

## **Millennials in the Workplace: Were the Experts Right?**

Paula Santonocito Monday – June 26, 2017

As a generation, Millennials have gotten a lot of attention, much of it negative. But it turns out not all Millennial traits are bad for business.



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The largest generation in U.S. history has brought change to the workplace, and much of it is positive.

### **Past Profile**

Early on, generational experts identified various characteristics of Millennials as members of this generation came of age, attended college, and entered the workplace. By now, most of these traits are well known.

Millennials believe they are special; they are sheltered; they require ongoing praise; they prefer working in teams. And oh those hovering parents.

At the same time, the experts noted that Millennials are technologically savvy, which was cited as a detriment by some, who say this has resulted in them being socially challenged. Millennials are also the most educated generation in history, which those same experts say has created a sense of entitlement; and experts point out that despite their educational strengths, Millennials lack necessary soft skills.

### **Current Reality**

There's no doubt that some of these characteristics have turned out to be true. Millennials are close to their parents, for example, and research shows that many continue to live at home for longer than their Generation X and Baby Boomer coworkers did.

It's worth noting, however, that Millennials carry more student loan debt than their coworkers from previous generations. They also came of age during the Great Recession, when they saw the impact widespread job losses had on family members. Is it any wonder they are financially cautious?

Attention to family and finances has them seeking certain benefits from employers. At or near the top of most lists is the opportunity to learn and grow (i.e., advance in their careers) and work-life balance and workplace flexibility. Millennials also expect to receive a competitive salary, and they value benefits that have a financial impact, like health insurance and a 401(k).

As companies attempt to recruit and retain employees amid an increasingly tight labor market, they have little choice but to offer these benefits. And they're offering them to all employees, not only Millennials. Workplace flexibility, for example, has become a common benefit, largely because of Millennials. The proliferation of career development programs, used by all, has also been driven by Millennials.

Millennials do like to work in teams, and this too has impacted the workplace. Open office environments that encourage teamwork, as well as group projects as opposed to individual efforts, have become more common. This fosters camaraderie and a sense of belonging, which, when managed properly, can contribute to the business.

As for technological abilities, these workers are extremely knowledgeable. Technology has always been a part of their lives. The downside, if there is one, is that technology has influenced the way Millennials communicate. The soft skills they lack are largely the result of less face-to-face communication. Employers that meet Millennials on their turf by using technology and related platforms for communication find they are highly engaged and strong communicators.

With regard to requiring ongoing praise, there may be some confusion. Like all workers, Millennials want recognition. But more importantly, they want ongoing feedback, as opposed to annual performance reviews. A recent report from research and consulting firm Gallup, *How Millennials Want to Work and Live*, indicates that this is indeed a workplace priority. And companies are responding by making changes to their evaluation processes, which again impacts the entire workforce.

### **Additional Misconceptions**

Perhaps the biggest misconception about Millennials is that they are young. Generational parameters vary, but Gallup uses 1980 through 1996 as the birth years for this generation. This means that many Millennials are quite grown up.

A survey from job site FlexJobs finds that 40 percent of Millennials are parents.

As for another once commonly cited trait, that Millennials are risk-averse, FlexJobs finds that 26 percent of Millennials are freelancers and 18 percent are entrepreneurs.

Along these same lines, members of this generation aren't afraid to look for a job elsewhere, if their current employer doesn't provide them with the opportunities and benefits they seek. Gallup

research finds Millennials change jobs more often than members of older generations, and six in 10 Millennials say they are currently looking for new employment opportunities.

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