MILLENNIALS IN THE WORKFORCE

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Introduction

"Millennial" is kind of a pejorative term. You hear and read a lot about the stereotypes surrounding the generation: they are lazy, flighty, glued to their phones, and need too much reassurance they're doing a good job; they want too much vacation and need too much flexibility in when and where they can work; they expect a ping pong table and beer fridge in every office. But where are these observations coming from? Is this generation really so entitled and self-absorbed?

Let's start with the facts. Millennials, often defined as those born between 1981 and 1996, became the largest cohort in the U.S. workforce in 2016, according to the Pew Research Center. Today, they make up more of the employees at the average business than any other generation.

Millennials became the largest generation in the labor force in 2016

U.S. labor force, in millions
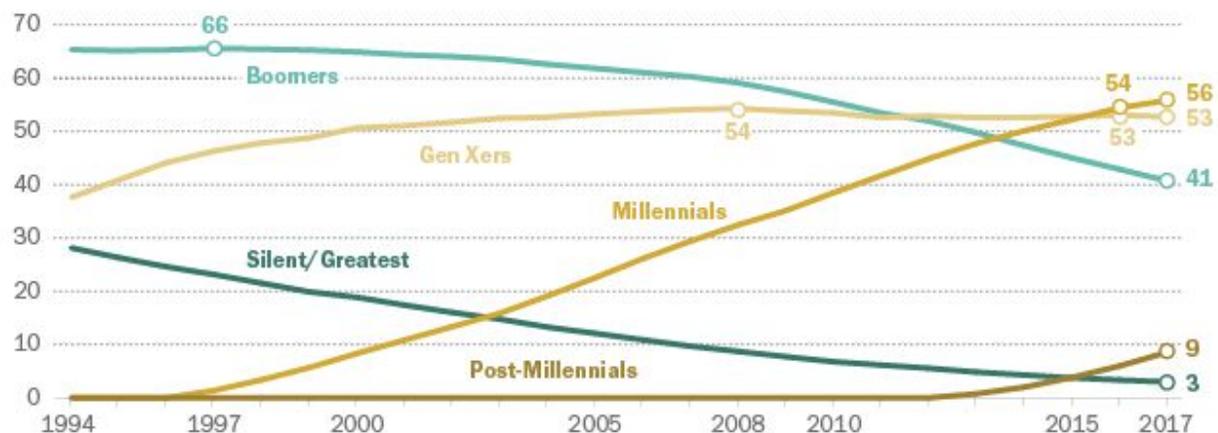
Note: Labor force includes those ages 16 and older who are working or looking for work. Annual averages shown.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of monthly 1994-2017 Current Population Survey (IPUMS).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The Brookings Institute says there are 75 million Millennials in the U.S. as of 2018, making up nearly a quarter of the total population, and representing 30 percent of eligible voters and almost two-fifths of its workers. By 2020, they're expected to represent 35 percent of America's workforce.

This means their values, beliefs, and perspectives are gradually becoming the core identity of businesses, if not society in general — which makes them, at bare minimum, a group that business leaders have to pay attention to. Moreover, they will eventually start taking the reins of the businesses they work for now and it will only benefit those businesses to be positioned structurally, culturally, and philosophically to align themselves with Millennials well in advance of this reality.

Debunking Millennial Stereotypes

When it comes to data, there is little to support the pervasively negative stereotypes of Millennials. Examining a wide body of research and evidence, the Harvard Business Review found that employees of all ages are far more alike in work-based values and attitudes than common stereotypes would have you believe. Furthermore, to the extent differences do exist, HBR found that they pertain far more to gaps that have always been present between younger and older generations than to anything that is specifically Millennial in nature.

Take technological development, for one. Many older generations these days are a little baffled by the ease with which younger generations live in tandem with their smartphones. That isn't to say Boomers don't also use them a lot. Still, it is generally accepted that Millennials and their phones are approaching cyborg-level. But is this adoption really so different from past technological advances, when similar cross-generational differences in acceptance inevitably followed?

For instance, remember when word processors, mobile phones, and the Internet came out? Those technologies were each, in their own right, fairly jarring for us all. We couldn't imagine living without them today, and they have been superseded by newer or more advanced technologies that Millennials are more than comfortable with. Yet members of older generations can't all say they have enjoyed the same adoption and comfort levels of these technologies, just like their preceding generations' experiences with other revolutionary technologies, such as the desktop computer. So really, it's all about perspective.

We also have to remind ourselves that younger people tend to be more narcissistic and don't yet know where their lives are going. These factors change an individual's perspective on the world and what motivates them. Add to this the fact that each subsequent generation in our history has adopted more progressive and inclusive social views than its predecessors, and you come to see how Millennials, as the younger generation, are a little at loggerheads with their older counterparts. Or perhaps vice versa.

Nevertheless, most managerial and leadership roles today are of course filled by Boomers and Gen Xers, for obvious and considerable reasons surrounding knowledge, age, and experience.

So, if you are a Boomer/GenX manager who oversees a number of millennial workers, or perhaps a Marketing Director who needs to understand the mindset and preferences of this

generation better, what are you to do? Read on for insights and takeaways into how to best work alongside and grow engagement with this cohort.

What the Research Shows

To start with, there is a wealth of research and data out there on Millennials in the workforce, and even more on Millennials in general. Here are some key highlights from a number of different institutions that have studied them in the workplace:

- Millennials are the **most diverse adult generation** in American history, consisting of 44 percent minority. They have also attained **higher levels of education than any generation before them**, including all racial and ethnic young adult groups ([Brookings](#))

- Millennials value being healthy, but they are also focused on living a purposeful life, in an active community with good social ties, while **achieving financial stability so they can purchase things they *want***, not just things they need ([Gallup](#))

- As a generation, they have surprisingly **positive views on their careers and career prospects** — two thirds are optimistic about immediate job prospects, and 62 percent are confident they could replace their current employment with something equally good or better within 3 months, were they to lose their job ([Manpower Group](#))

- More than half of Millennials **expect to work past the age of 65** ([Manpower Group](#))

- But Millennials do indicate a compulsion towards mobility, whether it is as a part of their current job or in the search for the right fit. Only half of millennials, for instance, plan to be working at their company one year from now. For reference, 60 percent of non-millennials report the same. **Businesses therefore need to be aware that half of their Millennial employees do not see a future with them**. ([Gallup](#))

- While Millennial workers move between jobs more frequently than other generations, this is not a new development. **Employees under 35 have been more likely to move on to new work opportunities than their older counterparts for at least the past two decades**, as reported by KPMG ([Harvard Business Review](#))

- In addition, **millennials value not being tied to strict hours or locations**, along with the trust that is inherent in such an agreement between employer and employee. Millennial workers that intend to stay with their current employer for at least five years generally report more flexibility in their job compared to those who do not intend to stay as long ([Deloitte](#))

- However, **21 percent of Millennials have changed jobs in the last year**. This is more than three times the number of non-millennials. This millennial turnover is estimated to cost the U.S. economy $30.5 billion annually ([Gallup](#))

- These figures notwithstanding, Millennials **work just as hard, if not harder, than previous generations**, with 73 percent reporting working more than 40 hours a week, and nearly 1 in 4 working over 50 hours ([Manpower Group](#))

- Millennials **do not prioritize management of others** highly on their list of job priorities. They are **more interested in money and purpose**. Only 22 percent hold attaining a leadership role as their top priority ([Manpower Group](#))

- **Frequent and consistent communication and feedback from managers drives engagement** with Millennials more than other groups ([Gallup](#))

- While the idea of job security is being redefined by Millennials, it is still critical. They value new and relevant skills as a form of security, rather than just having a job they can rely upon. **These skills give them assurance their talents will always be in demand and they will remain employable over longer working lives. This is *career security* over *job security*** ([Manpower Group](#))

- But Millennials are **struggling with engagement**. Their rates of unemployment and underemployment are the highest of any generation in the U.S., and only 29 percent report being engaged at work. Furthermore, **only 50 percent feel good about the amount of money they have to spend**, and **less than 40% are "thriving" in any one measurement of well-being** ([Gallup](#))

- In fact**, only 25 percent of Millennials are fully engaged**, either emotionally or psychologically, with a brand, product or company. These levels are below those of older generations ([Gallup](#))

Takeaways

Hopefully the above list shines a light on Millennials' motivations, needs, concerns, and perspectives. As a generation, their preferences are not all that different from their predecessors'. They just happen to be the younger and newer generation of workplace entrants; newcomers to the professional world who have entered it at a time when they need to be concerned with having skills that are relevant today and that will remain relevant in a fast-changing technological landscape.

Millennials are therefore drawn to companies that offer career *and* skill development. As a result, employers need to help them build their talents and experience, which is not all that different from how past generations were attracted by employers.

However, to attract and retain talent, companies must also realize that Millennials are generally willing to move on to new things if they do not feel they are being heard, engaged with, or trusted to do their jobs and do them well, regardless of when or where. But if their needs and expectations are met, the research does encouragingly show that they will be a hard-working, dedicated, reliable employee.

Regarding flexibility for the Millennial employee, it is also worth noting that this cohort grew up in a world that has become increasingly customizable for the consumer. Think of cell phone plans where you can pick the exact data and voice package you want; the move away from traditional cable packages to on-demand streaming and the "cord-cutting" habits of today's younger generations; the myriad options you have in stores and on the Internet for every product imaginable; or the ability to choose how and when a company will contact you through email, text, or phone.

With this all pervasive customization, it isn't surprising that Millennials prefer to be able to choose when they work and where they work from. It doesn't mean they want to work less, and the data certainly does not show that they are. They just recognize that having some control over their schedule and location means they will have flexibility in other areas of their life, which all comes back to being healthy and living a purposeful life. It's also a perk that might be an attractive substitute for higher wages, which are increasingly needed in a world of record housing prices and cost of living in nearly all metropolitan areas.

Also, with most industries and careers being fully digital these days, we're running out of reasons workers shouldn't be able to dictate their schedule a little beyond the office-desk 9-5 model.

Conclusion

To work efficiently and effectively with each other, it is crucial that we understand each other's perspectives, needs, and expectations. The time period and environment you grow up in can shape your personality significantly, and this is particularly true across generations.

Manager-employee relationships, and professional relationships in general, can run into trouble when communication and understanding break down (usually due to differing perspectives and a lack of understanding at both ends), causing frustration and the feeling you're not speaking the same language. The same can be said for marketing campaigns — if you don't understand your audience and their motivations, your message and strategy is doomed to fall flat.

To that end, managers of Millennials have to take the lead (it is the essence of leadership, after all) on understanding the unique perspectives and motivations of Millennials, seeing where the similarities between the generations lie, and forging a path forward to welcome Millennials into

the workplace, nurture and grow their skills and talents, and create cross-generational workplaces that generate benefits for everyone.

Informa's Infrastrcure group keeps a finger on the pulse of Millenails. Be sure to check our marketing website for updated inofrmation on Millenials in Manufacturing, Millenials in Contracting, and Millenials in Electronics.