

TV CAREERS

OPINION

The Kids Are Alright: Managing Millennials

Gen Y Employees Are Here to Stay; Quit Griping and Help Them Shine

A 50-ISH WEB COMPANY vice president is dismayed by younger department members who often drop by her office to shoot the breeze. A cable-company middle manager approaching 40 is bewildered by a subordinate in his 20s who needs assignments broken into bite-size chunks, each with its own deadline.

They're not quite shaking their canes and chasing the kids off their lawns, but every day in offic-

es across America, executives shake their heads over the alleged shortcomings of the 20-somethings now moving up in the workforce. Popular literature has been full of articles about the narcissism, short attention spans and entitled attitude of millennials, aka Generation Y.

As cathartic as it may be to grumble about "kids these days," smart cable and telecom executives will button their lips, adjust their think-

ing and make millennials welcome in their companies. With platoons of baby boomers approaching retirement, and fewer people in their 20s available to fill the vacuum, what choice do we have?

WHY THEY'RE DIFFERENT

Unlike the prototypical Gen X-er, a latch-key kid raised by overworked parents and necessarily self-reliant, millennials received more attention from their baby-boomer parents than any previous generation. Middle-class children born in the 1980s and '90s typically grew up being ferried from school to soccer to music

lessons to closely supervised homework. Their unstructured time was minimal, they were given a say in family decisions, and their self-esteem was burnished to a high luster on a daily basis. Many had helicopter parents who drove teachers nuts and demanded special treatment for their very special darlings. And of course, millennials are the first generation with technology embedded in their DNA.

At work, this early conditioning plays out in greater need for structure and feedback, lower tolerance for boredom and an expectation of personal interest from their employers. Millennials are self-confident and impatient and expect to advance quickly — paying one's dues is an alien

concept. And they're not the hyper-competitive workaholics who preceded them. Millennials tend to be more idealistic than their elders, committed to team and community. They work hard but insist on lives outside of work. (Obviously, generational archetypes aren't universal — individuals don't necessarily fit statistical molds.)

Companies that ignore millennials' expectations do so at their peril. As witnesses to corporate mergers and layoffs, younger employees don't expect to stay in any position long-term. They'll hold out for jobs that are consistent with their values and they're willing to change employers frequently if their needs aren't met. The new generation has much to add to your organization, but you'll have to be thoughtful about attracting and keeping them. Fortunately, many of the features that appeal to millennials line up nicely with enlightened management principles.

When recruiting job candidates in their 20s, speak to each individual's unique qualities and interests.

HOW TO GET THEIR BEST

Emphasize your company's commitment to customers, employees, and society. Describe the team they'll be joining and opportunities to contribute their opinions. Be specific regarding both job description and potential career path. Provide a humane, enjoyable environment: millennials expect to enjoy their work, and they expect work to be just one part of

their active lives. Work-life balance has never been so important — 60-hour, nose-to-the-grindstone work weeks won't fly with this crowd.

To get the best from your millennial staff members, make sure these management practices are standard operating procedure:

Frequent feedback: The supervisor who saves his comments for the annual performance review will

not retain millennial employees. Everyone benefits from frequent feedback; younger employees crave it and appreciate the opportunity for two-way communication.

Structure: Define goals, assignments and success factors. Establish schedules and deadlines.

Mentoring: Millennials need guidance

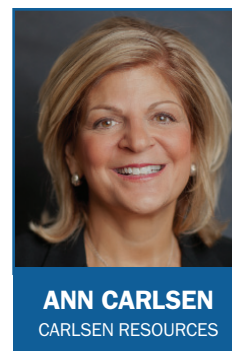
and want interaction with executives, regardless of org chart hierarchy. Formal mentoring programs benefit all employees, but will be especially appreciated by this generation.

Listen to their ideas: Young employees expect to contribute their own perspectives and opinions. Their fresh point of view can be valuable.

Networks and team connections: Millennials work most effectively in teams and have vast social networks. Think about promoting personal interaction with colleagues, online and in person.

Take advantage of their strengths: Immersed in digital technology from birth, millennials are accomplished multitaskers. Given the right resources, their productivity and innovation can be astonishing.

The new generation of employees may not be everything their elders think they should be. (What else is new?) But they bring unique and valuable skills to their employers, along with fresh perspectives and global connections. They're your future, both as employees and as customers. Play to their strengths and give them a chance to shine — they're ready, willing and able. ■



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