

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

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A collection of thoughts, theories and trends aimed at improving public relations firm operations, income and profit. Collected by Al Croft, APR, President, A.C. Croft and Associates, Inc.
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MANAGING, MENTORING AND MOTIVATING MELENNIALS: How To Get The Best From Them

"They want to know everything about the business and then get mad when they don't know it all." "They seek immediate gratification and are impatient." These were typical comments made by agency principals about "Millennials" (You know, those "20-something" employees who are so difficult to work with but are so smart about things like social media.) in a survey I ran earlier this year. I asked long-time agency executive Ken Jacobs, now principal of Jacobs Communications Consulting (jacobscomm.com) who specializes in agency training and new biz programs, to tell me what he knows about the subject headlined above. **Turns out, he knows quite a bit.** Herewith, with my thanks:

"We've all heard or read the many complaints about Millennials, aka 'Generation Y.' They want to be in charge without paying their dues. They want to manage before they've gotten enough experience. **They have no sense of loyalty.** They're terribly impatient and have unrealistic expectations about compensation.

"You may have thought or articulated some of these, or have others to add. But complain or not, no one running a PR firm in 2008 can afford to ignore this generation of talent. Why? Millennials, who were born from 1978, and the years just thereafter, through 1999 or 2000, are the largest (at 80 million strong) and fastest-growing group of workers in the U.S. With the retirement of the Baby Boomers, and the smaller numbers of Generation X, who were born between 1965 and 1977, Millennials are the bulls-eye target in the quest for **the talent that we so desperately need.**

"Despite what you may have heard, or even experienced, I believe that Millennials are a great generation who'll achieve much for our country, our industry and, if you provide the right kind of leadership, your agency. So you can gripe about them, or you can **take responsibility for doing a better job** of attracting, retaining, managing and motivating this important workforce group. To do so effectively, you must first understand their attributes, values, and experiences growing up. Here's what I think are the ten most important traits:

1) "**Exaggerated-Yet-Delicate Sense of Self:** This group was born and reared when an enormous amount of attention was placed on raising children to believe in their own specialness. From the start, their parents and teachers told them that they were intelligent, unique and even extraordinary. Further, their parents crafted relationships with their children that were based on a peer-to-peer or pal-to-pal model, rather than the classic parent-child one. This combination can result in Millennials feeling that they're exceptional, essential and irreplaceable. Yet because they've so rarely faced constructive criticism at home, this over-developed sense of self-esteem can melt the first time we share that their work can be improved, or that they've done something the wrong way. Clearly, pairing criticism with encouragement, on perhaps a 1:5 ratio, is critical.

2) "**Community-Loyal:** Millennials can be extremely loyal, but they tend to give that loyalty to individuals and communities rather than organizations. So it's essential that you create a sense of community within your agency in order to drive employee motivation, retention and attraction. This generation also expects employers to be fair to all employees, and woe to those who aren't.

3) "**Socially Driven:** Gen Yrs are highly socialized, socially responsible, collaborative and civic-minded. Many have volunteered since they were children, and view their careers as giving them the chance to contribute to the greater good. As such, they're more attracted to companies where they believe they'll be able to do so.

4) "**Highly Moral/Self-Policing:** Despite what you've heard, Millennials can be both self-driven and self-policing. As a result, they don't understand the need for authority, from you or others. They want their supervisors and managers to continue the kinds of casual and open relationships that they've had with their parents. Your role becomes one of peer, guide and mentor, rather than the authority or 'boss.' This is quite different, perhaps, from what we experienced with our bosses. But that's no longer relevant.

5) "**Independence-Seeking/Goal Focused:** In addition to being highly self-driven, this generation is objective-focused and they'll blow you away with their ability to multi-task. They demand independence, yet desire frequent feedback. (More about that below.)

6) "**Crave Creative Career Paths:** Millennials don't define themselves by their jobs. They demand that their jobs fit into their lives, rather than the other way around. They are exceedingly selective about where they decide to work and choose to stay. And they're open to a circuitous career path. In fact, they might not even be looking for a career, per se, but for a series of exciting employment engagements. For this group, the need for a challenge far exceeds the need for job security.

7) "**Comfortable With and Influenced by Technology:** This is the first generation to watch far less TV than previous ones. They grew up on computers and have had the internet/Web since they were teens. Their mobile phone is their primary mode of communication. In light of this, and the previous observation about community, if they feel you've been unfair to a team member or you aren't living up to their standards as an employer, they're comfortable spreading that news to thousands with one mouse click.

8) "**Data Overload:** They've grown up in the digital age. To survive its overabundance of data, visuals and technical stimulation, they've learned to process information selectively. As a result, they may tune out parts of your messages. Anticipating this, and not taking it personally or as a lack of respect, will help you keep your blood pressure in check when it happens.

9) "**Generational Differences/Similarities:** Despite their original name of Generation Y, they are worlds apart from Generation X. Millennials view Gen Xers as skeptical, cynical and aloof, who unfairly reject their ideas and idealism. Gen Xers, on the other hand, often feel that Millennials are narcissistic, self-indulgent and filled with unrealistic optimism. And you're surprised you have conflict between the generations at your workplace?

"Millennials have much in common with those born between 1901 and 1924, known as the GI Generation or, as Tom Brokaw named them, 'The Greatest Generation.' For example, both groups have strong feelings about civic order, family centrism, and belief in trustworthy institutions.

10) "**Group Personality/Skill Characteristics:** This generation is hopeful, optimistic, confident, determined, and idealistic. They're also highly-educated, skilled, talented, tenacious and amazingly able to multi-task. Who wouldn't want players like that on their team, even if they view themselves as free agents?

"Based on the above, here are twenty tips to help you manage and motivate Millennials, and give them the kind of work environment and assignments that will drive their performance, perhaps retain them just a little longer and attract more of them to your organization:

1) "**Provide Structure and Guidance.** Don't confuse their desire for independence with an ability to manage their time or as a lack of desire for advice. Remember, they were the most over-scheduled group of children ever, chauffeured by their parents from school to soccer practice to karate lessons to music instruction. Structure has always been provided for them by someone else, and now it's your turn. But note that this group views leadership and authority as two different animals, as indeed they are.

2) "**Give Multiple Tasks With Short-Term Goals, Interim Deadlines.** This will leverage their ability to multi-task, force you to give interim feedback multiple times, and prevent their boredom, which is Gen Y's Enemy Number-One.

3) "**Paint the Big Picture, Then Get Out of the Way.** First show them not only how they, their actions and their assignments fit into *the big picture*, but how the agency's goals link with their personal ones...which they expect you to know. If you don't, just ask. Once you explain the assignment, show how it fits with the larger goal and provide the right motivation, encouragement, feedback and safety nets; let them run with it; this decidedly moral, self-policing, goal-driven generation may surprise you with what they can achieve.

4) "**Realize that Millennials Link Job Satisfaction With Having a High-Quality Relationship With Their Manager.** Millennials rank 'working with a manager I can respect and learn from' as the most important aspect of their work environment. For many of them, this involves communicating with their bosses *several times a day*. This requires you to: a) Be involved, attentive and *approachable*; b) Spend considerable time teaching, coaching, mentoring and *listening*; c) Give consistent reinforcement via one-on-one meetings; and d) Banish the words 'I'm too busy' from your vocabulary.

5) "**Provide Frequent Feedback:** Give specific feedback, as positively and constructively as possible, with more encouragement and greater frequency than you give it to other Gens on your team. Millennials, who came of age when the Digital Age fostered instantaneous feedback, perceive a lack of or delay in feedback as negative.

6) "**Assign Work That's Meaningful and Challenging:** This is a group that desires fulfillment, wants work that gets them to the next level, bores easily and is already looking out for the subsequent challenge, which they're confident they can meet. As such, minimize menial tasks, but if you must assign them, be sure to reinforce how these fit into the aforementioned bigger picture.

7) "**Leverage Their Comfort With Teamwork and Desire for Connectivity:** This group wants a high level of social interaction and requires a feeling of connection. You can satisfy this by giving team assignments and group projects and designing a physical set-up that encourages group interaction and collaboration.

8) "**And We'll Have Fun, Fun, Fun:** Millennials stay longer and work harder for companies that offer fun. And it's your job to provide it! So create a fun office environment that emphasizes group activities. Provide exciting out-of-office events that facilitate teamwork. Do you hear laughter when you walk down the halls of your agency? If not, it's time to take action.

9) "**Expect Impatience:** To this generation, the concept of 'paying dues' has little currency. Expect them to do so, and you set yourself up for disappointment. Anticipate this perception, and help them manage their impatience by consistently illustrating the next step, and the one after that. Make crystal clear what they need to achieve to get to the next level, and the support you'll provide to help them get there. Frequently reinforce how quickly they're advancing.

"When you can't meet their desire for a higher-level task, avoid language like 'You're not ready yet,' or 'Because you haven't had enough experience,' as this will frustrate them. Instead, discuss how the skills we need to succeed, like muscle, are strengthened when you use, stretch and build them in increments. Use examples from their own lives to make the point. For instance, you'll have a faster pace in a 10K if you've run a few 5Ks; you'll do better at Guitar Hero after a few tries; you don't get to Level 10 on a video game until you've mastered the previous ones; and it's wise to get a number of intermediate spinning classes under your belt before moving onto an expert one.

10) "**Give Them Rope/Provide the Safety Net:** Understand that this generation doesn't necessarily view a lack of experience as a legitimate reason for not getting tremendous responsibility. If you wait to give a new level of assignment until your Millennial is fully ready for it, they may already have one foot out the door. So bite the bullet and give them assignments that are slightly ahead of their level. To minimize any risk in doing so, you must provide added safety nets and more frequent feedback to assure the successful, timely completion of deliverables.

11) "**Provide Flexibility** about how they complete their assignments so long as they achieve their deliverables. Actively help them accomplish work-life balance. For Boomers, this balance was and remains a desire; for Millennials, it's mandatory. Take this a step further by encouraging them to reasonably break, or at least stretch the rules; create innovative ways to accomplish tasks and blaze new trails.

12) "**Seek Their Input:** Never reject a Millennial's ideas due to their lack of experience. If you can fight the urge to tell these staffers that their ideas can't work, even when you know they can't, you'll ultimately get a stream of ideas, many of which are thought-provoking, valuable and useable, and which might never have occurred to you.

13) "**Optimize Your Communication I:** a) Use words that create visuals; b) Employ action verbs to

challenge them; c) Include goals; and d) Avail yourself of their communications tools, such as instant messaging, email and mobile.

14) "**Optimize Your Communication II:** a) Always be positive and motivating; b) Never talk down to them, but consistently communicate respect; c) Employ humor, fun and irreverence in your communications style d) *Never* start conversations with 'When I was an account executive.' From their perspective, that might as well have been during the Civil War!

15) "**Compensate Them Well From the Get-Go:** Millennials believe in entry-level positions of extremely short duration and when it comes to money, to paraphrase Elvis, 'It's Now or Never.' Remember this group's aforementioned impatience, and the fact that these proud members of the Digital Age are used to instant results. And one-third of them cite financial security as their top career concern.

16) "**Give Them a Voice in Decision-Making, whenever possible.** Many of us will find this particularly challenging, since most of this generation lack what many of us view as essential: experience. But remember that they've got knowledge and skills that we don't. Successfully tap into these, and you not only motivate them, you just might improve your office environment, enhance your organization's sense of community and teamwork; augment your creative output, and even increase your own job satisfaction

17) "**Anticipate Conflict between Millennials and Gen Xrs.** The section on values pointed out some of the distinctive differences between these two generations. This results in potential office conflict, as well as the need to create wholly different motivational tools. If you're a Boomer, know that you'll need to use different motivational tools than the ones you use with Gen Xrs. And be prepared for push-back from some Gen Xrs, should you follow this article's recommendations regarding granting some decision making to, giving responsibility to and compensating Millennials. If you're a Gen Xr, recognize that you'll have to create different motivational tools than the ones your supervisors employed with you.

18) "**Support Their Desire for Learning and Education:** a) Provide continuous learning via challenging assignments; b) Give on-the-job training; c) When doing so, use visuals, sound, color and multi-media extensively and employ interactivity and a highly experiential approach and d) Recognize their likely desire for a second or an advanced degree, for which they'll want your financial support.

19) "Speaking of training, find ways to **Learn From Them**, by frequently seeking their perspective and allowing them to teach part of the agency training program in areas in which they may be fluent, such as social media. They value mentoring relationships, so now's the time to re-energize your agency mentoring program. You can take this a step further by creating a 'reverse mentoring' program where Millennials share their knowledge with more senior staffers.

20) "**Meet Their Expectations** of their assignments, their challenges, the career path you're providing, and most of all, of you as a leader. And know in advance these expectations will be high!

"While it might appear that it takes a tremendous amount of time and energy to manage this generation, the reality is it necessitates what good management has always required: an understanding of their values and motivations; the acceptance that this group is profoundly different from the other generations in your workplace, and the recognition that what worked previously no longer does.

"So stop the griping and apply your proven, impressive thinking into managing this unique generation. You'll be delighted with the rewards."

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