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How to motivate millennial workers

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by Karen Gately

How often have you heard a Baby Boomer or Gen X Leader to talk about their frustrations with the Millennial generation. It's common to hear about the impatience, unrealistic expectations and lack of loyalty of younger workers. Millennials are also often accused of being demanding, short term focused, and self-centred.

Like every generation before them, Millennials are different and unquestionably pose challenges for employers. For example, this 'opportunity hunting' generation tends to only stay in one role for two years on average, creating a staff turnover nightmare for many leaders.

While these criticisms and challenges may be very real, the reality is by 2025 Millennials will make up approximately 75% of the workforce. The time has come for leaders to move past criticisms and

focus on what can be done to engage and retain the best of the younger generation.

Millennials hold expectations and behave in ways unique to them. Like any other group of people, inspiring their engagement takes first understanding how they think and what they value. Seven common traits of Millennial workers that are essential to understand include these.

1. **'Why' matters**

If you want a Millennial to 'get on board' you need to tell them why they should. Most Millennials want to understand the thinking behind an initiative, and why it's considered the right way to go, before being willing to buy-in and sign up for the journey. Help Millennials to understand not only the mission but also their role in getting there, and they are entirely more likely to be engaged and invest.

2. **Purpose**

This generation have been raised to look beyond themselves when measuring success. Less inclined to be focused on power and money, most are looking to make a meaningful contribution. Many want to have an impact on the world through their work and are therefore more likely to choose to work for an organisation that does something they believe in.

3. **Balance**

Millennials are a generation who have also been taught that there is more to life than work. They live in the moment and believe you should invest in all aspects of life, not just career advancement and accumulation of wealth.

4. **Autonomy**

Millennials value freedom and want to be empowered. Independent-minded, most expect to be given the opportunity to work autonomously, free of unnecessary oversight and direction. What can often be perceived as arrogance or anti-authoritarian attitudes, is in fact a desire for flexibility and personal control. Establishing clear boundaries within which Millennials are free to operate is critical to achieving balance between providing the freedom they want and supervision or coaching they need.

5. Optimism

While unquestionably an endearing characteristic, the Millennial generation's sense of optimism can lead to overconfidence or impatience. Having grown up in times of dramatic change and advancement Millennials live with the philosophy that practically anything is possible. Millennials are more likely to dive in with limited experience, or put their hand up for opportunities beyond their years. These can be great attributes if leveraged well by an employer.

6. Love of Change

The first Millennials were born in 1981, five years after Apple launched their personal home computer. Before these kids reached kindergarten, Sony had introduced the Walkman, the first portable player for recorded music. While at primary school the world wide web was invented. By their mid-teens wifi began to make staying connected even easier. By the time they reached work, smart phones were common place and fax machines were a thing of the past.

This is a generation who have witnessed extraordinary advances in technology and ways of working. As a consequence, not only do Millennials typically respond well to change, they look for it. Their need for constant stimulation posing the greatest challenge for employers. Working in partnership with Millennials to develop their capabilities and build their careers is essential to keeping them with your business.

Karen Gately, founder of Corporate Dojo, is a leadership and people-management specialist. Karen works with leaders and HR teams to drive business results through the talent and energy of people. She is the author of *The People Manager's Toolkit: A Practical guide to getting the best from people* (Wiley) and *The Corporate Dojo: Driving extraordinary results through spirited people*. For more information visit www.corporatedojo.com or contact info@corporatedojo.com.