Research Article

Leadership Practices for Engaging the Millennial Workforce

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ABSTRACT

What are some practises that can help retain and engage the millennial workforce better? As the millennial workforce is more aware, closely linked, and has enormous resources at their fingertips, they demand more meaningful and purposeful jobs that combine monetary gains and personal fulfilment. Traditional management styles are quickly becoming obsolete and new forms of management need to catch up if firms want to retain their best and brightest. This paper focuses on key strategies that managers can use to engage with the Millennials. This paper briefly explores the Millennial mind set and expectations from their careers and proposes four ways for managers to rise to those expectations.

The global workforce is rapidly changing. The current employees are demanding, educated, and confident. The Millennial workforce, who, by the events that define their life periods and context have been labelled different terms by different authors- Generation Y, Millennials, Nexus Generation are rapidly disrupting the current dynamics and practises in leadership and management. The Millennials, born during 1980-2000, are challenging conventional job expectations and traditions (Sessa, 2007). The Millennials are often described at special, sheltered, achievement oriented, and confident (Menakse Sahin, 2017) and have said to have a different set of values than the Baby Boomers.

The generation theory suggests that each generation differs due to a different set of values, ethics and beliefs (Johnson and Romanello, 2005) and some research suggests that while the Millennial's belief systems do differ slightly from the previous generation they often fall on a predictable continuum. This difference in values and beliefs regardless of how prominent, does impact their working styles and expectations, impacting in turn, the managers who work with them. The most significant difference between the Millennials and the previous generation is the use of technology in their lives (Hershatter and Epstein, 2016).As the Millennials grew up with technology, their ability to use it, understand it, and manipulate it

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often helps them multitask, be optimistic, team oriented, and an inclination to accept authority (Hartman, Moskal, and Dziuban, 2005).

A review of relevant literature suggests that the millennial being brought up in a world of instant access, also want instant gratification as well as harbour higher expectations from their jobs in terms of pay and benefits, promotions, work/life balance, purpose, and intellectual challenges (Ng et al, 2014). A survey suggested that by 2020, Millennials will form 50% of the global workforce, however, they will still continue to be a shortage of workers particularly due to the low birth rates in certain countries (Price Water Coopers 2008). Another survey, by Statistics Canada (2007) suggested a shortage of qualified workers in the next twenty five years. These projected shortages in the global workforce coupled with the highly educated Millennials will lead toMillennials having a higher degree of choice regarding where they want to work, how they want to work, what kind of employment they would prefer, and the flexibility they would require. As employers strive to hire and retain the best, most value addition employees, it is absolutely imperative that employers and managers re-evaluate their management and leadership styles and understand the expectations of the younger generations so that they can cater to them.

In this paper, I briefly touch upon the expectations of the Millennials, their goals, motivations, expectations from their jobs, and then review and document how these expectations can be met. I focus on four key ways to retain and engage Millennials in a firm.

The Millennial Career Expectations
Work/Life Balance
The Millennials are striving for a work/life balance that enables personal and professional growth. They are demanding jobs that give them the flexibility to pursue and enjoy a healthy family life with a challenging, fulfilling career path. One research proposes that since the Millennials have seen their parents work long hours on days at end, have seen layoffs, and the impact work pressures have on family life (Loughin and Barling 2001), they are prioritizing their lives in a manner to allow for the balance their parents didn't have. A study carried out across Canada found that Millennials emphasised the most on the individualistic aspects of their job (Eddy et al, 2010) catering to those jobs that satisfied most of their requirements.

Benefits and Advancement
A study by the Corporate Reward Leadership Council (2005) found that pay was the most important factor for the Millennials. While some researchers have argued that this is due to the millennial sense of entitlement (Greenberger et at, 2008), other researchers argue that while Millennials do have high expectations in term of money and advancements, they were also realistic when they first began their jobs (Ng Eddy et al, 2010). Some scholars also contended that the Millennials need for higher pay maybe a way for them to feel validated and receive feedback (McClelland, 1965). The Millennials also seem to be looking for new experiences which often include international assignments (Price Water Coopers 2008) and challenging, stimulating work (Thompson and Gregory, 2012).The Millennials have high

expectations to promotion and career advancements. When they do not receive the rewards or benefits they expect, the Millennials move onto a different firm or employer that can give them better benefits and opportunities.

Meaningful Work
While the Millennial employee demands good benefits, they also are looking for meaningful and purposeful work (Yang and Guy 2006). The Millennials are focusing as much on the work itself as they are on the employer's vision, values, and mission. The Millennials are not afraid of seeking out employers whose values match their own and whose work has purpose. Millennials are seeking out companies that have meaningful corporate responsibility and where the company's vision is aligned to theirs. A study by Price Water Coopers (2008) found that 88% of the respondents said that they would find an employer whose values match their own.

Firms and management is often tempted to regard the Millennials as 'lazy' and 'entitled', but they need to remember that these Millennials will constitute a majority workforce and their best bet to retain the best of them, is to cater to their needs and values, create an environment that will foster growth, and help them evolve.

METHODS TO ENGAGE THE MILLENNIAL WORKFORCE

Opening Different Channels of Communications
One of the biggest distinguishing factors between the Millennials and the baby boomers is the use of technology. The internet was established in 1982, two years into the Millennial generation, growing with the generation itself (Hershatter, A., & Epstein, M. 2010) giving way eventually to social networking sites and the cell phone. MySpace, a social networking site was developed in 2003, and Facebook, another social media site, was launched in 2004. The founder of Facebook himself a millennial was a Harvard student at the time of the creation of this social networking site. These sites game them instant access to friends, family, and information.

By the time a millennial enters the workforce, technology is an inseparable part of his/her experience and life. Technology has enabled the millennial to stay at home and reach the corners of the world within seconds, they find information on their fingertips, and have the ability to locate multiple answers and solutions within seconds. This also extends to the idea of communication. Rather than wait for letters or the appropriate time for phone calls, the Millennials simply send text messages. While one can argue that texting leads to bad interpersonal skills, the millennial workforce has been ingrained into school life with various group projects and assignments at every grade, compelling them to work together and as a team and hence prefer to and value teamwork and community (Hershatter, A., & Epstein, M. 2010). The use and familiarity with technology is so pervasive in the Millennial that researcher Marc Prensky, coined the term 'Digital native' exemplifying the importance of technology. It is no surprise then that managers will need to start taking this extensive use of

technology in their stride and in fact working with it to understand and communicate with their employees.

While managers complain that their employees (often the Millennial) have a poor work ethic, and are easily distracted (Shwabel 2013) they will need to be able to work around those tendencies to retain their employees. Managers must open up to different forms of communication. While emailing is often the preferred format by many managers, many firms are experimenting with texts, video calls, and the likes. They are faster and many times more suited to the Millennials. Managers must have a viable way to be able to connect with and in turn communicate with their employees.

Encouraging Innovation
The Millennials have a bad reputation of disloyalty, looking for ways to advance faster and better, leaving firms without much hesitation. A report found that 72% of the respondents felt like they had to make several compromises in their jobs, 28% felt that their work/life balance wasn't met and 86% suggested changing jobs in case their employer's values didn't match theirs (Price Water Coopers, 2008). In order to retain creative, young workers, the management will need to expand the way they structure their work and interaction.

Millennial have numerous ways to show, explain, and learn. From blogs to YouTube, every format of audio and visual learning is available. They have learned to fend for themselves, often looking up vast amounts of information from their phones. Universities too have endorsed this tendency and have invested billions of dollars to stay up to date with technology. Today, the majority of start-ups like Mu Sigma, EnCloudEn, Uber, have an intensive technology background and then build on that technology to find solutions. In every field, some form of technology bleeds in. In order to retain and sustain the best employees the employers must give way for innovation and creativity among their employees. An analysis at Google found that in comparison to the projects backed by the managements, the projects that weren't had a higher success rate (Khaire, 2014). It's imperative that employees have time given to them to find solutions to recurring problems, and also be given the resources they need to find those solutions. While traditional thought believed in single handed genius, the contemporary school of thought often relies on group efforts. Collaboration within the employees is also vital to promote innovation and a sense of belonging. Employees must be encouraged to seek other avenues and professionals for solutions.

Consistent Feedback Generation
As the millennial have worked tirelessly with technology in some form or the other, they have received answers ad solutions instantly. Their interaction with technology is mirrored in their work ethic for their need for instant feedback is immense. Providing feedback to the Millennials is an important part of their job expectations, as they grew up in an environments of constant feedback, attention, and positivity so much so that many of them were given appreciation awards for simply participating rather than achieving. A phenomenon that

earned the Millennials a title of "trophy kids" (Alsop, 2008) and one that managers have to deal with in the workplace. This tendency carriers through college into their jobs as Millennials constantly want to learn and grow (Smith, 2014). While feedback ought to be given regularly, negative feedback must be given with actionable solutions. Improvement points ought to be listed out. Research suggests that focusing on positive emotions during a negative feedback can enhance performance and acceptance of that feedback (O'Malley and Gregory, 2011).

It is also vital that managers give their employees space to suggest, and voice their opinions and solutions. While the Servant leader mode of business worked well for the previous generation, this generation has a different approach to work. This should be taken into account and put to practise by giving Millennials more responsibility and more accountability. Employees must be given a free hand to work and then their voice ought to be heard. Managers must make time to hear ideas and solutions and to acknowledge the same.

Authenticity and Vision
The Millennials have seen many catastrophic events in their lives. From witnessing the September 11 attacks to recurrently witnessing mass shootings and fatalities, they are increasingly looking for ways to give back to society and contribute to create a greater good. At the same time, they are exposed to enormous information of cheating, deceit, and violence (Gregoire, 2015) often leading to a negative outlook of people and society in general. Millennials in turn, have a burning need for authentic leadership and meaningful action. This trait is so valued by the Millennials that consumer brands are looking for ways to be more authentic and real (Jubenville, 2016). Companies too need to follow in suit in order to attract and retain the best employees. Authenticity in companies is first gauged by the Millennials by the company's corporate branding, corporate social responsibility, and finally reflected in their managers. Authenticity comes forth in transparency and communication. Being honest and open regarding work, while giving feedback and about their progress in the firm is a practise all managers must execute. Managers must be willing to have their motives and intentions questioned. They must also be open to receiving feedback.

In that vein, Millennials while being intellectually challenged, must also be given a valid reason as to why they are working and what they are working towards. Managers must align the company vision and values to the tasks that they give their employees.

CONCLUSION

The Millennials have a tremendous drive to achieve and to innovate. They have the energy and know how to work towards goals that motivate and excite them. While more empirical studies are needed to better understand leadership needs and trends among the Millennial, this paper provides a theoretical framework for engaging and retaining the millennial in a way that will lead to productive and innovate solutions with longer lasting relationships among managers and employees.

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