

Talent Management Perspectives

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Managing the Millennials

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They're coming. It's inevitable. The children of the "Me Generation" are entering the workforce to take the place of their retiring parents and, to the dismay of many managers, they're no less set on changing the rules. For many of these young workers, flip-flops are business casual, text messages aren't personal calls and "9 to 5" are dirty words.

The members of Generation Y (aka "the millennials") are generally described as an empowered, independent and expressive group of workers who aren't afraid to make demands of their employers. This lack of respect for the status quo has created challenges for managers who aren't sure how to benefit from the skills these young workers bring without being undone by their idiosyncrasies.

In her 2004 book "They Don't Teach Corporate in College," Alexandra Levit explores the growing pains that both millennials and their managers will experience as the fastest-growing segment of the workforce begins to make its presence known.

To successfully attract, integrate and retain millennials, many managers will have to throw out a lot of the formalities they had to embrace when they started their first jobs, Levit said.

"To be competitive in the marketplace, you absolutely have to be able to recruit and retain these guys effectively," she said. "So, you really have to kind of suck it up and say, 'Yes, I didn't do things this way when I was in my 20s, I had to pay my dues a lot more, but the world has changed.'"

Although meeting millennials' demands for individual attention and flexible scheduling might be frustrating at times, supervisors who can adequately engage these workers will benefit from their innate understanding of technology and achievement-oriented work ethic. The best way to keep them interested and on task is to provide them with a series of measurable performance goals and regular evaluations that will allow them to see what they have accomplished and where they are going, Levit said.

"Millennials really want to be looked at as individuals," she said. "They want you to understand where they're coming from in life, the types of skills they have, and they want to use those skills to help the organization. They're not content to just

do entry-level grunt work — they really want to feel like they're contributing in some sort of meaningful way."

Personal development is another important factor millennials seek in a job, so companies that offer room for growth and provide opportunities to learn skills are the most desirable to these workers. Although corporate loyalty is generally weak among millennials, businesses that allow them to practice skills that are important to their careers, even if they don't relate to their daily job roles, will retain these employees longer, Levit said.

"Help them prioritize important skills that will take them wherever they want to go — if you help them learn transferable skills that they recognize they need to learn, like project management and budgeting, they're going to feel more loyalty to you as a manager," she said.

Millennials are also very socially responsible and want to work for companies that share their values, so companies that give back to the community and offer responsible products and services will be the most attractive to this group. Levit said millennials are even willing to take less money to work for companies that meet these requirements.

There are many ways to address the demands of these young workers, who just want a job that will test their skills, but it's important for companies to decide now how they are going to retain them, Levit said, because in five years, it might be too late.

"To some extent, I think we're still seeing a lot of complaining about this generation — how they're entitled, and how they're coddled — but we're not seeing a lot of proactive measures being taken to really recruit and retain these young people," she said. "But we really need to be looking at what their requirements are and changing the organization to address them now because we're really going to see the labor shortage in the next five to 10 years. At that point, it's going to become critical, and companies aren't going to have time to overhaul everything overnight."