

# Mighty Millennials



By LaSonya Berry

## Strategies for avoiding intergenerational conflict in the workplace.

Currently, there are four generations in the workplace. If your organization wants to remain relevant, innovate, or ever needs to hire new people to operate, then this reality and its significance can no longer be ignored.

The U.S. Census data suggests that by 2015, Generation Y and Z workers will outnumber the Baby Boomers and Generation Xers in the workplace. And staffing firm Lee Hecht Harrison reports that 60 percent of employers are dealing with intergenerational conflict.

Currently, the most discussed generation is Generation Y (Gen Y), the “Millennials” who have been criticized for their bad workplace habits and poor performance. They have been accused of being unmotivated, impatient know-it-all who are overly focused on the latest gadget or social fad. They have been called slackers, and are seen as easily bored and ill-equipped to make an impact unless it is technology-related. But didn't you hear similar words when you were younger?

Gen Y is the largest population in the world, and soon will represent the largest population of workers. This is what we like to call Generational Leadership Transition™. They view the world differently than the other generations, and define success differently.

Whatever your thoughts on Gen Y, they will be leading us all through the workplace. More guidance is needed to prepare these young leaders to take on their work roles. Here are a few strategies some successful organizations have implemented:

### Explore the Differences, Focus on Shared Values

Before you can determine a common ground, you must first understand each other's three Ps: Past, Perspective, and Preference. Our behaviors and how we respond to things have a lot to do with how we were brought up and what we experienced. This drives our perspectives and determines our preferences.

Let's consider the Millennials. They were raised during the most technologically advanced age so far. Their parents provided them with gadgets to keep them on the cutting edge—or maybe to just keep them busy. They can get

information about anything in seconds. And yet, they still don't fully understand the history of most things after the late 1990s, and are not really interested.

Understand the era in which the various generations were reared, and you'll have a good idea of their perspectives. We all value the

### The Generations Defined

| Generation                          | Birth Range      |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| Traditionalist or Silent Generation | Born before 1945 |
| Baby Boomers                        | 1946-1964        |
| Generation X                        | 1965-1979        |
| Generation Y (Millennials)          | 1980-1994        |
| Generation Z (Digital Natives)      | 1995-            |

# Mighty Millennials *(continued)*

need to belong, provide relevance, and be appreciated. Determine how that can be accomplished in your workplace and you will have the foundation of your organization's sweet spot.

## Provide Professional Development

If the majority of the workforce in the next five years will be Millennials, and schools continue to struggle to provide cutting-edge education, then Millennials will have significant skills gaps, limited employment opportunities, and will be ill-equipped for careers in the STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). Millennials may not be where they should when they enter college, and as a result, may not be work-ready when they graduate.

Organizations should take a three-pronged approach to employee development. Millennials welcome professional development at minimal cost—and often need it.

**1.** Implement support programs to incorporate Gen Y into the fold successfully, or develop your own internal program. In McPherson/Berry's **Bridge to the Workplace™** program, we provide high school and college graduates with the skills needed to be effective in their future places of employment. By teaching skills such as business writing, communication, etiquette, and ethics, insights on employer expectations, and tips on how to be successful during the first 90 days of employment, we increase Millennial engagement, retention, and results.

**2.** Customize programs for various industries or specific jobs in order to have a ready-made workforce. Equally important are programs that support skill development in STEM fields, both for college-educated and trade-focused individuals. A new "hollege" model founded by Rashid Davis, is the six year high school that includes some college. Bridging high school, college, and the professional world, **Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH)** allows students to leave high school with an associate's degree.

**3.** Offer leadership development programs specifically for Millennials such as **Next Level Young Leaders™** to support the need for expedited leadership transitions. With Baby Boomers (the second-largest generation) retiring and Generation X representing only about 20 percent of the workforce, you will need trained leaders quickly, and they will want to advance fast.

## Establish an Inclusive Culture

Establish a culture that's inclusive of generational diversity. Intentionally incorporate the perspective of each generation in everything your organization does to build its

culture. When committees, task forces, or project teams are formed, ensure that each generation is represented. Have each generation commit to helping another generation develop specific skills or learn specific areas. For instance, let Millennials offer development to Baby Boomers and Traditionalists on the effects of social media on your service or product. Build on the wealth of knowledge and experience that is present in your organization.

## Connect to Collaborate

Millennials are the most supervised generation ever. As children, they were less likely than any other generation to be left alone due to societal circumstances, and they participated in more team activities. They are also the most technologically savvy, and the most likely to multitask. As a result, they understand what it means to be a team player—collaborating, existing in diverse environments and connecting.

Maximize on their ability to collaborate. Help them understand how they contribute to the organization's success, utilize their technology skills, provide them with goals, communicate deadlines, and provide consistent supervision. Connect them to your cause, and you will have engaged Millennials who are ready to contribute and increase your return on investment.

Gallup reports that "actively disengaged" employees cost the American economy up to \$350 billion a year in lost productivity. Actively disengaged employees are those that are doing just enough to get by and stay below the radar. They typically are not making a significant impact to move the organization forward, and not providing a significant return on the investment. Which generations are present in your organization? Are they universally satisfied, and do they work well together? If you can survive lost productivity, disengaged workers, workplace conflict, and negative customer interactions, you are making a different kind of history. ♦



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