

Millennials: They've arrived at work with a new attitude and expectation

They're young, smart, brash. They may wear flip flops to the office or listen to IPODs at their desk. They want to work, but they don't want to work to be their LIFE.

These are Millennials, a force of as many as 70 million, and the first wave is just now embarking on their careers — taking their place in an increasingly multigenerational workplace.

Get ready, because this generation — whose members have not yet hit 30 — is different from any that have come before them.

This age group is moving into the labor force during a time of major demographic change, as companies around the USA face an aging workforce. Sixty-year-olds are working beside 20-year-olds. Freshly minted college graduates are overseeing employees old enough to be their parents. And new job entrants are changing careers faster than college students change their majors, creating frustration for employers struggling to retain and recruit talented high-performers.

Unlike the generations that have gone before them, Millennials have been pampered, nurtured and programmed with a slew of activities since they were toddlers, meaning they are both high-performance and high-maintenance, they also believe in their own worth.

Millennials are much less likely to respond to the traditional command-and-control type of management still popular in much of today's workforce. They've grown up questioning their parents, and now they're questioning their employers. They don't know how to shut up, which is great, but that's aggravating to the 50-year-old manager who says, 'Do it and do it now.'

A great deal is known about Millennials:

They have financial smarts. After witnessing the financial insecurity that beset earlier generations stung by layoffs and the dot-com bust, today's newest entrants into the workforce are generally savvy when it comes to money and savings. They care about such benefits as 401 (k) retirement plans.

Thirty-seven percent of Millennials expect to start saving for retirement before they reach 25, with 46% of those already working indicating so, according to a September survey by Purchase, N.Y.-based Diversified Investment Advisors. And 49% say retirement benefits are a very important factor in their job choices. Among those eligible, 70% of this generation contributes to their 401 (k) plan.

Work-life balance isn't just a buzz word. Unlike boomers who tend to put a high priority on career, today's youngest workers are more interested in making their jobs accommodate their family and personal lives. They want jobs with flexibility, telecommuting options and the ability to go part time or leave the workforce temporarily when children are in the picture.

There's a higher value on self-fulfillment. After 9/11, there is a realization that life is short. You value it more.

Change, change, change. Millennials don't expect to stay in a job, or even a career, for too long — they've seen the scandals that imploded Enron and Arthur Andersen, and they're skeptical when it comes to such concepts as employee loyalty.

They don't like to stay too long on any one assignment. This is a generation of multitaskers, and they can juggle e-mail on their IPAD's while talking on cellphones while working.

And they believe in their own self-worth and value enough that they're not shy about trying to change the companies they work for. That compares somewhat with Gen X, a generation born from the mid-1960s to the late-1970s, known for its independent thinking, addiction to change and emphasis on family.

They're like Generation X on steroids. They walk in with high expectations for themselves, their employer, and their boss. If you thought you saw a clash when Generation X came into the workplace that was a fake punch. The workplace changer is due to Millennials.

Conflicts over casual dress

In the workplace, conflict and resentment can arise over a host of issues, even seemingly innocuous subjects such as appearance, as a generation used to casual fare such as flip-flops, tattoos and capri pants finds more traditional attire is required at the office.

But some conflict is inevitable. More than 60% of employers say they are experiencing tension between employees from different generations, according to a survey by Lee Hecht Harrison.

The survey found more than 70% of older employees are dismissive of younger workers' abilities. And nearly half of employers say that younger employees are dismissive of the abilities of their older co-workers.

Who Are Making the Necessary Changes in today's Workplace?

Xerox is using the slogan "Express Yourself" as a way to describe its culture to recruits. The hope is that the slogan will appeal to Gen Y's desire to develop solutions and change. Recruiters also point out the importance of diversity at the company; Millennials are one of the most diverse demographic groups — one out of three is a minority.

"(Gen Y) is very important," says Joe Hammill, director of talent acquisition. "Xerox and other Fortune-type companies view this emerging workforce as the future of our organization."



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