

Boomers and Millennials

A Grand Canyon of Communication and Culture

I. Millennial Data

A. Pew Research Center article, *Forty Years After Woodstock, A Gentler Generation Gap*, Paul Taylor and Richard Morin, 8/12/09

1. Gen-Xers and those in early middle age appear to offer the harshest assessment of young people.
2. Regardless of age, about two-thirds or more of the public believes that older Americans are superior in terms of their moral values, respect for others and work ethic.
3. 68% of young people believe that older adults have a better work ethic.

B. The Dumbest Generation, Mark Bauerlein

1. Reading comprehension is down.
2. Writing skill has decreased.
3. Verbal skill has decreased.
4. Mathematical skill has decreased.
 - a) 2004 Department of Education survey of high school seniors showed 35% understood intermediate level math, 21% could not perform simple operations with decimals, powers, fractions and roots.
 - b) 37.6% could not complete simple problem solving
5. Even with dismal numbers like these, participant expectation of success is very high.
 - a) 69% expect to complete college with a four-year degree.
6. Technology use is superior to older generations.
7. However, Millennial *ability to discern quality content* as a result of technology is in question (Irvin Katz, senior scientist, Educational Testing Services)
8. Extended adolescence

II. Understanding and Awareness

A. Understanding generational traits also requires that you treat every person as an individual.

B. Millennials require more supervision and more instruction than CPA firms are accustomed to giving.

1. If you do these things well, your chances of success are much higher. If you do not, you will continue to be frustrated by Millennials.

C. Millennials are more socially segregated from the outside world than ever before: Facebook, MySpace, IM, texting, etc.

1. Their communication skills and client service skills suffer as a result.

D. Clear, direct communication is essential.

E. Millennials exist in a transactional world, and always have.

1. Need to talk to them in business terms.
2. WAMWIG – “What about me? What do I get?”
 - a) Works both ways

F. The tough economy may slow turnover, but it won't make internal problems disappear, particularly those related to communication.

G. You risk losing your mid-level Gen-Xers, because they have to deal with Millennials more directly than you do.

1. Gen X-ers are the harshest critics of Millennials
2. Gen X-ers are among the most desirable professionals (experience and work ethic).

H. Accept that you will have to put more time into managing people — not processes — than ever before.

III. Actions for Partners and Other Boomers

A. Note: Most of these actions are useful when dealing with *any* knowledge worker, not just Millennials.

B. Talk

1. Give and solicit specific feedback
2. Communicate effectively.
 - a) Civility
 - b) Consistency
 - c) Clarity
3. Listen
 - a) Covey: "First seek to understand, then to be understood."
 - b) Don't dismiss an idea just because it came from a young person
4. Confront respectfully, directly, and individually.
 - (1) Introduce new hires to team members face to face.
 - (2) Have real work for them to do on the first day.
 - b) "Sink or swim is guaranteed failure." ~ Tulgan
 - (1) Don't leave them alone, particularly in their first few months.
 - (2) Maintain the intensity of your orientation long after orientation is over.
 - c) Tell your organization's story and tell them where they fit in. Tell them specifically how can they contribute immediately.

5. Have zero unspoken expectations. Speak them all.
 - a) Be specific in communicating concerns, deadlines.
 - b) Use praise *and* accountability
 - (1) Teach them to self-evaluate: assess their use of time, productivity, and work quality.
 - (2) Break up goals into small steps.
 - (3) Deliver critiques as part of a process of continuous improvement. Focus on next steps.
 - (a) "Keep asking young employees: exactly what concrete actions – next steps – are you going to take next? What can you do to improve? What do you need to revise and adjust?" - Tulgan
 - c) Consider a points system for individual efforts and results.
 - (1) Add points for achievement, deduct points for errors, lateness, etc.
6. Get communications training and mentoring for all professionals.

C. Teach and Learn

1. CPA firm partners must teach Millennials how to be working adults.
 - a) We're starting from Square One with Millennials, so increase your explanation, clarification, and articulation with them.
 - b) Remove "should" from your internal and external dialogue.
2. Be ready for new hires.
 - a) Have a formal orientation that goes beyond paperwork.
 - b) Explain everything.
 - (1) When workday starts and ends
 - (2) How to dress
 - (3) How to interact
 - (4) How to deal with clients
 - (5) How to prioritize
3. Learn to mentor while you manage.
 - a) Remember to manage people, just not process.
 - b) Give Millennials context all the time.
 - (1) Explain why you want them to do something or how you want them to handle given situations ("if/then" scenarios).
 - (2) Tell them what is required to get to do more interesting work.
 - c) Let Millennials work in teams when possible.
4. Get a Young Mentor for yourself and other Boomers in your office.

D. Be Transparent

1. Avoid rhetoric. Speak directly.
2. Open your business information to employees.
 - a) What it takes to keep the doors open
 - b) What you expect from them
 - c) What they can expect from you

E. Conduct Transactions

1. Remember WAMWIG – “What’s in it for me? What do I get?”
2. Spell out what they have to do to get your help in getting their needs met.
3. Direct them to put their ideas into written proposal form, showing how the idea is good for them and good for the firm. Ask them to indicate how long their idea would take, how much it would cost, how they would be involved, etc..

IV. Tips for Millennials

- A. Understand and follow the rules of your organization, both written and unwritten.
- B. Assume nothing; ask questions.
- C. Use your best English, both written and spoken.
- D. Err on the side of formality when it comes to business etiquette.
- E. Network with your friends on your own time.
- F. Volunteer to help your colleagues if you’re light on work.
- G. Know that getting to work late and leaving early will not help you advance your career.

V. Recommended Reading

- A. *The Dumbest Generation*, Mark Baurlein
- B. *Not Everyone Gets a Trophy*, Bruce Tulgan