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The Millennial Employee in Today's Workforce— Our Future Leaders

DEVELOPING THE 21ST
CENTURY WORKFORCE

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Introduction

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The workforce of the 21st century is rapidly changing in today's environment. The economic conditions of the past few years have caused individuals who were late baby boomers, i.e., individuals in their late 50's and 60's to remain in the workforce longer, causing a sometimes cultural clash and difference of opinion with newly entering millennial workers in their early 20's. Currently working in today's workforce are four generations of workers—all with different and sometimes divergent backgrounds and work expectations. The definition of four worker generations is listed below (Zemke, 2000):

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	Veterans	Boomers	Xers	Nexters
Outlook	Practical	Optimistic	Skeptical	Hopeful
Work Ethic	Dedicated	Driven	Balanced	Determined
View of Authority	Respectful	Love/Hate	Unimpressed	Polite
Leadership by	Hierarchy	Consensus	Competence	Pulling Together
Relationships	Personal Sacrifice	Personal Gratification	Reluctant to commit	Inclusive
Turnoffs	Vulgarity	Political incorrectness	Cliché, hype	Promiscuity

Veterans are identified as those workers who participated in World War II and the Korean War. Baby Boomers are identified as those workers born between 1946 and 1964, while Generation Xers constitute the group born from 1965 to 1980. Millennial age workers, or Nexters, the predominant cohort who is graduating from college and entering the workforce today, were born between 1981 and 2000.

One of the immediate identified key differences of employees is work ethic. Veterans and Baby Boomers are identified as having a dedicated and driven work ethic, while Generation Xers and Nexters prefer and desire a balanced and determined work ethic. Work life balance is important to many Nexters because of what they observed with their Baby Boomer parents, who dedicated heart and soul to the job only to be laid off when any corporate downturn arose. This intense focus and dedication of Baby Boomer parents to their jobs caused many Nexters to not desire such an intense and focused work life balance in their personal careers.

Five generations in the current workforce identified in research (Meister, 2009) depict the decreasing number of traditionalists by the year 2020, while the number of Millennials is increasing at a significant rate.

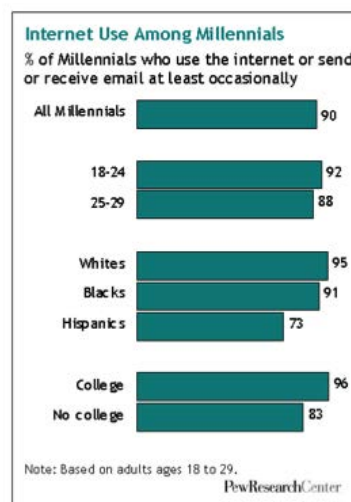
Traits and Characteristics of Millennial Nexter Workers

The growth of Nexters dictates that workplace cultural environmental conditions change in order to adapt to this new generation of worker. Three key traits of Millennial workers are the desires to have flexible work options, a strong work and life balance, as well as the ability to work remotely (Kaifi, 2012). Generation X workers possess unique traits identified as individualistic, risk-tolerant, self-reliant, entrepreneurial, comfortable with diversity, and valuing work life balance (Gentry, 2011).

Millennial Nexters desire collective action, working in teams, wanting work that really matters to them and being civic minded, eco-aware, confident, conventional, optimistic and socially conscious (Hewlett, 2009). Motivation, drive and desire are Nexter characteristics.

As the workforce and workplace changes, companies and corporations need to make cultural and environmental adjustments in order to not only keep up with change, but also to also address millennial worker concerns. Five dominant themes for millennial workers include work life balance, good pay and benefits, opportunities for advancement, meaningful work experience and a nurturing work environment (Ng, 2010).

Leading and managing Millennial Nexters is not domain dependent, which means that irrespective of the domain of employment, e.g. healthcare, engineering, manufacturing, and financial services industry, their characteristics and expectations appear to remain similar. Millennials want coaching, direction and feedback. They want to work, but do not want



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work to be their life. They are typically hard workers and are willing to work hard when they deem the work to be worthwhile. Nexters are not driven by money but by meaningful work, and they expect to fly—not merely climb—the corporate ladder sooner rather than later in their careers. They are prone to change jobs every few years or even more frequently in search of a greater intellectual or creative challenge, schedule flexibility, career development, career satisfaction, better relationships with coworkers, less stressful work conditions or better quality of life. Nexters are team oriented and value collaboration and sharing of ideas. They are comfortable and may thrive in multicultural, diverse environments (Piper, 2012).

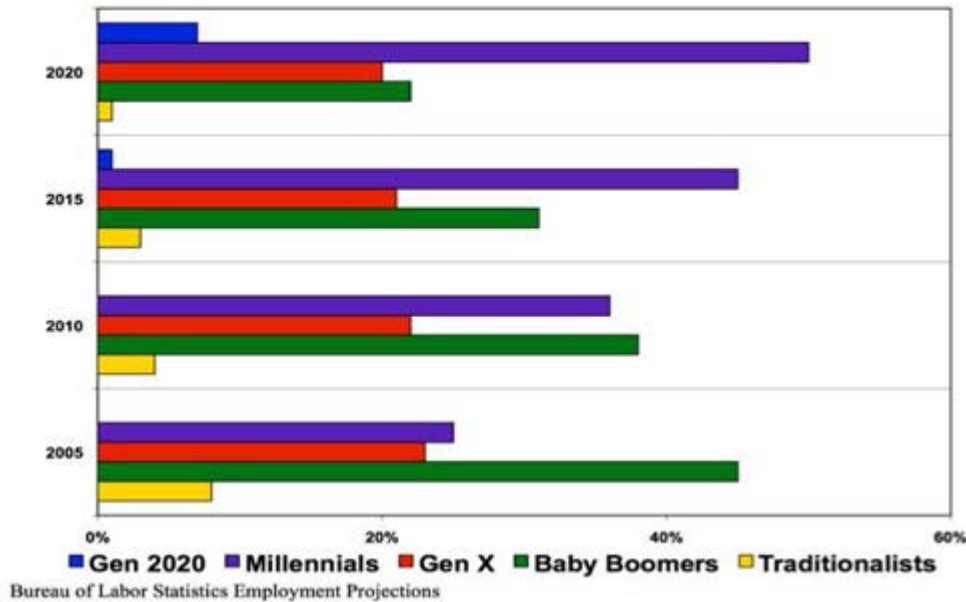
Digital connectivity is important to Millennial-age employees. Having grown up using a wide variety of electronic devices, i.e. smart phones, tablets, and laptops, this generation of workers is comfortable being “connected” through electronic media all of the time. The implication for the company that employs these new workforce contributors is significant. Fast speed, wireless connections will be a given, with high expectations to being able to use their devices all of the time. Companies that retain and employ outdated, arcane information technology corporate policies on how, when and where an individual can use the Internet will find that this generation will revolt.

Millennials clearly understand security and safety considerations when using the Internet. However, they fully expect to be able to use the Internet to access any type of information or data necessary during their daily routines (PewResearchCenter, 2010).

Workplace Changes to Adapt to Millennial Nexters

Industry must be willing to make cultural and environmental changes to adjust to the new Millennial worker mindset. These employees are going to become our new leaders, so changes have to be made to adapt to their learning styles and must begin during the employee on-boarding process. The following characteristics of a successful on-boarding experience set the tone for success with a new Millennial employee (Ferri-Read, 2013):

Five Generations in the Workplace



- Plan it together—Discuss and identify on-boarding options
- Make it Visual—Videos, Web
- Keep it Brief—Focused, Pointed
- Automate it—Social Media, Facebook, Twitter, Blogs
- Make it Interactive—Hands on interactive events
- Group it—Use teams
- Assess it—Gather feedback to measure program and process effectiveness

The first step that industry must take is to develop an on-boarding process that addresses the needs and expectations of the Millennial-age employee. With the broad degree of information that is normally associated with onboarding, some large companies spend at least five full work days in seminars, presentations and briefings trying to impart knowledge to new employees. With the new generation of worker that program should change to a much richer, multi-media focused approach, like including videos, Web-based training, and limited and focused Power Point slide presentations. In some cases, large corporate onboarding has many hours of “rah-rah” about the new company and how wonderful it is to work at such a firm. That type of presentation will not be successful with the Millennial-generation employee.

Nexters have grown up in a team environment. They are accustomed to working in multi-cultural, diverse teams in everything that they do. The onboarding process should be no different and will allow new employees to meet new people who have started at the same time they did. This process allows for instant “friends” in the new workplace to be identified and developed.

Role of Social Mentors

Companies should assign and /or identify “functional and social mentor or mentors” for each employee. The assignment of mentors is an interesting challenge and can be achieved several different ways.

The role of the social mentor is different than that of the functional mentor. The social mentor’s role is to help the new Millennial employee become adjusted and accustomed to his/her new workplace and immediately becoming a strong individual contributor. The social mentor can be anyone, but preferably someone NOT in the same section or division of the company where the new employee is assigned. The social mentor’s primary role is to help the new employee adapt socially to the new corporate environment.

One of the most successful and creative manners to assign a social mentor is to find someone who is older than the employee and who has been at the firm for four to six years. This could be a senior individual contributor who has worked within several divisions of the company, knows the corporate environment and many, if not most, of the senior corporate leaders.

The social mentor can address how the company works, what political hot button issues are currently topical, what and how current policies work, i.e. travel reimbursement, use of the company facilities, social engagements and use of the corporate credit card—all questions that are covered in the onboarding process in a cold, sterile, non-engaging fashion.

Role of Functional Mentors

Functional mentors are individuals in workers’ own domain environments who have extensive knowledge of the work that the new employees are engaged in. This functional mentor is probably a senior individual contributor who may be a Baby Boomer generation member. Research (Speigel, 2011) shows that Millennials want mentorship, which, if successfully implemented, may also benefit the mentor. The

Role of Social Mentors

senior worker can show the new Nexter worker how the work domain operates, while the Millennial worker can show the Boomer employee how to use the wide variety of computer, tablet, smart phone and social media tools and devices that Millennials have grown up with. This mentoring is known as reverse or cross-generational mentoring—both individuals are able to achieve new knowledge, confidence and abilities while working together in the functional environment.

Cross-generational mentoring can be implemented in a way to positively benefit both individuals. This method also allows for cross-generational connections between employees (Alsop, 2008). The Millennials' knowledge of, and previous experiences with, older adults will have an impact on their transition into the workforce (Allan, 2009; Eisner, 2005).

Mentoring the New Millennial Employee

Senior corporate executives should make it a habit to talk—really talk—and listen to new Millennial employees on a periodic basis, no less than bi-monthly. Nexters desire, seek and want senior level mentoring (Nekuda, 2011). This discussion can take a variety of different forms, however, the “stand up and lecture” format is NOT the correct way to handle this matter if you expect to gain any long-term mutual benefit. Millennials, like all people, like to be talked with, not to.

A much more desirable and effective method is to have an informal “burger burn”, draft beer sampling, chili cook off or some type of competitive sports or service activity where senior executives are actively involved. This means wearing jeans, not three-piece suits. Millennial employees are not rank or status conscious, but they do have immense respect for successful individuals. They want to become just as successful and are seeking input in how to become successful.



**Mentoring the
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Work Assignments and Challenging Opportunities

Millennial employees seek a wide diversification of assignments coupled with challenging opportunities. Company leaders should neither be discouraged from assigning tough, knotty problems to new Millennial employees, nor should company leaders expect a lesser quality product from these new employees. Nexters are used to multi-tasking. The solutions that these new employees produce may be unique, distinct and different than what was previously achieved. The benefit of this solution is that new ideas are considered, proposed and posited that may not have been previously explored.

Workplace Flexibility

Millennial employees are used to working a wide variety of hours—some late, some early, some differentiated, e.g. working four hours in the morning and four hours in the evening with some “release” time in the middle of the day for other non-job related or family activities. Allowing employees to work at Starbucks, at home, at the gym, on the beach, or at 2 a.m. are all traits important to Millennial Nexters. With the global world environment that many companies are involved in today, having someone up at 2 in the morning to work with China or India when the company is located in the U.S. can be considered a real bonus—especially to those employees who prefer a standard 8 to 5 schedule.

Conclusion

The Millennial Nexter is the next corporate leader. Strong communications skills, adept technology utilization, a work and life balance that provides meaningful work coupled with a family life is what Millennial-age employees seek. The world is changing at breakneck speed—existing companies must change with it or be left to flounder.



Conclusion

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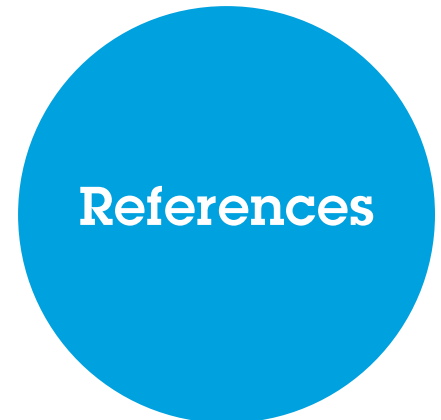
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