Millennials in the Workplace

BY CATHERINE RASMUSSEN, EXTENSION PROFESSOR, LEADERSHIP & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Why do we need to know?
A generational shift is changing the dynamics of the workplace - and this shift, a demographic reality - will continue to grow in the next decade and beyond. Secondly, today’s workplace is complicated by many factors: globalization, flattened layers of management, breathtakingly fast technology changes, social media, and increasing expectations by customers and clients. Thirdly, there is a challenge to recruit and retain good workers. Younger generations have grown up participating in this fast-changing world and see clearly how they can be creative and innovative…and they will change jobs to find what fits their talents and values.

What questions do we need to address?
If organizations want to attract and retain quality workers, they have to proactively address the multiple generational issue. Critical questions need to be discussed to rethink policies and practices regarding work-life balance, management and training.

- What is the generational composition of our organization’s workforce? What will the composition of the workforce be in five years?
- How does our organization create a work environment that fosters and leverages generational and cultural differences and knowledge?
- What major changes are needed in our HR policies and practices to address and meet the needs and demands of different generations?
- Do managers and supervisors need to adjust their motivational and leadership styles to fit each generation and diverse workers?
- How does our organization accelerate getting younger workers on board given their lack of experience, skills, and training?
- How does our organization motivate and engage mature workers to continually upgrade their skills and participate in continuous learning activities?

~ Millennials likely to leave after 1 yr (16%); after 2 yrs (40%)
~ On average, people under 30 spend 20 months on a job
~ 40% of employees 25-34 are considering leaving their current position
~ 83% of Millennials will relocate for the right job

Sources: Generational Insights: how to train millennials (2012); Goldman Sachs (2015)

Source: US Labor Force Census
5 Best Practices for Building a Multigenerational Workforce

Successful organizations have been able to tap into and leverage the strengths of their intergenerational workforce by creatively applying five critical principles:

1. **Flexibility**
   - Try to serve your employee’s preferences such as work-life balance, flextime, job sharing, telecommuting, and scheduling options to accommodate a diverse workforce.
   - Allow the workplace to shape itself around the work being done, clients being served, and the people who do the work.
   - Decrease bureaucracy and shorten chain of command.
   - Encourage a more relaxed and informal environment.

2. **Sophisticated Management Style**
   - Study the generational composition of the workforce and use the information in many HR strategies (supervision and feedback, training to specific needs, recognition, recruitment, etc.)
   - Offer a wide variety and choices of benefits (life, health, long-term care insurance, 401(k) match, alumni group, tuition reimbursement, day care, etc.)
   - Effectively articulate the bigger vision, specific goals of organization and measures to all employees – then allow autonomy to do the work. Check-in regularly vs. annual performance review.
   - Include all generations and/or positions on boards for planning and decision-making.
   - Use multiple communication avenues – err on the side of over communication.

3. **Continuing Education**
   - Make your workplace a learning environment; encourage life-long learning; provide time for certifications and advanced degrees.
   - Make learning and development a part of the job description, work plans and accountability.
   - Encourage regular parallel movement between jobs with broadened assignments to gain experience and break down silos.
   - Overcome negative perceptions about increased education and retaining staff.

4. **Mentorship Programs and Coaching**
   - Encourage mentoring relationships that develop trust and respect.
   - Create an environment where mentoring is valued & encouraged – and time given to do so.
   - Let young workers be mentors, too – create a two-way exchange of knowledge.

5. **Respectful Work Environment**
   - Respect competence and initiative - provide autonomy to do the work and reward performance.
   - Keep young workers motivated and productive by letting them tell where their efforts are best employed.
   - Listen to new ideas – your next big idea could come from Twitter or an energetic twenty-something!
   - Don’t let generational stereotypes define a person.


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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approximate #</td>
<td>40 million</td>
<td>80 million</td>
<td>45 million</td>
<td>84 million</td>
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<td><strong>Key Events in Formative Years/ Cultural Touchstones</strong></td>
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<td>Great Depression</td>
<td>Kennedy assassinations</td>
<td>Challenger disaster</td>
<td>9/11</td>
<td>Global financial meltdown</td>
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<td>New Deal</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>Chernobyl</td>
<td>Columbine massacre</td>
<td>First African American President</td>
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<td>World War II</td>
<td>Martin Luther King, Jr.</td>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Oklahoma City Bombing</td>
<td>Asian wars</td>
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<td>Korean War</td>
<td>Watergate</td>
<td>Divorce rate triples</td>
<td>Tech explosion</td>
<td>New Dept of Homeland Security</td>
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<td>Cold War</td>
<td>Long-term U.S. prosperity</td>
<td>Recession of early 80s and early 90s</td>
<td>Diversity is normal</td>
<td>More time at home with digital platforms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suburbanization of the US</td>
<td>Beatles/Rolling Stones</td>
<td>Martin Luther King, Jr.</td>
<td>Recession of 2008-2012</td>
<td>Behavioral curriculum in schools</td>
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<td>Elvis</td>
<td>All in the Family</td>
<td>The Simpsons</td>
<td>Paris Hilton, Brittany Spears, Mark Zuckerberg</td>
<td>Highly engaged parenting, teaching, counseling</td>
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<td>Abbott &amp; Costello (radio)</td>
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<td>CSI, reality TV</td>
<td>Modern Family</td>
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<td><strong>Values and Characteristics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial security</td>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>Social media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patriotism</td>
<td>Team orientation</td>
<td>Thinking globally</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Instant results/constant feedback</td>
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<td>Belief in institutions</td>
<td>Personal fulfillment</td>
<td>Work/life balance</td>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Global mindset/local reality</td>
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<td>Respect for authority</td>
<td>Health and wellness</td>
<td>Tech literacy</td>
<td>Sociability</td>
<td>Lower expectations and confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selflessness</td>
<td>Personal growth</td>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>Skills gaps</td>
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<td>Honor and Loyalty</td>
<td>Youth as an ideal</td>
<td>Informality</td>
<td>Street smarts</td>
<td>Forever creating personal montage</td>
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<td>Delayed reward</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Self-reliance</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Dubious about long-term</td>
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<td>Dedication/sacrifice</td>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Free agent</td>
<td>Tech savvy</td>
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<td>Career focus</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
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<td>Well-educated</td>
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<td><strong>Critical Changes in Technology</strong></td>
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<td>Rural electrification</td>
<td>Television (color) as center of social/family life</td>
<td>PCs</td>
<td>24/7 connectivity</td>
<td>On the grid 24/7</td>
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<td>Radio</td>
<td>Calculators</td>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>Instant access to the world</td>
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<td>Private automobile ownership</td>
<td>Computers at work</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>Text messaging</td>
<td>Connected to anyone, anywhere in the world</td>
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<td>Party phone lines</td>
<td>Phones in multiple rooms at home</td>
<td>Cell phones</td>
<td>Personalized music and data systems—data the way I want it</td>
<td>Rise of handheld devices</td>
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<td>Massive industrialization</td>
<td>Cordless phones</td>
<td>Cable TV</td>
<td>Handheld devices running interactive systems</td>
<td>Wireless internet</td>
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<td>Office machines</td>
<td>Early computers</td>
<td>Video games</td>
<td>Social gaming</td>
<td>Tech integration</td>
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<td>Fax machines</td>
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<td>VHS</td>
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### Values and Characteristics
- **Financial security**
- **Optimism**
- **Team orientation**
- **Personal fulfillment**
- **Health and wellness**
- **Personal growth**
- **Youth as an ideal**
- **Work**
- **Competition**
- **Career focus**
- **Diversity**
- **Thinking globally**
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- **Fun**
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- **Confidence**
- **Achievement**
- **Sociability**
- **Networking**
- **Street smarts**
- **Diversity**
- **Tech savvy**
- **Collaborative**
- **Well-educated**
- **Social media**
- **Instant results/constant feedback**
- **Global mindset/local reality**

### Critical Changes in Technology
- Rural electrification
- Television (color) as center of social/family life
- Calculators
- Computers at work
- Phones in multiple rooms at home
- Cordless phones
- Early computers
- Fax machines
- VHS
- PCs
- Internet
- E-mail
- Cell phones
- Cable TV
- Video games
- 24/7 connectivity
- Instant access to the world
- Text messaging
- Personalized music and data systems—data the way I want it
- Handheld devices running interactive systems
- Social gaming
- On the grid 24/7
- Access to more information than ever before
- Connected to anyone, anywhere in the world
- Rise of handheld devices
- Wireless internet
- Tech integration
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<tr>
<th>GENERATIONS OVERVIEW CHART</th>
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**Generations in the Workplace**

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<tr>
<td><strong>In the Workforce</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Where they are</td>
<td>Some still working – some because they want to, many because they have to; many are on boards, volunteers</td>
<td>Current managers/leaders. Many are ready to retire/do something different, but the recession has put plans on hold</td>
<td>Waiting for Boomers to get out of the way</td>
<td>Newer to the workforce, making a significant impact already</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership style</td>
<td>Directive, command and control, executive decision making</td>
<td>Collegial, consensual, advocate participative leadership</td>
<td>Challenging, fair, competent, straightforward</td>
<td>Collaborative, team-oriented, want to take action to move the organization forward</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Love/hate</td>
<td>Not impressed</td>
<td>Respect is earned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus when working with them</td>
<td>Tradition, value of shared work ethic, respectful communication</td>
<td>Used to sharing with peers, give them challenges so they can lead change</td>
<td>Fun, flexibility, value independent thinking, work/life balance</td>
<td>See the good that they and their peers are doing, value their new perspectives and ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What They Want</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Career Path</td>
<td>Build a legacy</td>
<td>Build a stellar career</td>
<td>Build a portable career</td>
<td>Build impactful careers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/Life Balance</td>
<td>What do you mean? We work if there is work to be done</td>
<td>Help me balance everything as I reflect on what is important in life</td>
<td>Give me balance now, not when I’m 65</td>
<td>Work isn’t everything, I need flexibility to balance all I do</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workplace Beliefs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>On the job</td>
<td>Train them too much and they’ll leave</td>
<td>The more they learn, the more they stay</td>
<td>Continuous learning is a way of life and an expectation of the job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty/Maintaining</td>
<td>Most loyal of workers</td>
<td>Value company commitment and loyalty</td>
<td>Loyal to people and colleagues</td>
<td>Loyal to a cause, idea or project that has meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rewards</td>
<td>Satisfaction is in a job well done</td>
<td>Money, title, recognition, the corner office</td>
<td>Freedom is the ultimate reward</td>
<td>Attention from a mentor; making a difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing Jobs</td>
<td>Changing jobs carries a stigma</td>
<td>Changing jobs puts you behind</td>
<td>Changing jobs is necessary</td>
<td>Changing jobs is no big deal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Day</td>
<td>Defined by clock</td>
<td>Visibility is key – arrive early and stay late</td>
<td>Doesn’t matter when one does the work</td>
<td>I have another life to get to; work is only part of my life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generations Bibliography

- Excellent research as well as specific ideas and examples


ICMA Next Generation Initiative - [http://icma.org/nextgen](http://icma.org/nextgen)
- A report specific to local government, includes a chapter with 39 best practices for developing talent for future managers and leader


Prepared by Catherine Rasmussen, Extension Professor, Leadership and Civic Engagement