

And Now a Word From the Millennials (As Interpreted by a Boomer)

By Melinda Guillemette

In the November 2008 issue of this publication, I wrote the memo that many CPA firm partners would love to send to their Millennial employees. You can review it here: <http://www.melindamarkets.com/CPA%20Prac%20Mgmt%20Forum%20Partners%20to%20Young%20Profls.pdf>. The article generated responses from members of every generation and led to conversations with several Millennial professionals. I learned quite a bit from them. Following is some of what they have to say in response to the Baby Boomer concerns from the previous article.

Memo

To: Our Partners

From: Your Millennials

Subject: We didn't mean to scare the old people

We are not the enemy. We work in your firm because, for the most part, we enjoy it. Our professional and personal lives very often overlap and intersect, so it's really important to us that we feel comfortable in our professional environment. If we do, and if we can keep learning from you how to get better at doing our jobs, we are much more likely to remain with you for a long time and to contribute our skills to your firm's growth and success.

We work hard, we play hard, and sometimes we like to combine the two. Many of

us want to make a career of public accounting, but we also want a life. For us, the equation is life/work balance, not work/life balance. We were raised and educated by you Baby Boomers. Your experiences have shown us that sacrificing everything for money or power isn't all that satisfying. We are trying hard to figure out how to advance our careers and increase our skills while still doing all those things that make our lives interesting and exciting. Isn't it possible that having outside interests might make us better at relating to our clients, who also have outside interests? Wouldn't that help break our profession out of the bean-counter image we still so often have?

Technology is our friend, and we can make it your friend, too—but only if you open your minds. Frequently, our more-experienced colleagues seem entrenched in doing things the old way. We don't claim to have all the answers (even though we might come across that way sometimes), but we are very adept at making technology work for us. We can teach you how to use it better. In fact, some of us are conducting technology training sessions in our firms. We're happy to help you get better at using technology, so you too can be more efficient. Maybe you'll even create more spare time for yourself as a result.

Here's where technology hasn't been useful: we've spent so much of our growth years texting, IM-ing and living virtual lives that we don't really know how to communicate effectively face-to-face.

This is an area where we could really use your help, and where it's in your best interests to teach us. We know you are successful in business not only because you are good CPAs, but also because you are so much better than we are at talking with colleagues and clients. You know how to hold a conversation. You know how to listen. These are not things we've been trained to do or are innately good at, so we need you to teach us. Take us with you to meetings so we can watch how you work. Bring in communication experts to teach us. Give us feedback on how we're communicating. We'll get better if you help us.

We want to hear your thoughts about our performance. And if you don't tell us, we'll ask you. Annual evaluations aren't really helpful in improving our day-to-day skills and behavior. We want to know what you think about us more than once a year. Remember: we've grown up being coached and taught, so criticism is nothing new to us. We can only improve if you tell us what we need to work on, and we need to know that frequently—not just once a year.

Our world is flatter than yours. Our parents, the Boomers, taught us to ask questions of adults, and they tried to teach us to be comfortable in different environments. That includes our offices. So we're very likely to breach your sense of protocol when we approach you with our ideas for how things could work better. We don't intend to be rude, although we are learning that our message delivery could be better. But remember that we've been asking questions and giving our opinions since we were toddlers. It comes naturally to us. If our approach isn't helping you, it's probably not ultimately helping us, so tell us if we've crossed a line. We'll cooperate, but we can't if we don't know we've done something wrong.

Many of us want to make it to the top of our profession, but we don't want to sacrifice everything to do it. That doesn't make us lazy. It makes us observant and judicious. We learned by watching our parents how fickle the world

can be, how loyalty isn't always rewarded and how relationships get damaged when people are just too busy to pay attention to them. We love our families and our friends, and we like the work we do for you. We're still trying to figure out how to make it all fit into "life." We hope you will be patient because we think you could learn something from us as we explore this challenge.

Your experience is vital to our learning, and we love to learn. We are completely aware how much you have to teach us, and we value your work experience very highly. We want to learn as much as we can from you so we, too, can be successful. We're interested in learning about the many different aspects of our profession, including the business, marketing and human-relations aspects.

We're not totally different from you when you started out. We're betting that when you started out as a CPA, you were open minded and eager to try new things. So are we.

We're certain you were willing to work hard. So are we. We think you probably wanted to help make your firms grow and be more successful when you started. So do we.

You Boomers and we Millennials might not always agree with each other, but we do share similar aspirations for fulfillment, achievement and happiness. We all want our firms to succeed because we know that's in everyone's best interests. So let's make a pact to listen to each other more and judge each other less. Let's communicate clearly what our expectations are for each other. And let's go down the path toward success together.

About the author: Melinda Guillemette is an empathetic Baby Boomer who consults with CPA firms on recruiting, retention and marketing. She is the creator of *Firing on All Cylinders: How to Energize Your Firm*, a video and audio set available at www.melindamarkets.com. ✦

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