding of the evolving process of leadership.

In our consulting work, we have seen some interesting scenarios with the millennial workforce. These include the receptionist who started work on Monday morning, was not “trained,” and asked to begin working immediately in greeting patients and answering the phone. This person did not come back after lunch. Then there was the intern who worked on a few projects in a medical practice. That person became very involved, produced some remarkable statistical reports, and agreed to become a permanent employee. And that employee has been with the practice now for three years. Then there was the billing clerk who wanted to work from home. This was arranged, and the result has been very positive. The most interesting scenario was the applicant who completed the online application and appeared for the interview—with Mom!

What, then, is the plan for working with millennials? Recognize them as the leaders of the future. Develop their skills and organizational knowledge. Accept the differences, but also recognize their capabilities. Key concepts are training, flexibility, accountability, and coaching. **PM**

Millennials will become the organization leaders in the not too distant future.

Just as you make an investment in maintenance of the facility or equipment, think about your knowledge worker as a similar asset that needs, at a minimum, to be maintained. Effective training programs can be found through many sources on the Internet, such as YouTube, webinars, and the like. Even creating your own training program via electronic media is not out of the question. In addition, a mentorship program is an “up close and personal” model to share knowledge, develop skills, and impart the culture of the organization to the young, upcoming knowledge worker. These can be formal or informal but should definitely be part of the organization’s learning and development program.

Another reason to invest in the millennial is to create an “alumni” association. Keep an eye on, track, solicit, or welcome back those knowledge workers who were employed previously and left for other jobs. The grass is not always greener on the other side.

Because millennials tend to lack confidence and trust in politicians and overall leadership, it is neces-

sary to develop managers and leadership so they can understand and support the new knowledge worker. Along with this is a need for each individual knowledge worker to have a clear definition and expectation of his or her job duties.

Millennials, like all employees, need to be held accountable. They appreciate it! This supports the aspects of goal setting and effective training. But those two aren’t enough. It is necessary to follow up and to hold the individual accountable for his or her work efforts.

This means, again, bringing back the approach of coaching and being supportive rather than autocratic while expecting a specific outcome from the effort.

The millennial generation will become the organization leaders in the not too distant future. Therefore, it will be necessary to define leadership roles, offer management and leadership training, and ensure that the roles and expectations are very clear. What is needed is to recognize the contributions of the baby boomers while at the same time ensure that there is an effective succession plan

References

- ¹ Millennials in Adulthood. Pew Research Center, March 7, 2014.
- ² Rigoni B, Nelson B. Few Millennials are engaged at work. Gallup Business Journal. August 30, 2016.



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