

Millennial Sanity



Imagine this: a beautiful Monday morning and you have come into work, a double hot extra shot mocha something fancy coffee in one hand, your cell phone in the other. Today will be awesome, new people have started, your company is growing, and there are white puffy clouds against a bright blue backdrop of sky for bonus points. As you round the corner to your office to see...them.

Yes, them, The Millennials. Your HR department saw their bright shiny new resumes, their social-media-perfect hair, glamorous white smiles, and urban office chic clothes and thought: THIS is the ticket. Sigh. I know, I know. I have a few millennials in my household that I made myself and I can tell you with certainty, I feel your pain. (P.s. no they won't leave, but if you are hiring by the end of this article...email me).

The real reason you sighed and plunked your fancy coffee on the desk is because...this is going to be hard work. These are actual new people. New like: fresh out of college new, fresh with ideas new, and thoughts – all new. These are the people that will ask questions you were never bold enough to ask. They will question all your decisions new and old then push the boundaries of your comfortable lines in the sand. They will want to work as teams, and have collaborations. Designer kids are here, in your office (or one near you), and they don't understand what you have been through.

So close your office door and know a few things about Millennials. I have done some digging to try to help relieve your pain and as always I am happy to help, or listen, if you need a friend.

The real issue

You as a manager are going to have to deal with this generation just as the generation before dealt with you. Yes, yes, you. You were of an earlier generation, you were new and fresh and ready. You had ideas and thoughts too.

I will say nothing while you close your eyes and remember: 1986...heck 1976, 1966? What were the kids of that day doing? Some were at Woodstock, some were worshiping punk rock and big hair and shoulder pads, and some were wearing a great deal of unfortunate polyester, hammer-pants anyone? However, without these people (potentially even you) who ran in bold, bright and ready to change the world, where would we be today? Generation X were some crazy innovative peeps. They came up with the internet, cell phones, entrepreneurship, self-help, and outside-of-the-box thinking, oh and Millennials.

Who are they?

A Millennial is defined as someone aged 18-34. Yes, 34ish. This group of adults are the products of different social norms than you or I while growing up. Think thirty-minute-and-fixed television. Think participation trophies. Think a graduation for every grade (that one drives me insane I could write a whole litany of articles on that subject alone). I even recently discovered the "prom-proposal". I told my girls, any boys who do that are to be dumped immediately for being too dumb to see that they themselves and my girls deserve to leave something to the future like a real proposal. I digress, but I hope you see my point.

Loyalty and Flexibility

Millennials grew up with choices and flexibility. There were 3000 channels on TV, the internet, cell phones...your basic run of the mill instant gratification fest. Which to you means they have no issue finding a new job, on the millions of job sites on the internet, if yours doesn't "fit". Loyalty means something entirely different to them than it does to you. The process of gaining their loyalty will take some creativity, polls, and constant morphing to keep your Millennials. Missing this important step will cost you big time in training and retraining incoming "hole fillers" every time the wind blows. So you need to discover the best ways to keep them in their seats for as long as possible. No company can afford to train new people every year. Don't be discouraged though! There are some great ways to help keep your Millennials from job hopping.

Start in the interview by finding out what their ideas are and how they envision their career path. Then discuss what you can do for them. Start on the very first day with a career path plan and every six months go over it to make sure you are still on the same path. Make sure you are paying attention to sentences that end with "but..." My example is, "I really like what I do, but..." Whatever comes next you need to discuss, is this a realistic "but" or not? Finally, make sure that you have your shield of flexibility on when you hear what your employee says. I say this because you are offering an opportunity to discuss their dreams and hopes and direction, be aware that they are going to tell you exactly that. Care about what they have to say, be honest and understanding. That means that, "No you can't be CEO at 22 three months after you started, but you can do this, see this, read this, join this, watch that, and add x amount of education and experience, so that maybe you can be the youngest CEO in our history...". Just because they are getting a chance to direct their employment as you may not have had the pleasure to do so early, or maybe ever, in your career doesn't mean they are less than able.

Perks

Millennials offer a breath of fresh air. Yes, structured – hover parent style breaths of air, but there are ways to help this process go smoother. Millennials will press you to make sure that you have expounded on what is expected. They will want rules, guidelines, boundaries, with a smidge of flexibility. Flexibility can be mask as rewards, which they love. These are carrot finders. You put out a carrot, they will go get it. Just don't get in their way as they go get it. If you offer up an issue: "solve global warming" and get awarded an electric car...don't be mad when you come in the office and you are sitting on cardboard furniture and an average office temperature of 82°F. Make guidelines, narrow pathways, rules, exclusions etc.

Sure this is all more work for you, but it is also a grand opportunity to find new roads. Millennials offer fresh. They offer innovation, they offer a wide range of ideas and thoughts in a minute. Those same ideas would have you at your desk for a year and still you might never have come up with even one. They will site the obvious but blaze a new trail, probably just like you did once upon a time. They will want fancy coffee *in* the office because that is easier than waking up 20 minutes early to drive for fancy coffee. They will want flexibility in the form of if I take off today at 3 and stay 2 hours over the course of the week can that be ok? The answer to a hard & good worker, yes (some exclusions apply). Remember they grew up with fine print too!

How to move forward:

First you need to break out of your bubble and ask yourself what do you have to lose. Think about all the things you did as a youngling, and the things you wish you hadn't. Worse, think of all the things you didn't do that you wish you had done but didn't because you were scared of the wrath of the generation above you.

Second, relax. So things are going to change, maybe it will be better for everyone this way. Maybe a more relaxed environment will usher in a better way of doing business today. The ugly simple fact is: if you stay the same your company will die of irrelevance anyway.

Third, pick up your fancy coffee, take a big gulp, do a little research, and see what happens. Oh and be sure to email or twitter or call me, I am flexible!

About the Author: Danah Head is an Executive Advisor for The Distribution Team, a firm that specializes in helping distributors become more profitable through strategic planning and operating efficiencies. Danah has an MBA in Technology Management for Supply Chain and completed work for a Masters in Adult Education and Corporate Training. While pursuing education, she worked in different purchasing and supply chain roles within the manufacturing industry. With real world experience and technical training help her find the best solutions for warehouse and distribution companies. One way she does this is via a Business Reality 101 simulation game designed to dispel common business misunderstandings for the whole company (<https://youtu.be/G9QBGq4MLJc>). For more information, call 479.381.8495 or e-mail danah@distributionteam.com. Also be sure to visit The Distribution Team online www.thedistributionteam.com. Now: @Distribution_Tm on Twitter

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