

By

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## Career purpose and development key to keeping millennial talent

At 24, senior IT consultant Brad Fenech already knows the challenges of getting ahead in a jobs market that can be all-too-often based on outdated stereotypes.

"It's tough being 24 and going for positions people would not necessarily consider you for based on age or appearance," Fenech says. "Don't think people are not capable or qualified just because they are young. We're a smart generation."



Millennials are looking for the opportunity to make a difference.

He is talking about millennials, sometimes branded as "the entitled generation", but also a cohort which contains "some of the most driven people" Fenech knows.

As someone who was working full time from age 18 with the Department of Health, while also studying full time for a Bachelor of Management at the University of Canberra, he clearly puts himself in the latter category.

"It was four years of chaos with no social life, but I look back on it and I have no regrets," he says. "From my childhood I just wanted to be great at whatever it is I was doing. Playing sport I always wanted to be captain. I always wanted to be the guy people looked up to, and then starting straight out in the workforce it was odd being so young, but I liked it. I wanted to improve my skills and I wanted to learn as much as I could."

Today Fenech works on providing big data solutions for the federal government and private clients in his role with consulting firm Approach ICT in Canberra. He suggests the best way to lead high-performing millennials is to adopt a consultative style where possible, especially for staff impacted by the rapid changes common in the digital era.

His own role models are larger-than-life business characters like Elon Musk and Richard Branson who want to change the world as true originals. "Be your own self," Fenech says. "Be inspired by different people and take as much information as you can from as many sources as you can. Don't necessarily try to mirror one person or one thing."

As part of his career progression, and to widen his employment horizons, Fenech has also recently become accredited as a Chartered Manager by completing the assessment program run by the Institute of Managers and Leaders. The globally-recognised designation is based on 34 skills and competencies to formally recognise leadership experience.

The Institute's chief executive David Pich says the reality for many millennials is they have been working and studying from a young age and are looking for more challenging roles than previous graduates may have done starting out.

"They don't need wrapping on cotton wool," Pich says. "What they actually want is more responsibility than they are being given. It means that managers and leaders can't be lazy when it comes to managing millennials. These are people who are ready to go and ready to contribute."

The best way to attract and retain millennials, he says, is to offer them the challenge of running projects – especially in fields which require technology and social skills that are often second nature to them.

Flexibility is also key, whether this comes as a more varied and open approach to the physical office environment, the hours worked or traditional management hierarchies.

"You can either go with it or get left behind. You should be offering millennials a mentor who is senior in the organisation. You should be offering them networking opportunities, because they tend to be very socially aware. You should introduce them widely."

Natalie Micarone, a director and co-founder of HR consultancy Bendelta, says millennials are also looking for the opportunity to make a difference. She says they will ask questions like: "What's your purpose? What's your vision? What are you trying to create as an organisation?"

"The thing they most want out of the founders and the leaders is that ability to inspire and to be able to have the freedom and to be valued enough to be a part of contributing towards that vision," Micarone says.

Latest research has also identified millennials do not put the same sort of trust in business that previous generations have and are looking for organisations they work for to contribute more to society.

According to the 2018 Deloitte Millennial Survey, the percentage of Australian millennials who say business has a positive impact on society has dropped from 72 per cent in 2017 to 45 per cent in 2018.

The survey said when choosing a new employer, Australian millennials also believe culture is more important than money: 67 per cent rate a positive work environment as the most important consideration, followed by financial rewards and benefits (63 per cent). Flexibility is also ranked as third most important (55 per cent).

It also reveals there is some truth in the perception that millennials switch employers more often. Almost half (44 per cent) expect to stay with their employer for less than two years and only 22 per cent say they plan to stay beyond five years.

Karen Gately, a leadership specialist at HR consultancy Ryan Gately, says: "If the point comes where the next right step for them is outside of your organisation, work hard to retain a quality of relationship where it may be that two or three further steps down their career path, they may actually come back in your direction. We don't have to have a one-strike-and-you're-out kind of attitude towards that employment relationship."

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