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INSIGHT CONTRIBUTOR

Mastering the Millennial Mindset. Keep Your Emerging Leaders from Leaving.

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“The youth of today love luxury. They have bad manners, they disrespect their elders and they prefer chatter in place of exercise.” Who do you think said this?

This quote is attributed to Socrates in approximately 432 BC? Yes, we have been complaining about the younger generations almost since the beginning of time. However, it’s different today. So, unless you are ready to adapt your business strategies to the younger generations who are in the workplace and soon to be entering the workplace, your company could be in big trouble.

Let’s start with a brief review of the generations and some characteristics of each:

Traditionalists (Silent Generation, Greatest Generation): Born before 1945, this group was raised to “pay their dues,” and work their way up through an organization. They were hardworking, fiercely loyal, and trusted authority. They did not expect to be recognized for doing their job, after all, that’s what they go paid to do.

Baby Boomers: Born between 1946 and 1964, Boomers are the generation that the term “workaholic” was coined for. They lived to work and put in the “facetime” necessary to climb the corporate ladder. Their extreme dedication to their career, caused an imbalance in their personal lives, leading to a high divorce rate and an increase in single-parent households.

Generation X: Born between 1965 and 1980, Gen Xers were the first generation of latchkey children who were raised to be independent. They saw the toll that spending too many hours at the workplace put on their parents, and thus desired more time with their families. This is the generation that introduced the concept of work/life balance. Not only is this the smallest generation, they were also steered away from manufacturing/trade occupations by their parents, thus causing today’s large age gap in many plants.

Millennials (Generation Y): Born between 1981 and 2000, the Millennials now make up the largest percentage of the workplace. Similar in size to the Boomers (75 million Millennials versus 80 million Boomers), just like the Boomers, this group is poised to change business as we know it. They were raised embracing technology, recycling, and initiatives to take care of the planet. They are the most educated of the generations and have to deal with the repayment of large student loans. Because they are used to receiving continuous feedback, they expect the same level of recognition, respect, and relevance they’ve been ingrained with since their childhood. Serving a mission greater than themselves and making a difference are an important personal initiative for them and they are looking to join an organization that makes the world a better place.

Generation Z (iGen): Born after 1996-2000 (the years get fuzzy when defining both the Millennial and the Next Generation), this group has seen the struggles that Millennials face – “helicopter” parents, high student loan debt, and the negative perception and reputation of being “lazy and entitled.” This generation is distancing themselves from Millennials as much as possible. Now that there's an app for everything, Gen Z is used to being

part of a “gig” economy. Because they value flexibility, they are much more likely to consider contract work and entrepreneurship.

So, how does knowing this information about the five different generations in the workplace affect you and your manufacturing business? By understanding the general traits of each generation, you can learn to accept and appreciate the differences and create a more harmonious workplace.

Here are ten strategies to help you attract and retain both Millennial and Gen Z workers:

- 1. Develop a career plan.** For the first ten years of their career, Millennials, on average, will switch jobs four times. They will either switch to different positions within your company, or they’ll take their skills elsewhere. By creating a personalized career development plan for all new employees you can give your people opportunities to experience different jobs within the company to see the best fit for their skills. Listen to what employees want in their career and help them achieve their goals.
- 2. Start early.** Because Gen Z is not seeing the value in higher education, they may go straight into the workforce. Tapping into this pool of candidates as early as possible may give your organization an advantage over those companies that wait for potential hires to graduate high school or college. Promoting your business through “Manufacturing Day” (first Friday in October) activities is a good way to connect with elementary and middle school children and their parents.
- 3. Be Flexible.** Offering flexible schedules, opportunities for cross-training and time off to work on charitable projects are benefits that resonate with both groups. Younger generations thrive on life-long learning, career growth, and having a mission, instead of just a job.
- 4. Keep it clean.** Unfortunately, manufacturing has an image problem. Many younger workers see manufacturing companies as dirty, boring, smoky, dismal places to work. Providing a clean, safe environment with good air quality not only improves worker productivity, morale and retention, it plays a critical role in recruiting manufacturing employees who want to stay with you.
- 5. Listen up.** Millennials and Gen Zers are not necessarily workers who want to punch in, punch out, go home, don’t think about work once they leave. They have a lot of energy and want to contribute their ideas. Embrace their unique perspectives, leverage their ideas, and recognize their participation in achieving company goals.
- 6. Respond quickly.** Multitasking is a way of life for these generations. They are used to watching videos, hanging out with friends and texting at the same time. Because of this constant connection, they also expect to be able to immediately communicate with their boss and they expect a quick response.
- 7. Promote safety.** Because both Millennials and Gen Z were used to being buckled in a car seat, wearing a safety helmet, and always being kept from harm, they expect the same in the workplace. Convey everything that you are doing – and how you are going beyond – to provide a safe workplace that protects them.
- 8. Instill confidence.** Millennials do not appreciate feeling like rookies. As the most educated of the generations, they already believe themselves to be leaders. For that reason, they want to be recognized for what they bring to the table and have a desire to confidently contribute from day one. This group likes to learn new skills and technology – encourage them to do so.
- 9. Take field trips.** Expose your employees to industry trends and best practices by taking them or allowing them to attend tradeshow, supplier open houses and demo days. Let your team see new technology for themselves so they can see where the industry is going.

10. Offer to mentor. Set up mentoring, not reporting, relationships between your employees and their managers or other tenured employees who can show them the ropes. Set expectations so both mentor and mentee know what is expected of them. Schedule frequent check-ins to see how the relationship is working and have a defined period with the option to continue if needed and wanted.

When it comes down to it, Millennials and Gen Z workers desire the same standards that all of your employees want – to be treated with respect, acknowledged for their efforts and to feel valued by the organization. However, the rapidly changing workplace means that leadership teams must look at every aspect of their business and make the changes necessary to keep up with the technically savvy, ever multitasking, and time-valuing workforce that is their future.

Lisa Ryan helps organizations who want to keep their top talent from becoming someone else's. She is the Founder of Grategy and is an award-winning speaker and best-selling author of ten books, including "Manufacturing Engagement: 98 Proven Strategies to Attract and Retain Your Industry's Top Talent." Learn more at www.LisaRyanSpeaks.com.



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