

## Understanding Millennial Employees

Workers from the last three generations are vastly different in their workplace motivators and threats. **Baby Boomer:** born between 1946-1964 and are 52-70 years old. **Generation X:** born between 1965-1980 and are 36-51 years old. **Millennial** (also known as Generation Y): born between 1981 and 2000 and are 35-16 years old.

Many doctors today do not understand why Millennials' work ethic is so different from theirs. The sum total of each generation's experiences, ideas and values, shape their work approach and priorities. Not all of the following characteristics of Millennials will apply to everyone; some will fit part of the description and some will not fit at all. However, if different generations can better understand each other, the management and the mutual cooperation will make work less frustrating and more productive.

Millennials are the current and future workforce in dental offices, and they will make up nearly half the workforce by 2020. They grew up through 9/11, the recession, school shootings, terrorist attacks, AIDS and cultural diversity, and their heroes are Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg. They are also typically children of divorce. These events and their Generation X parent's latch-key childhoods have made Millennials the most sheltered generation. Their parents tried to protect them from the evils in the world and took on an expanded role of helping their children advance in life. Thus, Millennials' work characteristics derive from being raised by helicopter parents who micromanage their lives:

- Their doting parents gave Millennials constant attention and validation. This was the generation where everyone on the team received a trophy for participating. There were no losers, everyone was a winner. They are extremely focused on continuing to develop themselves and want to learn new job skills.
- Nothing is impossible to them because they grew up being exposed to vast information and possibilities of careers and life styles. They are the can-do generation, never worrying about failure, for they see themselves as running the world and their work environments; and they hope to be the next great generation that will fix all the wrong they have seen in the world.
- Because their parents had high expectations, Millennials tend to display plenty of self-confidence and believe they are highly valuable to any organization from the start.
- Their parents created highly structured lives for their children by scheduling sports, musical and tutoring lessons to help their children be high achievers. As a result of their minimal downtime, they are very comfortable with moving from one activity to another, and are good multitaskers.
- Millennials adapt well to change, are the most technologically savvy generation, and work well with diverse coworkers.
- They are also known as the Microwave Society who want things quickly and immediate gratification is very important.
- Millennials are not willing to give up their lifestyle for a career. They are famous for their commitment to friends, family and hobbies, even at the expense of work. They value having flexibility in their daily lives and choose careers that allow them to live the life they desire; busy with after-work activities, heading out to gyms, volunteer positions, classes and social events.
- In school, Millennials were taught lessons using a cooperative learning style; therefore, they are team-oriented and like to socialize in groups. They feel comfortable working on teams and want to make friends with people at work. They thrive in a work environment that is family-like and their opinions matter.
- Millennials grew up communicating through instant messaging, texting, Facebook, e-mail and various types of social media. Quick and efficient communication is the way Millennials choose to interact. They prefer to text important communications which should be done via phone, e.g. informing their supervisor they will not make it into work.
- Millennials are typically unaware of their non-verbal cues because of their lack of face-to-face communication experience. As a result, this generation can be more intimidated with this type of communication. They can also have more miscommunications between coworkers and bosses when their interactions are only snippets of texting and emails.
- Millennials are notorious job-hoppers who dislike workplace rules and procedures, and distrust that their boss has their best interest at heart. Bruce Tulgan, consultant and author of *It's Okay to Manage Your Boss* says, "They will be the most high maintenance workforce in the history of the world, but they may also be the most high performing. Some of the negative stereotypes about this generation—that they're narcissistic, disloyal or can't interact face-to-face—can be turned into positive attributes when properly understood and leveraged."

## Ways to Work Successfully with Millennials

### Hiring

- Millennials are the generation of research. Before interviewing, they will read reviews on a company to see what it can offer them that no other can.

### Provide Structure and Meaning

- Millennials are more interested in a sense of purpose, making the world a better place, than simply punching a clock. Share with them the practice's vision and the way each position on the team impacts the success of the practice. This makes them feel valued, which in turn boosts productivity.
- Goals are clearly stated and progress is regularly assessed. Create small benchmarks of achievement so the team can more easily feel success vs. setting high goals that take a long time to attain.
- Have clear due dates for reports or projects.
- Have clear job descriptions and an up-to-date employee policy manual. Go over the employee policy manual as a team once a year so everyone understands the rules and expectations of working in the practice, i.e. cell phone usage, tardiness, absenteeism, social media postings, etc. Have regular meetings with agendas; morning meeting, monthly team meeting and quarterly department meeting (front desk, restorative staff, recare staff). These meetings should be an exchange of open communication. Millennials want to have a voice in decisions that affect them and are always looking for innovative ways to make things better, especially utilizing technology.

### Provide Leadership and Guidance

- Millennials are used to close and supportive relationships with their parents. They want a tight bond with a boss who is close, caring and aware. Win their affection, but be careful not to cross the line between boss - advocate and boss - friend. According to research, loyalty to the boss is the number one reason they stay in a job, especially during the first three years. Dissatisfaction with the boss or the company's reputation is the number one reason they quit.
- Listen to the Millennial employee, they do not want their thoughts ignored. Engage them in the interview process of new employees, new policies and system changes. They are used to loving, doting parents who scheduled their lives around their children.
- Understand that Millennials' sense of entitlement comes from their Boomer/Generation X parents who coached them to ask for what they want, as well as growing up in a society that promotes immediate gratification.
- Millennials enjoy challenge and change. They want to learn and grow. Encourage this by providing CE classes on new technology, expanded functions, insurance regulations, etc. Practice management, delivery and marketing systems are changing rapidly and Millennials can help the practice keep up and adapt.

- Millennials respond well to constant feedback. Give corrections and encouragement often. Reward good behavior immediately and guide them through personal growth not criticism. Privately hold them accountable for mistakes; they have a hard time taking criticism. First, start your discussion with the things they are doing right, then address the changes they need to make, and how you can help them grow. Once a year performance reviews are not enough. Millennials are used to regular feedback from their parents and always want to know how they are doing. Consider doing shorter, quarterly performance reviews.
- Plan to spend a lot of time teaching and coaching Millennials, so be aware of this commitment when you hire them.
- Encourage the Millennial's confident can-do attitude and positive personal self-image. They want to change the world, because their parents told them they can do it.
- Millennials are great multi-taskers; Therefore create jobs which duties keep them engaged and stimulated by setting different goals and tasks to be completed each week.
- Millennials have a high comfort level with teams and believe a team can accomplish more and better. Have strong, open, two-way team communication, and foster high levels of cooperation and support among employees.

### Make your Work Place Millennial Friendly

- Provide a fun, employee-centered workplace. Millennials want to enjoy their work and workplace, and be friends with their co-workers. Let them help plan the next practice team outing. Also ask for their ideas on making their job and the workday more productive and fun, i.e. schedule theme days once a month where the team dresses up.

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- Prioritize community service. Millennials want to be connected to their community in philanthropic causes. Use practice resources to do community service projects that the team selects.
- Take advantage of your Millennials' computer, cell phone, social media and electronic literacy to maximize the utilization of technology in the practice to increase efficiency.
- Provide a life-work integration in the workplace. Millennials work hard, but they are not into long work days and work weeks as defined by the Baby Boomers. Spending time with children, families and their extracurricular activities are priorities. Work-life balance and multiple activities are important. Offer job sharing and flexible hours if possible.

### Millennial Marketing

- Ask Millennials for their marketing ideas, and capitalize on their ability to network and utilize social media to stay connected with families in the practice and the community. Millennials use Instagram and Pinterest for creative ideas that they can replicate.

Millennials have grown up in a digital world with uncertainty and a shower of parental attention, but ultimately, they want the same thing that every employee wants: schedule control, meaningful work relationships, choice of work day activities, learning opportunities and advancement. Make your millennial employees happy in a challenging, fun, yet structured setting as you build the foundation for a productive team.

"Employees who believe that management is concerned about them as a whole person - not just an employee - are more productive, more satisfied, more fulfilled. Satisfied employees mean satisfied customers, which leads to profitability."

~ Anne M. Mulcahy

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