

Culture Insight:

Inspiring the Millennial Workforce

Executive Summary

Much has been written about the entrance of the Millennials (generally defined as those born between 1982 and 2004) into the workforce and how their attitudes toward their jobs and lives outside of work are altering the workplace.

If you decide to hire and train Millennial IT employees, you should be aware of some of the unique challenges involved in managing members of this generation.

In fact, one of the biggest mistakes that many organizations and CIOs make when hiring Millennial IT employees is not recognizing how different their attitudes toward their jobs and their personal lives are from previous generations.

A Recipe for Disaster

“Trying to manage Millennial IT employees like you do Baby Boomers or even Generation Xers is a recipe for disaster,” says Mark Griesbaum, the managing partner for Affinity4U, LLC, which consults with companies on IT strategic projects and helps assess and develop the careers of IT professionals. **“They learn differently and they work differently than Baby Boomers, so management’s interactions and styles of communication with them need to be different.”**

For example, unlike many Baby Boomers, most Millennials place less value on working long hours and having a lot of “face time” at work. It’s not that Millennials don’t want to work hard; rather, they want to see purpose and value in the work they’re doing. Putting in a 60- or 70-hour week just to impress the “boss” isn’t high on the priority list of many Millennials.

When they’re working, most Millennials are highly engaged in what they’re doing and very conscientious about doing a good job. But Millennials place a high value on work-life balance — so they don’t expect to have to be available

or on call 24/7. **Most Millennials prefer to draw a sharp line between their work and personal lives.**

Forget the Stereotypes

Rashmi Bhatnagar is a senior corporate recruiter for Ensono who has interviewed Millennials for several years now for various positions, which gives her a unique perspective on Millennial IT employees.

She says to forget about all the Millennial stereotypes you've heard — for example, that they have a sense of entitlement and aren't willing to pay their dues. "This is not what I see when recruiting Millennial IT employees at all," she says. **"The fact is, most Millennial IT employees are very serious-minded and also very business-savvy.** They are quick to assess and gauge the work environment and they are very strategic in how they plan their careers."

One reason for this, says Bhatnagar, is that Millennials have seen the severe financial repercussions over the past decade of the financial crisis.

"Millennials examine IT jobs very carefully. They want to know what kinds of ongoing training and education they'll receive and what their career advancement opportunities are going to be. These are more important to them than a few thousand dollars in extra salary."

In addition, **Millennial IT employees are constantly looking ahead to "what's next," Bhatnagar adds. "They want to keep their options open and they aren't afraid to ask questions."**

Give Them a Voice

One strategy Bhatnagar recommends for CIOs managing Millennial IT employees is to give them some flexibility and a voice in choosing which projects they're going to work on.

"Lay out the vision and big picture and then let them help determine which tasks will best accomplish it," she says. "Or, at least give them flex work time when they can work on whatever projects they want, like Google does."

From a work structure standpoint, keep in mind that Millennials generally prefer working together collaboratively and in teams. They like having the options of telecommuting and flex time in order to give them more time in their personal lives. While at work, they also enjoy working in open spaces instead of in a "cube farm" or traditional office environment — this makes it easier to collaborate with each other.

“The most important thing to remember is that this generation has grown up using technology since childhood,” says Griesbaum. “Their comfort level with technology leads them to work and collaborate with each other far differently than previous generations did.”

In Their Own Words

Andrew Meister, 26, graduated college in 2014 with degrees in Computer Science and Computer Aided Design. Two years ago, he started working for Ensono as a Mainframe systems programmer.

“The only Mainframe course I took in college was Assembler,” he says. “In my experience, there wasn’t as much focus in college on Mainframe training and education as there was on languages like Java and Linux, which is where colleges are targeting students. **College students don’t get much exposure to Mainframe so not many of them are focused on it. But there’s lots of exposure to companies like Google and Facebook — a lot of computer science students want to work for them.**”

Steven Boyd, 25, who graduated college in 2015 with a degree in Computer Science and started working for Ensono last year in technical services support, has a little bit different story. Mainframe courses were mandatory at his college, he says.

“The computer science department was known for Mainframe, but before college, I didn’t know anything about it.”

Boyd says he enjoys working in the Mainframe environment and thinks the trend is toward more college students recognizing the value of gaining Mainframe skills. “It’s not a secret that there are lots of jobs in Mainframe,” he says. “Fortune 500 company recruiters made this clear to us, and some colleges are taking advantage of it.”

Meister acknowledges that Mainframe work isn’t as exciting as working for a high-profile Internet or social media company. “I hate to say it but some people in my generation look down on what they consider 9-to-5, white-collar jobs,” he says. “If Mainframe didn’t have that stigma, people might view it no differently than working at Facebook or Google. There are a lot of dynamics in Mainframe work and you can have a lot of fun with it.”

In fact, he says that he sees on IT job boards where graduates with Masters degrees in Computer Science are doing data entry work at Google and Facebook. **“They can choose the best of the best to do even menial tasks because people want to work for them so badly,” he says. “I’m doing much more challenging and interesting work than some of them.”**

Both Meister and Boyd said that when they started looking for a job after college, one of their main goals was to find a company that would train them and offer them growth opportunities.

“I didn’t want to be stuck in a bubble,” says Boyd. “At some companies you start out on a probationary period and if you don’t make it through that you’re dead in the water. Here, I’ve been part of the team from the first day.”

“I wanted to find a company that would train me and grow with me,” says Meister. **“Ensono was willing to train me to be a Mainframe technician and do product maintenance and installation. They were very welcoming of new talent.** Now I want to get more training and more products under my belt so I can be ready to carry the torch going forward.”

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