

MediNews

A PUBLICATION PROVIDED BY MARYLAND MGMA

AUGUST 2014



MARYLAND MGMA STATE CONFERENCE

Essentials to Refresh Your Practice

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MILLENNIALS TO THE RESCUE?

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Millennials to the Rescue?

YOU'VE HEARD THE CHATTER about the Millennial generation. They are lazy, need constant stroking, incompetent, and glued to their “phones.” Do you believe it? I do, and I do not.

I Do

PWC found that Millennials, in contrast to their Boomer parents, view work as just one life priority. They also concluded that Millennials seek more appreciation for their work than their older counterparts.¹

The Pew Research Center² found that Millennials have more confidence in their skills than prior generations, but compared to other generations at the same point in their careers, they are viewed the least favorably. Moreover, the same research shows that Millennials themselves believe that their older colleagues work harder. And who will deny that anyone born after 1980 is connected 24/7 – literally. People sleep with their smartphones! This data may seem convincing, but there is more.

I Don't

“Family” occupies a central role in their lives, but Millennials are not ALL about having fun. In fact, The Gallup Organization reports that more Millennials are engaged in their work (33%) than either Boomers (26%) or Gen Xers (28%).³ But they don't want to be constrained to the office and prefer flexible work arrangements.

By observation they learned that relationships and a full life are more rewarding than toiling away for an employer. Their families lived through layoffs, scandals, economic turmoil. Those experiences taught them that giving one's life to a job can be quite disappointing. So, maybe they are justifiably intent on leading fulfilling lives rather than on earning more

money. While Millennials may overestimate their capabilities, confidence isn't a bad thing. Confident people overcome setbacks, learn, and achieve more than others. Isn't that what employers want?

Millennials Are Learners

Millennials are eager and savvy learners. This explains a lot of their often-misunderstood behavior. It is also the key to engaging and retaining them. Growing-up, their learning process featured cooperative learning, a steady flow of feedback, and plenty of encouragement. Why? Because educators know that those practices drive learning, achievement, and success. As it turns out, that is exactly what we want in the workplace!

Millennials tend to view work assignments as learning opportunities and are not necessarily aiming to produce a perfect product. Instead, they are likely to get a good start on a project then hand it over for review and feedback. Supervisors sometimes misunderstand this and conclude that they are careless, lazy, or incompetent. To keep them engaged and productive:

- make work processes more collaborative,
- build touch-points and feedback loops into the work process,
- give lots of feedback; don't be shy about “correcting” them, and build the capacity for working remotely.

In contrast with Boomers and Gen Xers, Millennials have greater respect for their elders and are eager to learn from them. Since they generally had close personal relationships with their parents and teachers, they expect to work alongside leaders. It is not that they presume to be equals. It is because they desire to contribute meaningfully, work collaboratively rather than separately, and learn from more experienced professionals.

Millennials to the Rescue!

This is great news! Many of the work conditions Millennials seek are the very things that drive organizational effectiveness.

- People who lead full lives - who maintain close relationships, pursue hobbies, and exercise - are more resilient, focused and productive.
- People who take risks, make mistakes, and learn from them accomplish more than people who don't take risks. Millennials are ready jump in, but they know they still have a lot to learn.
- Regular feedback keeps people on track and drives results.
- Collaboration and teamwork foster innovation, and result in better problem-solving and decisions.

These are the very things that most people say they want at work, but in reality, they are rarely practiced. So perhaps our discomfort with Millennials has something to do with their courage to live out the values we only talk about. What if we stepped back and asked, “What can we learn from them?” ■

1. Millennials at Work: Reshaping the Workplace (2012)

2. Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next: Confident, Connected and Open to Change, (2010)

3. S. Sorenson and Kerri Garman, (August 2013) There is a Generation Gap in your Workplace. The Gallup Business Journal.