



Motivating Your Millennials

March 4, 2010

Dr. Jay Conner, Director of Enterprise Services here at Strategic Advantages, wrote a very insightful column recently on Baby Boomers managing the Millennial generation. We are regularly seeing a huge disconnect between the Boomers and Millennials in our consulting work. Here's some good advice from Jay on how to bridge this gap and the importance of doing so:

An exasperated executive called us the other day to get our advice. This Baby Boomer had asked one of his Millennial employees to do some work over the weekend. The employee declined because it would cut into her "me time" during the weekend.

Baby Boomers, America's largest generation ever at 80 million strong (born from 1946-64), are in control now. But there is a tsunami hitting the workforce, the 75-million strong Millennials. Boomers are desperately trying to figure out what makes the Millennials tick because they realize that their ultimate success depends on it.

We would like to share a few insights in this month's e-newsletter, but first let's state the obvious: Communicating with someone from another generation is often different from communicating within your own generation. You must recognize, however, that "different" is neither right nor wrong, just different.

It is important to understand the context that shaped the Millennials (born between 1981 and 2000). They grew up in a child-focused society, the products of parents who think they can do no wrong. This generation tends to be "street smart," adaptive to change, comfortable with new technology, confident, achievement oriented, globally connected, and communal. At work, they desire independence and autonomy, challenge and variety, continual development of skills, and a fun and collective workplace.

Become a more active listener and teach active listening skills

So you're leading the weekly staff meeting outlining the week's priorities and your Millennials are busy with their BlackBerry's and laptops. Frustrating? Yes, but don't take it personally. These are the kids who grew up texting while playing a computer game while doing homework! Teach them active listening skills and why those skills matter to the other generations. But also be sure to listen; these young adults have ideas and opinions and don't take kindly to having their thoughts ignored. After all, they had the best listening, most child-centric audience in history – their Boomer parents.

Explain Your Conversational Intent

Begin your interactions with a concise statement of your intent. Our words can often get misconstrued, especially when there are generational differences. Stating your intentions up front (i.e., I am mentioning this to you because . . .) allows the person to mentally prepare for what is to come and minimizes putting the other person on the defensive.

Provide feedback . . . often

The Millennials live in a world of social networking with constant feedback. They crave positive reinforcement and seek to validate their value to an organization more than any other generation. Integrate recognition and ongoing team improvement opportunities into weekly team meetings to meet some of their needs.

Millennials are up for a challenge and change.

Boring is bad. They seek ever-changing tasks within their work. What's happening next is their mantra. Don't bore them, ignore them, or trivialize their contribution.

Demonstrate appreciation & learning opportunities

Millennials will not embrace the traditional training methods. Instead it must be fast-paced, using real life application. Make their orientation, assimilation and training fun and challenging or you will lose their interest quickly.

Take advantage of your Millennial employees' electronic literacy

The electronic capabilities of these employees are amazing. Take advantage of it, but don't confuse technology know-how with experience. They may be extremely adept at keeping up with their friends on Facebook, but do they know how to use social media to drive business? Give them proper training and mentoring.

Sound like a lot of work? It does take some extra effort and an open mind, but if you properly harness the power of the Millennials you will reap multiple rewards for many years.