

Working With the Millennials – The Good and the Different (Part 2 of 3)

In our first article we identified the four generations working and influencing today's workplace. The Millennial generation (born between 1981-1999) is the latest participant into the workforce and their entrance is sometimes a challenge to their co-workers and managers (similar to the entrance of every "new" generation before them).

The differences of the Millennial generation are many, but allow us to focus on three common categories that may be helpful to understand the Millennials: Goal Orientation, Collaboration and Family Matters.

Goal Orientation

The Good

The Millennials have grown up consumed by reaching and achieving goals – theirs and their parent's! From securing a coveted admission slot to exclusive pre-schools, to being part of the traveling soccer club team, these Millennials have been driven to believe and achieve anything they set their minds to. They have been tested, graded, and ranked in the classroom and have been told again and again they are living in a globally competitive, dog eat dog world – they need to look out for themselves. Without a semester to waste, they are asked to pick their career track in middle school which will outline the high school course selection that needs to be on their transcripts to position them for maximum success. So, you shouldn't be shocked when during their first interview they tell you their goal isn't to have your job, but that they want to take over the company. Some people would call this aggressive confidence, while others would say it is presumptuous. Regardless of what you call it, there is no shortage of "can do" attitude with the Millennials.

The Different

Oh yes, the Millennials are goal oriented – but isn't that what many managers have been asking for? A motivated, engaged, productive workforce? The difference with the Millennials is they think they should be in the corner office within the next few months! When they are told that they must "pay their dues" or "work their way up", some Millennials walk right out the door to another opportunity they hope will help them reach their goals and aspirations.

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Team Based Collaboration

The Good

The Millennials have grown up in a very inclusive and accepting world. While not completely devoid of prejudice, racism or stereotypes, the surrounding society has come a long way from the childhood the Baby Boomers encountered. In addition to focusing less on our differences, the Millennials have also strayed from the "rugged individualism" of their parents and have embraced more of a "What do you think?" team based, democratic approach to problem solving and taking action. The wireless flat world of the Millennials allows them to put things "out there" for comment using technologies like Facebook and YouTube (among many others) and sometimes within hours they receive feedback and suggestions from literally around the world. And, if they still don't discover the "know-how" to solve a problem, a few detailed searches on the web yield volumes of information that provide solutions. The Millennials may just be the resourceful "team players" their managers have been longing for.

The Different

Inclusive, resourceful and team based – what's not to like? Well, some Millennials are challenged by dealing with difficult people. As easily as the "click it together" virtual work team is assembled, it is also dissolved by clicking "delete". In the "real world", interacting face to face with a disagreeing co-worker or demanding customer isn't resolved by clicking delete or scrolling down the screen to the next email. Conflict resolution is hampered with replies of "Whatever", "That's your problem, get over it", "So what's the big deal?", or "Everyone has an opinion...".

Another by-product of the "you can find it online" mentality is the creation of an undifferentiated public square where everyone's gravitas is relative. Traditional differentiators such as professional titles and designations, authoritative hierarchies and time tested experience, have given way to the "everyone matters but nobody counts" philosophy of interaction.

Family Matters

The Good

The value of the family is very important to the Millennials. Recently a MTV survey asked viewers "Who is your hero?" Expecting the names of sports stars, Hollywood starlets and music groups, the researchers were taken back when the number one response was, drum roll please... - "My Mom" or "My Dad". With record numbers of Millennials growing up in broken or blended families, a desire and appreciation of family ties have grown stronger. Add to this the literal terror that the Millennials have grown up with – from the 9-11 attacks to numerous

campus massacres – and the result is a generation who feels safe with anyone they can call family.

The Different

One outcome of this family connection is that many Millennials are quite comfortable at home. The days of "leaving the nest" as soon as possible to "make it on your own" have yielded to a phenomenon termed "boomerang kids" – returning to live at home after high school or college graduation. A June 29, 2006 article in USA Today by Sharon Jayson stated:

"Findings published in the American Sociological Association journal *Contexts* in 2004 contrasted young people growing up today with those 40 years earlier. Researchers found that by age 30 a much smaller percentage today (46% of women and 31% of men) have finished school, left home, gotten married, had children or reached financial independence. In 1960, 77% of women and 65% of men had reached these standard markers of adulthood by age 30."

There are many more differences of the Millennial generation that we could discuss. Compared to the generations that have come before, every generation is different – isn't that the way it is supposed to be? The key to leadership now and in the future is to recognize the differences and not accept them as an excuse but to leverage differences to make them keys for success. We will discuss some of these "keys for success" in the next volume of "Working With the Millennials".