

Satellite Meeting: Recruiting and Managing the New Generation of Employees to Attract New Markets and Create new Services

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Retaining Millennials: Strategies for *Keeping* New Professionals After the Initial Excitement of the Recruitment Process is Over

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Abstract:

Millennials are bringing fresh new ideas and tremendous expertise into the library workplace, but retaining them over the long term can be challenging. This talented new generation of workers enters with exceptionally high expectations for work-life balance, constant feedback and recognition, open communication and rapid-fire career advancement. When the organization disappoints them, they leave – resulting in substantial costs and disruption to the workplace.

Truly engaging Millennials in the workplace involves some give and take on both sides. Success requires a willingness to set aside generational biases and popular press stereotypes – to see the workplace (and the world) from a new perspective.

Millennials can and will mature into their roles, but they will never become mirror images of the generations that came before them. Libraries need to change outmoded human resource strategies and adopt new, more progressive approaches to workplace design and communication if they hope to win over this particular cohort of workers.

The author cautions against establishing targeted programs for millennial workers to the exclusion of others. The best solutions respond to the needs of this new, rapidly growing generation of employees, but in ways that support the entire workforce.

Keywords: Millennials, Retention, Workforce

The presence of an increasing number of Millennials in the library workforce creates both opportunities and challenges for their organizations. This new generation of workers, born between 1980 and 1996, brings tremendous confidence, fresh new ideas and an affinity for

collaboration to their roles. However, their considerable attributes come with a price, at least in the eyes of their Baby Boomer and Generation X co-workers. Their confidence can be perceived as “entitlement” and their strong focus on work-life balance can be interpreted as lack of work ethic. And when the Millennials choose to leave the organization, as they do in large numbers, former colleagues tend to focus on the massive financial and training costs incurred by their exit rather than the clear message they are sending about the need for changes in work design and culture.

The solution requires some give and take on both sides. The new cohort of workers needs to be socialized into the realities of the workplace, to better understand the ambiguities and expectations associated with career advancement. At the same time, however, libraries need to change outmoded human resource strategies and adopt new, more progressive approaches to workplace communication and relationships.

The author cautions against establishing targeted programs for millennial workers to the exclusion of others. Opportunities restricted to one contingent of the library workforce can be disheartening to long-serving staff members, most of whom are eager for similar benefits. The best solutions respond to the needs of this new, rapidly growing generation of employees, but in ways that support the entire workforce.

The Numbers:

Millennials, defined as individuals born between 1980 and 1996, account for 31.5% of the world’s population as of 2019. They represent the largest age cohort in the four largest global economies (U.S., China, Japan and Germany)¹

The impact of Millennials in the workplace cannot be ignored. By 2020, Millennials will represent 35% of the global workforce.² Given low birth rates and high level of retirements, by 2025, that number is expected to rise to 75%.³

The itinerant nature of millennial work patterns makes their growing prominence in the workforce particularly critical. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ 2013 *Employee Tenure Summary* noted that Millennials, aged 24-34, stay in the job on average less than three years. Twenty-one % have changed jobs in the last year (three times more than non-Millennials). Six out of ten Millennials report being “open” to new opportunities, ready to move on if the right opportunity materializes.⁴

The impact of millennial disengagement is significant. Many empirical research studies have shown that unengaged workers display higher rates of absenteeism, lower productivity and lower morale.⁵ When Millennials ultimately leave the organization, the costs of finding and

¹ Gen Z to Outnumber Millennials Within the Year, Bloomberg [online]. August 20, 2018, retrieved July 3, 2019.

² “The Millennial Moment in Charts,” Financial Times, 2018 June 6.

³ EY, [Global Generations: A Global Study on Work-Life Challenges Across Generations](#) (2015): p. 1

⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, (2013), Economic News Release: Employee Tenure Summary. Cited by Campione, p. 60

⁵ Campione, p. 61

retraining their replacements are staggering; Gallup estimates that the cost of Millennial turnover to the U.S. economy to be upwards of \$30.5B a year.⁶

The Need for a More Empirical Lens:

Considerable caution should be taken in making sweeping generalizations about the disappointing nature of the next generation. The reality is that, throughout history, the older generation has *always* been disappointed by the behavior and choices made by the group that comes after them. The sentiment can be traced back as far as ancient times: Socrates is alleged to have said:

“The children now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise.”

The truth is, to retain millennial workers, libraries first need to understand the attitudes and behaviors that make this generation unique. This exploration requires a willingness to move beyond the popular press depictions of millennial traits and review the results of large, empirical studies.⁷ Perhaps more importantly, the path to success requires an ability to set generational biases aside and see the workplace (and the world) from a new perspective.

The concept of generations sharing common attributes has been prevalent in the literature for decades. Massive longitudinal studies show that individuals born in the same cluster of years experienced historical events at the same critical period in their lives and, as a result, tend to develop shared values and attitudes.⁸ Collecting large amounts of data with time lag intervals can isolate the impact of sheer youthful exuberance (Campione refers to this as the “combined effects of inexperience and hopeful expectations” that *every* generation experiences) from the commonly held attitudes of one particular cohort.⁹

What the Data Tells Us

Many empirical studies (e.g., Twenge, 2010) have shown that Millennials are ‘less work centric and more family centric.’¹⁰ Work life balance is a primary concern. This group spent large amounts of their childhood waiting in daycare centres to be picked up by their workaholic Baby Boomer parents – only to see those same parents downsized when the economy tanked. As a result, they are less interested in putting in overtime, working through vacations or any of the other tactics traditionally associated with career advancement by those who came before them.¹¹ At the same time, they have greater expectations than previous generations for work to be engaging and playful.¹²

⁶Adkins, Amy. “Millennials: The Job Hopping Generation.” Gallup. N.d.

⁷Myers, 226

⁸Rydewr, N.B. (1965). The Cohort as a Concept in the Study of Social Change,” American Sociological Review, 30, 843-861.

⁹Campione, p. 62. Campione suggests that most research “confounds” the influence of age and cohort effects.

¹⁰ Twenge, J.M. “A Review of Empirical Evidence on Generational Differences in Work Attitudes.” Journal of Business and Psychology 25 (2), 203.

¹¹ Note that the Families and Work Institute (2006) actually determined that, although Millennials express less interest in working long hours, they actually DO work more hours than people of the same age (2002 versus 1977). Campione suggests that this discrepancy reflects the general increase in working hours in the U.S. Campione, 62.

¹² Herhsatter, 229.

Other large studies have focused on the distinct personality traits of Millennials. These studies flag consistently high self-esteem and assertiveness scores.¹³ Many studies flag the generation's extraordinarily high scores on measures of narcissism, evidenced by an excessive sense of self-importance.¹⁴ These scores are not altogether surprising. The "Me Generation" or the "Trophy Generation," as they are often called, grew up in supportive and nurturing environments shaped by doting parents and teachers who assured them that they could do anything they put their minds to. They were awarded trophies and ribbons regardless of who won the game.¹⁵

These traits render themselves in the workplace in both positive and negative ways. The millennial worker can be a change agent, breaking down hierarchical barriers and bringing new and fresh ideas to the organization. They are focused on their own personal achievements and career success. They are very eager to be recognized for their valuable contributions to their organization and to their profession – and to be engaged and recognized for this high-level work almost immediately upon entry. Unfortunately, these behaviours and attitudes can antagonize longer-serving colleagues who came up through the ranks at a time when loyal service, "paying your dues" and deference to elders were valued traits in emerging leaders. Their impatience to succeed and their eagerness to be recognized may cloud their understanding of the larger, messier context within which they work and interfere with their acceptance by others into the organization.

The cohort is described as fixated on career achievement. Ramey (2008) and others have indicated that Millennials feel "pressured" to achieve success by their parents who remain actively involved in their working lives for many years after graduation. A 2007 Pew study suggested that 64% of Millennials see the accumulation of wealth as the #1 goal for their generation.¹⁶ A 2010 study by Ng et al found that millennial high school students had inflated notions of future pay and advancement: 2/3 expected a promotion within the first 15 months of work with a 65% increase in pay within the first five years.¹⁷

Many studies have shown that Millennials display strong risk aversion in comparison to previous generations. When in school, they demanded exemplars, templates and practice exams to ensure success. In the workplace, this translates into sometimes-unreasonable (at least by Boomer and Gen X standards) needs for detailed guidelines, structure and a clear, virtually guaranteed path to success. (In a 2007 study of 5,600 MBA students, 72% said they preferred to work in "structured environments with clear rules.")¹⁸ Hershatter & Epstein (2010) notes that the Millennials' "extensive propensity to continuously seek guidance and direction" plays reasonably well with the Baby Boomers in the executive office, but can be "draining" to the Gen X managers who directly supervise them.¹⁹

¹³ Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press. (2007). *How Young People View Their Lives, Futures and Politics: A Portrait of 'Generation Next.'* Retrieved 9 July 2019. Twenge (2010), 206.

¹⁴ Twenge, J.M. and J.D. Foster. "Birth Cohort Increases in Narcissistic Personality Traits Among American College Students, 1982-2009," *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 1, 99-106. The National Institutes of Health reports that today's Millennials are 3 times as likely to be narcissists than people that are currently 65 years of age or older.

¹⁵ Howe & Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. Vintage, 2000, 124.

¹⁶ Pew Research Centre. 2007.

¹⁷ Howe & Strauss, 125.

¹⁸ Graduate Management Admission Council. *2007 Global MBA Graduate Survey Report*. Retrieved 7 July 2019.

¹⁹ Hershatter, 217.

Millennials also desire strong and very open communication from their organizations. Studies have shown that *all* generations show greater job satisfaction when communication is “open,” but Millennials raise the bar by expecting that communication be “more frequent, more positive and more affirming than has been the case with employees of prior generations.”²⁰ The group expects new levels of transparency and will not accept the old standard that information is provided on a “need to know basis” to those ultimately responsible for making decisions.

To make matters more challenging, many studies have documented the Millennial’s expectation for their supervisors to be their *friends* and to take a close, personal interest in their career advancement. As one respondent noted in Hershatler’s 2007 study, the preferred supervisor should act as a “friend and a co-worker.”²¹ Some organizational theorists have gone so far as to describe supervisors as the Millennial’s “workplace parents.”²²

The need for personal connection does not stop with the supervisor. Millennials seek out close relationships with senior leaders. They see nothing amiss with skipping over their manager and taking their ideas and their frustrations directly to senior leadership. This expectation for close relationships with their organization’s most senior officers is not surprising: growing up, Millennials were encouraged to have close and supportive relationships with their parents, teachers and coaches.²³

Much has been written, admittedly more in the popular press than in the research literature, about Millennials’ focus on personal and organizational values. They aspire to do “meaningful and engaging work” that protects the environment, reduces social inequities and makes a difference in society. They grew up with a more ethnically diverse group of friends than their parents did and so tend to be supportive of diversity issues. They like to be associated with organizations that share their values and will quickly disengage if they suspect their personal values are being compromised.²⁴

Finally, research shows that Millennials have a deep and “distinctive” relationship with technology, which influences how they interact with their organizations and with the world. They are true digital natives – the first generation to have experienced computers in their homes. They have grown up at the same time as cell phones and social networks like MySpace and Facebook.²⁵ They are far more interested in creating and disseminating digital content than previous generations. (Given their high self-esteem scores, their greater willingness to document their personal thoughts and experiences should not be surprising.)²⁶ They are also very eager to explore new and innovative strategies for improving communication, both internally and externally. While most observers note the tremendous advantages associated with bringing digital natives into the workplace (Tapscott flags Millennials as gifted visual thinkers and strong multitaskers), others note the challenges associated with controlling the messaging (e.g., navigating the grey areas associated with posting personal opinions on work-related matters in social media).²⁷

²⁰ Myers, 229

²¹ Hershatler, 219

²² Myers, 234.

²³ Hershatler, 220

²⁴ Howe & Strauss, 123.

²⁵ Myer, 231; Hershatler, 212

²⁶ Hershatler, 213

²⁷ Tapscott, 2009.

The research also confirms Millennials' willingness to exit if things do not go their way. They will leave because the hours are long or irregular, if policies seem unfair or unreasonable, or if their supervisor is not supportive enough.²⁸ A recent Gallup survey describes Millennials as the least "engaged" generation in the U.S. workforce. Only 3 out of 10 report being emotionally connected to their work or their employer. Twenge (2010) suggests that, when Millennials become disillusioned with their organization they will leave quickly – far quicker than other generations.²⁹ To their Boomer and Gen X colleagues, this high turnover rate comes across as lack of loyalty or perseverance. To the Millennials, exiting is the logical step in their path to career success.

Strategies for Retaining Millennials in the Library Workplace

So how do we encourage this talented but also complex group of workers, not just to stay in library organizations but also to contribute actively and to thrive on both a personal and professional level? The answer involves give and take on both sides. The solution is not simply to expect Millennials to "grow up" or acquiesce to the attitudes and behaviors of their Boomer and Gen X colleagues. As one observant wisely noted, many of the aspects Millennials dislike about the traditional library workplace are the same things Boomers and Gen Xers disliked as well.³⁰ More money will not help. Studies illustrate that higher pay may attract millennial workers, but is not enough to keep them.³¹ Rather success involves libraries meeting their new millennial colleagues in the middle by making substantive changes in organizational culture and practices.

The author cautions against the establishment of formal programs targeted specifically to millennial workers without consideration being given to other groups. When too much attention is focused on new professionals, long-serving staff can become frustrated and disengaged, thus creating an unhealthy work environment that does little to help with the membership acceptance process. The best solutions involve identifying the unique needs of this new generation, but using this information to improve the experience of the entire workforce.

The following list of ten key strategies is based on a careful analysis of the literature (with a focus on empirical studies) combined with the author's own experience over two decades of supervisory experience in libraries.

1. Provide Manager Training

The single most important thing libraries can do to support millennial workers is to provide the managers working directly with them with solid training in the art and science of supervising a multigenerational workforce. As noted by Campione and others, managers often secure their positions because of deep technical skills and years in the job, but lack formal training in the complexities of managing a group of staff who approach work and life significantly differently than themselves.³² These managers do not need to become the Millennial's friend or "workplace parent," but they *do* need to

²⁸ Campione, 62

²⁹ Twenge, J.M. (2010), 205.

³⁰ Campione, 71.

³¹ Campione, 70.

³² Campione, 71.

cast aside some of the “sink or swim” approach they themselves experienced in favour of a more nurturing and flexible style.

2. Support Work life Balance

Libraries need to rethink many of their formal human resources policies and practices to respond to the millennial generation’s high focus on family and leisure time. (Before Boomers and Gen Xers become too alarmed, remember that Millennials are in fact working substantial hours, but are choosing to deliver more of those hours online, from wherever they happen to be.)

First, libraries need to examine job descriptions carefully to ensure that the key responsibilities can actually be accomplished in a reasonable amount of time each week. If the jobs are too big, they need to be reshaped.

Second, care must also be taken to ensure that the concept of working long work hours is not being implicitly required or glorified as the anticipated norm for career advancement. (When Deloitte and Touche eliminated the implicit requirement that new recruits work 80 hours a week, retention rates for women improved considerably.³³)

Libraries also need to support a variety of flexible work schedules wherever they are feasible. When requests for alternative arrangements are rejected, the reasons need to be examined carefully to ensure that generational bias is not at play. Libraries need to lessen the impact of irregular shifts as much as possible; several options might be possible including hiring groups of staff to cover specific shifts or using temporary staff to do the irregular hours.

Finally libraries should explore a variety of non-traditional benefits in support of healthy work environments. Major corporations have experimented with options such as yoga and meditation sessions, in-house gyms and regular physician visits.³⁴

3. Provide Clear Structure

Libraries need to create the stable and well-documented infrastructure that Millennials crave. First, the organization must ensure that its strategic planning process is robust and meaningful. Knowing where the organization is going and how all the pieces fit together is reassuring to millennial workers – as long as the process for getting there was consultative. Although some of their older, more road-weary colleagues may exhibit some distain for strategic planning exercises, the final deliverables will ultimately be useful to the entire workforce.

The strategic plan on its own is not enough. The library must also make certain that job descriptions and organization charts, committee mandates and project management charters are accurate and produced in a timely fashion.

³³ Myers, 228.

³⁴ SAS offers an in-house gym. Google provides onsite laundry services. eBay has two meditation rooms. Twenge et al (2010), 1118.

4. Creating a Positive and Welcoming OnBoarding Process

The first few weeks and months on the job are critical to the Millennial's retention. Myers describes the "membership acceptance" period where both the new recruit and the established co-workers are sizing each other up. The new worker is making judgements about their role, the values of the organization, the skills of their new colleagues and ultimately, if they believe they will like the job. At the same time, their co-workers are making judgements about whether the new recruit "fits in," whether he or she will be accepted or kept in the periphery.³⁵

Libraries must set new recruits up for success. Onboarding programs must go far beyond health and safety checklists and key distributions. Rather, HR managers and departmental supervisors must be actively introducing incumbents to their new colleagues, setting up meetings with engaging co-workers, and providing multiple forums for flagging issues. Senior leaders should be making time to meet with new recruits to help set a welcoming and friendly tone for the organization.

5. Embrace Social and Professional Values.

As noted earlier, libraries can attract workers of all ages by espousing positive social and professional values. Posting lofty value statements, including references to respect for the individual, diversity & inclusion and environmental stewardship, is relatively easy. But to *retain* Millennial recruits, the library actually has to *live* these values on a day-to-day basis.³⁶ Commitment to social and professional values can be hard and sometimes divisive work. The values-focused library will turn to first principles when shaping new user policies and when deciding how to respond to campus or community events.

Libraries can support their staff's personal values in meaningful ways. They can give staff time off to volunteer, either individually or in groups, for good causes.³⁷ They can encourage socially engaged staff to speak about their experiences to others.

Libraries should be aware that Millennials will often expect that creating a supportive environment for staff will be one of the library's core values. This approach can be surprising to Boomer and Gen X colleagues who came up through the ranks in a time when the library's strategic focus was firmly set on the user, with the library staff rarely considered in discussions of strategy.³⁸

6. Be More Transparent

Library managers and leaders need to rethink their approach to information sharing. Only telling staff what they need to know at the time they need to know it works well

³⁵ Myers, 227

³⁶ Hershatter, 221

³⁷ Fisherman, 252

³⁸ Myers, 221. Myers notes that International hotel chain Marriott is rated #2 out of the 25 top "Great Places for Millennials." Marriott's first stated value is "the unshakeable conviction that people are our most important asset."

in military situations or high-tech R&D operations, but is not always necessary when dealing with the day-to-day work in libraries.

Sending out long and complex missives via email is also not adequate. As noted earlier, Millennials live in a technology-infused world – but email is not their preferred medium. Digital content needs to be delivered in short digestible chunks or through attractive web-based interfaces with many opportunities for interaction and customization.³⁹

Libraries are encouraged to create regular forums for sharing information. These mechanisms could include in-person meetings, webinars, etc. To be successful, the experiences must be regularized (i.e., happen on a routine schedule rather than only in moments of crisis). The opportunity should also be “two-way,” with ample time for staff to provide meaningful feedback on the issues at hand.

Sharing information and asking people what they think is admittedly more work. Opening up conversations invites surfacing inconvenient and divergent opinions. Committing to seeking feedback on specific issues while still reserving the senior leadership team’s right to make the final decision can be challenging, but is often the best decision for the entire organization.

7. Provide Consistent Feedback

As noted earlier, Millennials need consistent and regular feedback mechanisms to help them move through their careers. The annual performance review ritual, which many other staff find agonizing, is probably not sufficient for this cohort. Millennials need regular check-in meetings between the annual performance review sessions to ensure that they stay on track, especially during the first few years of their employment.

To be successful, the feedback mechanisms have to be positive and supportive in tone. This is not suggesting that Millennials are not able to hear criticism, but that the tone of the discussion needs to be inherently uplifting and constructive. When any aspect of their performance is found wanting, Millennials need early warning mechanisms and elevated attention from the Manager to help them resolve the problem.

8. Provide Clear Paths to Success:

As noted by Hershatler and others, “Millennial employees thrive in organizations that similarly create a clear path to success by identifying employees’ ideal skills, creating realistic timelines for promotion and detailing career aspirations.”⁴⁰ Given this reality, libraries are wise to engage staff in regular conversations about the core competencies required for success and how the organization’s strategic plan aligns with their own strengths and career aspirations. Staff members should have a realistic understanding of how salary increases are calculated, how decisions about promotions are made, and how long they would typically wait until their next promotion. Although early in their

³⁹ Hershatler, 214.

⁴⁰ Hershatler, 218.

career, Millennials would also benefit from information about financial planning, including planning for retirement.⁴¹

9. Provide Consistent Recognition

Millennials desire to be publicly recognized for their accomplishments, but also to hear about the accomplishments of their co-workers. For this reason, library leaders and managers are encouraged to seek out regular opportunities to acknowledge a broad spectrum of staff achievements (the successful completion of a challenging project, the appointment to an important external committee, the acceptance into a competitive program, etc.) This recognition could take place in staff newsletters, the library website, annual reports or staff meetings. The key factors are that the recognition be public, consistent and regular.

10. Support Ongoing Professional Development.

Libraries need to ramp up their commitment to staff professional development to meet the needs of the millennial workforce. This generation in particular, expects their organization to take an active role in their career journey. They crave both formal development opportunities (training sessions, leadership institutes, etc.) as well as informal experiences (lunch and learn series, etc.)

Mentoring programs are a particularly good fit for Millennials. They are looking for trusted colleagues to advise them on navigating workplace challenges, interacting with their supervisor, and mapping out a realistic career path. The mentors themselves also benefit; participation in these programs can inspire mentors to think more positively about their work and their role in supporting the next generation.⁴²

Conclusion:

Millennials are bringing fresh new ideas and tremendous expertise into the library workplace, but retaining them over the long term can be challenging. This talented new generation of workers enters with exceptionally high expectations for work-life balance, constant feedback and recognition, open communication and rapid-fire career advancement. When the organization disappoints them, they leave – resulting in substantial costs and disruption to the workplace.

Truly engaging Millennials in the library workplace involves some give and take on both sides. Success requires a willingness to set aside generational biases and popular press stereotypes – to see the workplace (and the world) from a new perspective.

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⁴¹ Fisherman, 252.

⁴² Hershatter, 220.

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