



7 SECRETS TO WORKING WITH MILLENNIALS

Does this sound familiar?

- You have just spent thousands of dollars recruiting recent college graduates, only to find that six months later, they have left you for greener pastures.
- You are horrified by the casual writing style of your younger staff and wonder what happened to spell check and punctuation.
- You are frustrated by what you call a “sense of entitlement” in today’s youth and marvel at their lack of patience to master a skill or job thoroughly.

If any of these statements hits home, you have already come in contact with the Millennial generation, born after 1981. If you haven’t been exposed to this dynamic cohort, just wait. Over 75 million¹ Millennials will enter the US labor market in the coming years. Understanding who they are and how they operate will no longer be a choice.

Millennial History

As each before them, the Millennial generation has a history of its own. Optimistic yet street smart, Millennials value diversity but also form the largest religious age bracket in the US. Born into the world of the internet, cell phones and video games, they are tech savvy with short attention spans. Raised by “Helicopter” Baby Boomer parents who pushed them to excel, Millennials are natural multi-taskers brimming with confidence. Simultaneously, this generation’s writing and communication skills have not kept pace with previous generations. What’s more, Millennial values around the sharing of media and intellectual property differ significantly from their older cohorts. Consider online social networking sites like MySpace and you will get a hint of how freely Millennials disseminate information over the web. This is a Harry Potter, Power Rangers generation of action-oriented team enthusiasts who want to make the world a better place. They are ready to bypass any red tape that tries to get in their way!

So where does this leave Millennials as up and coming employees? And how will employers effectively recruit and retain a group of workers predicted to drastically change how companies organize and communicate? Here are seven secrets for working with and supervising Millennials that will help even the most pessimistic of managers effectively leverage this generation!

Secret 1 - Stay Connected

Millennials are likely to be more successful with an ongoing support system at work. Close parental and school counselor relationships coupled with a demand for information at the push of a button translate into a need for constant feedback and contact in the workplace.

What you can do:

- Connect with Millennials daily by scheduling 10-minute meetings or quick email check-ins to outline expectations and answer questions.
- Provide ongoing mentoring and coaching opportunities to offer guidance and reinforce company culture and norms.
- Take the time to recognize Millennials by name on a daily basis.

Secret 2 - Make it Meaningful

Claiming the highest volunteer rates in recent history, Millennials want a chance to do work that will benefit society. They are more likely to respond (and less likely to quit!) if they feel their work has meaning and is connected to a greater good.

What you can do:

- Make a direct connection between their work and the benefit to others.
- Organize employee teams to collectively volunteer and match volunteering with paid time off.
- Highlight community involvement in your company newsletter.

Secret 3 - Create Goals Together

Even as adults, Millennials continue to be coached by highly involved parents encouraging them to set and achieve goals. Many members of this cohort have five-year plans and are looking for professional opportunities to fulfill them. They want to know how their next position will benefit them, what skills they will learn and when they will be promoted.

What you can do:

- Work with Millennials to integrate their goals with the organization's through formal performance management plans and career development programs.
- Educate Millennials on your organization's promotional track and what specific skills and experiences will help them reach the next level.
- Include Millennials in developing benchmarks and targets for particular projects to make them feel a part of the goal-setting process.

Secret 4 - Provide Flexibility

Skilled at multitasking and accustomed to media on demand, Millennials can consume 31 hours of media in a 24 hour period.ⁱⁱ They are likely to get bored when tasked with a single project and need variety to stay engaged.

What you can do:

- Assign two or more projects at a time, taking care to give explicit guidelines and due dates.
- Create flexible work schedules that leverage multitasking and focus on results.
- Make key data and training available online to allow workers access to the information they need on their own timetables.

Secret 5 - Challenge Them to Learn New Skills

Boasting the highest SAT scores in 30 years,ⁱⁱⁱ Millennials have always been pushed to excel in school and with extracurricular activities. They view learning as a lifelong pursuit and are hungry for new knowledge and training.

What you can do:

- Train Millennials on the "soft" skills (e.g. communication, business and email etiquette, presentation skills) that they often lack.
- Cater to different learning styles by offering multiple training formats, including downloadable modules, interactive group sessions, and mentor pairing.
- Create a learning culture by giving incentives for participating in training programs.

Secret 6 - Encourage Teamwork

Millennials are peer oriented. They like to support each other and to work in groups, even while having their own independent tasks to complete. Without a structured peer network to rely on they are likely to feel isolated and disengage from their work.

What you can do:

- Promote cross-functional teamwork and communication to complete assignments.
- Provide necessary technology to connect remote workers to each other 24 hours a day.
- Train all employees on conflict resolution and project management skills to ensure productivity within a team environment.

Secret 7 - Recognize Success

Millennials experienced educational and parental systems rich in praise. They are used to and expect to be recognized as someone special. They have also had limited exposure to critical feedback. To stay motivated, Millennials need frequent encouragement and acknowledgement.

What you can do:

- Acknowledge Millennials for their work, especially when it is significant to the overall project.
- Offer small but frequent rewards (e.g. movie tickets, gift certificates) to recognize key milestones achieved.
- Communicate how important Millennials are to your company's strategy and success.

Transitions that Count

With their multitasking, goal setting, and social networking skills, Millennials have a lot to offer organizations. In return, they ask for a sense of community, participation, and recognition, values we already know create strong work place cultures. As the mass exodus of Baby Boomers begins, and a smaller cohort of Generation Xers struggles to fill their shoes, it is clear that Millennials will have a significant role in tomorrow's workforce. Effectively integrating them into organizations will take planning, patience and a readiness to think differently about recruitment and retention programs. Companies willing to make the investment will see their attrition rates drop and experience a sustainable competitive advantage in the years to come.

Ready to Take the Next Step?

Bringing on a new generation can be daunting, but fortunately The Interchange Group has a number of programs to help you prepare your organization and embrace the change. Contact us today for more information!

ⁱ Danielle Sacks, "Scenes from the Culture Clash," *Fast Company*, January/February 2006, pp 73-77.

ⁱⁱ Michael Weiss, "To Be About to Be," *American Demographics*, September 2003, p. 31.

ⁱⁱⁱ Neil Howe, "Harnessing The Power of Millennials," *The School Administrator*, September 2005 (available: www.aasa.org/publications/saarticledetail.cfm?ItemNumber=2880&snItemNumber=&tnItemNumber=).