

CONNECTIONS

An Edelman perspective on making meaningful employee connections that deepen engagement, build trust and accelerate business performance

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WHAT MATTERS TO MILLENNIALS

Five ways to engage and motivate Millennial employees

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Diplomas in hand, another class of graduates is heading out into the working world, leading employers to ask: "What's special about Millennials? What motivates them? And how do we engage this growing generation of employees?" Just like every generation, Millennials are products of the environments they grew up in. As such, perceptions vary greatly depending on which generation you ask.

Here's a great example: My sister – a fellow Millennial – works for a startup that is recruiting recent MBA graduates. I asked her what makes this generation unique and she responded: "Millennials can work effectively with multiple generations. They value a strong work ethic from watching their parents and thus can relate to Gen X and Baby Boomers. Plus, they grew up experiencing many fast-paced technological and socioeconomic shifts and adapt well to changing, ambiguous environments, which helps them relate to the even younger Generation Z."

Compare that to the opinion of a friend's Baby Boomer father, who tells me how challenging it is to manage "you young kids" who are viewed as disloyal, entitled and self-centered by older generations.

A study conducted when I worked in-house confirmed these stereotypes but, more importantly, highlighted that Millennials are simply motivated by different factors than previous generations. Baby Boomers value being with one company for life, for example, while Millennials want broad experience and may seek that out from multiple employers throughout their career.

WHAT MAKES MILLENNIALS TICK?

By 2030, 75% of the U.S. workforce will be Millennials, so it's no surprise that employers are trying to better understand how to attract retain and motivate this generation. Naturally, Millennials share some broad commonalities, but they are still individuals with distinct personalities and goals.

Millennials belong to the generation born between 1980 and 2000. Sometimes referred to as Gen Y, they are the children of Baby Boomers and Gen Xers. Many of the nearly 80 million Millennials in the U.S. are just now starting their careers, but by 2030 will comprise 75% of the workforce.

For example, a desire for meaningful work does not mean every Millennial is a budding entrepreneur. Someone who prefers a flat organization and a high degree of independence may be a natural fit for a startup culture, while a Millennial who values stability may be well-suited to a more traditional corporation in a role that has a true impact on the larger organization.

When it comes to your own employees, it can be helpful to simply ask them directly what matters to them. Broadly speaking, however, here are five things Millennials value about work and how employers and managers can engage them:

1.) Developing skills beyond their current role.

Invite younger employees to attend senior-level meetings with their manager to better understand the decision-making process. Consider job rotations to give employees exposure to other functions and teams. Support continuous learning by encouraging employees to attend conferences, workshops or internal training.



2.) Being globally connected.

Look for opportunities for employees to work abroad, use a foreign language on the job, or connect with colleagues across the globe.

3.) Real-time feedback.

Give feedback on the spot, especially if employees are not meeting expectations so they can course-correct immediately. Reinforce a job well done with prompt recognition and thanks.

4.) Their manager's trust.

Consider flexible scheduling or allowing employees to work from home. Give Millennials ownership of projects (or components of a larger effort) with minimal supervision. When appropriate, send employees to meetings in their manager's place.

5.) Having a voice.

Give employees a way to provide meaningful feedback and input, and acknowledge those thoughts even if a different direction is chosen. Ask for volunteers to lead committees, test new products or pilot new technology.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Being a Millennial is as much a mindset as it is an age or a birth date. Moreover, some of the things that motivate Millennials are important to many employees regardless of generation. Thus it's important to keep a pulse on your organization and ask employees for regular feedback on their ambitions, goals and overall engagement.

FURTHER READING

[How to Engage Millennials in Your Corporate Culture](#)

Forbes

[How Millennial Are You? Quiz](#) Pew Research Center

[Talent Matters: Why You Should Be Nice to Your Baby](#)

[Boomers](#) Washington Post

[Millennials will soon rule the world: but how will they lead?](#)

Forbes

[The Millennial Impact Report](#) The Millennial Impact Project

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Our global network of employee engagement specialists develop engagement strategy; deploy the tools and processes to deliver it; create the multimedia channels and content that support it; and design the insight mechanisms to measure it.

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