

Gen Trends

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

Special
Millennial
Edition

May 2004

Managing the Millennial Generation

She arrives at work every morning, yet doesn't seem to be present. He'll do whatever you ask... then stop and wait for the next assignment. When you ask her to stay an extra half-hour, she does, but with reluctance. When you assign a project, you find yourself explaining what you thought were common sense steps, repeatedly. You must be managing a Millennial.

I've had a few people in their early twenties take me to task for describing their generation as lazy. But managers describe the behaviors above every day during seminars. "Why," they ask, "aren't these young people more engaged? Where's the self-initiative?"

Millennials, like other generations, are a product of the influences on them as they came of age. These include media, technology, parental beliefs and practices, society's interpretation of right and wrong, economic conditions and diversity, to name a few.

To understand Millennial values and beliefs, we have to examine the impact these influences have had. Only then can we talk about how to manage them effectively.

The Influences

In many ways, technology tops the list. This emerging generation has grown up surrounded by devices that offer every convenience. "Just point and click," they've been told, "and you can have someone or something perform the task." They've come of age immersed in non-stop music, advertising and entertainment. Many have never enjoyed a quiet walk in the woods.

Computers have contributed to this through the "menu-driven thinking"

that is programmed into every device. One can understand why they might feel lost while working on a task where a list of options is not readily available. How can you choose if you have to create your own choices?

They've also grown up with programmed play. Today's dual-career couples organize their children's time around their own packed schedules. Our nation's loss of community has persuaded many that non-stop activity is the only solution to keeping kids from society's troubling influences. But my nine-year-old laments the fact that there's no one with whom to simply pretend. The other children all seem dependent upon organized activities and computer games. Imagination seems to have succumbed to packaged fun.

Then there are economic conditions. When teenagers are spending more than \$130 per week, they develop a different interpretation of everyday value. Combine this with the almost surreal focus marketers have placed this generation and your result can be an employee who arrives for work with "earning to spend" as their primary agenda.

Finally, they are the products of a society whose values compass appears to change direction daily. While much of the population laments America's fraying moral fabric, this generation continues to observe countless examples of right and wrong being interpreted situationally by parents, schools, courts and employers. Is it any wonder that young workers doubt the judgment of a manager when they watch so many others "working the system?"

Mind you, I'm not pointing fingers on any of these issues. I'm simply explaining the impact. But with millions of these young people entering the marketplace over the next decade, managers will have no choice but to modify their methods of supervision.

The Solutions

So what do you do? Here are some tactics that employers tell me work effectively when supervising Millennials:

Be specific with everything. "I never

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"GenTistics"

"What's going on while you do homework?"

Music is playing 67%
TV is on 50%
I'm with family 44%
I'm on the phone 27%
I'm online 25%
I'm with friends 21%

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“We asked 11,000 seventeen- to twenty-one-year-olds why they were enlisting in the Army. We thought it might be the signing bonuses or the tuition reimbursement. But those items were down the list. Turns out, the youth of our great nation want desperately to belong to something bigger than themselves.

*Lt. General Dennis D. Cavin
As quoted by Eric Chester of
Generation Why*

To ponder . . .

Teens cannot be ignored. One out of four people in the world are between the ages of 10 and 24. One out of six persons worldwide are between 15 and 19. Current population statistics reveal that the populations of Latin America, China, India, and other less-developed regions are dramatically skewing younger. In Brazil, for example, 50 percent of the population is under 25. A glance at the top 10 countries with teen's ages 15 to 19 demonstrates this fact. This means that if you are marketing almost any brand to these developing countries, you need to consider youth.

The numbers of teen's ages 15 to 19 in China and India alone are staggering. Each country represents more than 90 million teens. To put this in perspective, that is about nine or ten times the size of several European countries, such as Austria or Hungary. No other country comes close to these figures. Ergo, being the leading teen brand in China or India could conceivably be more lucrative than leading in most other countries combined.

*Elissa Moses writing in
The \$100 Billion Allowance*

Case Study Corner

I supervise 15 Millennials in a warehouse. While my older workers are generally punctual, these young people must be staying up nights thinking of creative reasons why they didn't make it to work on time. I even had one tell me the family pet had died and she had to attend the memorial service. When I dock their hours or give them a day off without pay, the parents call and tell me I'm being unfair. What do I do?

The solution to this is fairly simple, if you have the intestinal fortitude. Assuming you have clearly explained the firm's attendance expectations, fire the next couple of transgressors. While that may sound harsh, it accomplishes several things:

- [] Removal of two poor performers.
- [] Puts the others on notice that tardiness will not be tolerated.
- [] Reassures the other, more punctual, workers that everyone is being treated consistently.

Parental calls seem to be a natural extension of the “lobbying” they have done with educators, soccer coaches and others for so long on behalf of their children. While the ramifications of these efforts can be debated elsewhere, this tactic should never be tolerated in the workplace. It undermines trust between you and the employee. It also violates his or her rights of privacy. Politely inform petitioning parents that due to organizational practice and federal law, you are prohibited from even verifying that their children have arrived for work. Resist the temptation to reason with parents. They are more determined to protect their children than you have time in the day. Enough said.

**71% of teens surveyed
say newspapers are
relevant to their lives.**

*USA Weekend
poll of 65,000 teens*

Managing Millennials

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thought I would be instructing employees to empty trash bins, but I am,” said one retail manager with whom I spoke. “Our job description now lists every little task and that works much better.” Other managers have echoed that observation. “It's not that they're lazy, it just doesn't occur to them.”

Ensure understanding. When delegating an assignment, ask them to outline the steps they plan to take. This way, you can be assured that they're on the right path. While those in Generation X may bristle at such an approach, Millennials look for more coaching and direction.

Keep them busy. For many young people, work seems to be a distraction 'til the next form of entertainment comes along. While this kind of supervision requires additional time, managers find that this is better than the alternative -- workers who stand around chatting with friends or surfing the Net on the firm's computer.

Lighten up. Most Millennials are fun-focused. But this can be in emotional opposition to the work-is-not-fun philosophy possessed by many veteran managers. While some supervisors have a gift for being fun and firm, most have to work at it.

I've observed more than one manager who can successfully laugh and play games with his or her young staff, yet find the moral authority to reprimand one of those same people if needed. But consistency is the key. If Millennials don't understand the boundaries, they'll run roughshod over the rules. If they do, understand the boundaries; then you have the recipe for productivity.

Veteran managers ask me whether this generation will eventually “grow up and accept responsibility.” They're troubled by the thought of a workplace staffed by “menu-driven entertainment hounds. “My answer is always yes,” but I remind them that “Millennials' interpretation of accepting responsibility will be different than ours.” Then I start to feel old again.

*For a copy of this entire article, containing
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