

Millennials in the Workplace:

4 things that won't change regardless of the economy

By W. Stanton Smith, *national director, cross generational initiatives at Deloitte & Touche USA LLP*

We're in the midst of a financial crisis. Why are we still talking about what these Millennials want? Everybody just has to hunker down and work.

This is a view that I've heard and it seems reasonable on one level. Yes we all have to focus on working our way out of this crisis. However, the crisis doesn't change any of the facts or realities that are not optional. We'll talk about the four things that haven't changed ... the long-term trends that are

shaping the Millennials' expectations of employers and careers as well as how they prefer to work. Four things that won't change:

1 The non-traditional family unit makes up the vast majority of households.

A traditional household is defined by the Census bureau as one in which the father works outside the home and the wife does not. In 1950 the U.S. Census identified nearly 60 percent of families as traditional ... now it is only 17 percent. What does this mean? There is a need for flexibility in navigating work-life issues that wasn't there when many of today's business leaders were growing up. In addition the workplace was designed with the traditional structure in mind ... linear career paths ... expectation of total dedication to work if you expected to make any progress in your career ... employees were expected to fit their lives into work rather than the other way around.

2 Flexibility in and customization of careers is a necessity for workers.

This need for flexibility is enhanced by the fact that our research shows that both genders expect women to continue to have primary responsibility for childcare and eldercare. So, since about 60 percent of college grads in the

United States are female, there will be continuing pressure for customization of careers and general flexibility.

3 Workers (especially Millennials) are redefining how work fits in their lives.

Additionally, research shows a low percentage of Millennials and Gen X who are interested in a prime focus on work. And finally, men report spending almost 50 percent more time daily with their children than did their equivalents in the late 1970s. In addition I've heard more than one senior executive say "I missed my child's games; I will not miss my grandchild's." In summary, changes in the family structure which affect focus on work and demand for increased flexibility in work schedules, work setting, job design and career planning are impacting everyone.

With the first three unchanging things as background it is quite logical to imagine that we are moving toward corporate lattice where role, schedule, workload and pace can be varied depending on the ebb and flow of life. Our research shows that this career customization approach is just what Millennials are looking for ... but most importantly it meets the needs of all generations.

Technology, attitudes toward business and a consumer mindset, have fundamentally affected how Millennials view the world.

Growing up as “technology natives” has profoundly affected what young people expect from life and how they relate to it. The intensity and extent of exposure to technology has had a major impact on how people perceive work as well as when, where and how it can be done. It permits a 24/7 connection to others, but especially to work. As such, this 24/7 connectivity removes the traditional constraints of office hours and location. Technology encourages networks and a lack of boundaries that makes operating in hierarchies problematic and challenges traditional ways of doing and managing work. At first, this difference appears to be generational, but it is not. It is the difference between those who view technology as a tool or a toy and those who see it as the way they interact with the world – an extension of them or, as it has been said, their oxygen.

The next important factor is the view that Millennials (as well as their parents and teachers) have about business values. They believe that despite what corporations say, businesses value financial success far more than they value the people that work for them or the communities in which they live. This view appears to be based on the negative impacts of mergers, acquisitions and other business trends. This skepticism about business can be summarized by this comment made by a college student who was strongly supported by others in her focus group and in subsequent ones: “We are looking to being loyal to an employer if that employer will be loyal to us, but we don’t think business operates that way today.”

Growing up in the world of lay-offs and corporate scandals has resulted in young people believing that:

- » Businesses generally, and big businesses in particular, value their own financial gain far above all else;
- » Business talk about the importance of people is largely insincere

The third potent divide is that of consumer attitude. Millennials, as we’ve noted, have been raised to be consumers ... to question value ... to demand and expect high-quality, easy-to-handle “microwavable experiences.” This is the world in which they were raised; thus it’s understandable that they carry these expectations with them as they consume everything – including careers.

Given the facts I’ve just related, it is not surprising that we must be mindful of the following as we work with Millennials.

- » Readiness to work gap; there is always a gap to be

spanned between school and work. The gap is greater than ever and employers who are savvy will work with the Millennial’s desire “to get it right” to teach them how to be professionals.

- » Insecurities about personal finances and holding onto a job or getting one in the first place; Millennials are feeling significant pressure from having to repay student loans while contending with an economic crisis and its affect on employment prospects. As leaders we need to keep in mind that these are the first hard times that any of them have probably experienced. We as leaders must show the way through transparency and willingness to hear them out as they try to grapple with business ambiguity.

Regardless of the state of the economy, Millennials are “engaged” consumers. They expect to:

- » Have real input into the product or service
- » Influence the product or service in a noticeable way
- » Receive value for time, effort and energy, i.e.,

do not want to be taken advantage of

Interestingly these expectations are beginning to be observed in all generations ... the Millennials are just the most vocal.

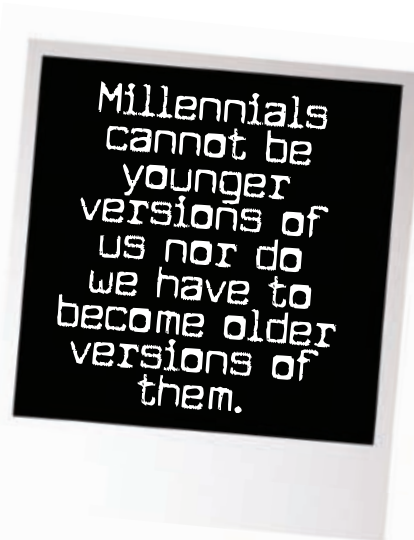
In his book “The Trophy Kids Grow Up ... How Millennials are Shaking Up the Workplace,” Ron Alsup makes a strong case as to why Millennials may have trouble with business ambiguity and why they ask so many questions. Once

again we must help Millennials become professionals by setting out clear project deliverables complete with due dates and resources available to help them complete project tasks and then coaching them on how to ask the right questions at the right time.

Alsup calls Millennials the “Checklist Kids” and observes that they:

- » Want to be right and want the road map to get to “right”
- » Are very diligent once they receive clear directions
- » Are accustomed, based on how we’ve prepared them for standardized tests, to receiving explicit directions. The “Checklist Kids” are:

- Taught rigidly with detailed test guides and formulaic writing exercises so they would score well on standardized tests.



Ten Truths cont. from page 4

respect more as “listen to me” and “pay attention to what I have to say.”

3. Trust matters.

The different generations have similar levels of trust in their organization and in upper management – they don't trust them much. People of all generations and at all levels trust the people they work with directly (bosses, peers and direct reports) more than they trust their organizations. And people trust their organization more than they trust upper management.

4. People want leaders who are credible and trustworthy.

What do different generations expect from their leaders? It turns out that age does not appear to matter much. People of all generations want their leaders to be credible, to be trusted, to listen well, to be farsighted and to be encouraging.

5. Organizational politics is a problem – no matter how old or young you are.

Everyone who isn't winning at the political game dislikes it. People from all generations are concerned about the effects of organizational politics on their careers, on being recognized for the work they are doing and for getting access to the resources they need to do their job. Even if they don't like it, employees know that political skills are a critical component in being able to move up and be effective at higher levels of management.

6. No one really likes change.

The stereotype is that older people dislike anything about their workplace being changed and that younger people love change. These assumptions are not true. In general, people from all generations are uncomfortable with change. Only 12 people in the study said they actually liked change! Resistance to change has nothing to do with age; it is all about how much one has to gain or lose with the change.

7. Loyalty depends on the context, not on the generation.

It's often said that young people are no longer loyal to their organizations in the way that young people were in the past. Our research shows that younger generations are not more likely to job-hop than older generations were at the same age. In addition, people of all generations don't necessarily think that being loyal in the old sense is good for their careers. The perception that older people are more loyal is, in fact, associated with context, not age. For example, people who are closer to retirement are more likely to want to stay with the same organization for the rest of their working life, and people higher in an organization work more hours than do people lower in the organization.

8. It's as easy to retain a young person as it is to retain an older one – if you do the right things.

Just about everyone feels overworked and underpaid. People of all

generations have the same ideas about what their organization can do to retain them. They want:

- » Opportunities to advance within their organization
- » Learning and development
- » Respect and recognition
- » Better quality of life
- » Better compensation

9. Everyone wants to learn – more than just about anything else.

Learning and development were among the issues brought up the most frequently by people of all generations. Everyone wants to learn – people of all generations want to make sure they have the training necessary to do their current job well. They are also interested in what they need to be learning to get to the next level in their organization. Five developmental areas have made it onto every generation's list: leadership, skills training in their field of expertise, problem solving and decision making, team building and communication skills.

10. Almost everyone wants a coach.

We've heard that younger people are constantly asking for feedback and can't get enough of it. We've also heard that older people don't want any feedback at all. According to our research, everyone wants to know how he or she is doing and wants to learn how to do better. Feedback can come in many forms, and people of all generations would love to receive it from a coach.

Millennials in the workplace from page 8

- » Are, as a result of the three factors above, challenged by ambiguity and how to figure out on their own how things fit together.

All the above further underscores the need for those of us with life experience to really coach and mentor Millennials to help them contend with a world that operates very differently from the educational environment with which they are so familiar. Fortunately Millennials

want to be coached and mentored by experts.

Accepting the validity of the four unchanging things does not mean lowering expectations. What it does mean is that we realize that Millennials cannot be younger versions of us nor do we have to

become older versions of them. We are all products of our upbringing.

Therefore we will work most effectively together if we acknowledge our differences and similarities and partner together to make the present and the future a place where we all want to be.



W. Stanton Smith is the author of the new book, “Decoding Generational Differences: Fact, Fiction ... or Should We Just Get Back to Work.” Don't miss his sessions on mentoring and reverse mentoring and mass career customization on May 8 at the Solutions Summit.