

Millennials:

Engage, Motivate, and Retain the New Workforce

How can managers flex to the needs of Millennials without giving away the keys?

A New Directions paper

It would be an inappropriate assumption for us, of previous generations, to expect or assume that this new workforce generation, also known as Gen Y, will eventually “come around to our way of thinking.” It is the mindset of some managers that they can continue to use only one style of supervision, and that those who are unable to adapt to that style, should look for employment elsewhere. In our trainings we use the analogy of fishing, and the idea that if I want to catch a certain type of fish, I need to use the right kind of bait. Well isn't that the same in the workplace? No two people are exactly alike, so why would I assume that my style leadership will fit all types of employees? This analogy holds true for the Gen Y. As managers we must see the benefit of this diverse workforce and capitalize on the different expertise that each individual brings to the table, including those skills that aren't specifically detailed in someone's job description. Sometimes that's hard to do when we're faced with behavior and a belief system that is contradictory to what we, as managers, expect.

How Do We Flex Our Leadership Style to Meet the Needs of the Gen Y Employees?

We are all aware of the characteristics and/or preferences of this new generation, and if not, there is a plethora of writings out there for us to whet our appetites. The question however becomes, how do we flex our leadership style to meet the needs of our Gen Y employees, maximizing their potential to succeed, without feeling like we're giving away the key to the store? Because let's face it, if we did everything that the books, articles and theories are telling us to do, there'd be nothing left. Millennials would get all the benefits without any of the responsibility. This understanding has led me to develop a concept that focuses on three areas during the employee lifecycle, which I believe can help develop new staff and re-commit old: **engage, motivate, retain.**

The Three Areas of the Employee Lifecycle

Essentially there are two types of employees, the ones we want and the ones we've got; and in either of those scenarios we can diagnose and implement the appropriate solution. We can either see the employee as a free-standing entity that is experiencing a particular issue and we must help him/her develop a solution (typically someone already employed at the company), or we can use these three methods in a systematic approach, implemented at different points throughout the employment cycle.

Figure 1

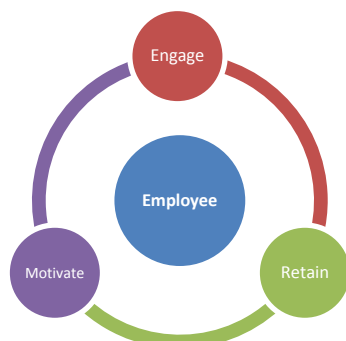


Figure 2



Engagement of the Millennial Employee

When we choose to engage this new generation we will begin to develop a relationship that is critical in being able to identify the belief that an employee has, beliefs that in turn drive the behavior we see. For example, if I, as a Gen Y, believe that every employee should have the same rights and privileges regardless of position, my own behavior will most likely reflect my belief, which may translate into extended breaks or a blatant disregard for time. Even though, this specific privilege may have been granted to a manager based on his/her position. As a manager I must be able to identify the belief the employee has and then assist the employee in developing a discrepancy in that belief. Too often a manager will focus on the behavior (tardiness), and from that develop an assumption (s/he is lazy). We then ascribe motive (s/he is looking to get paid without putting in the time), and then we form a belief (Gen Y employees can't be trusted). The realization one should have with this example is that we typically don't take the time to identify the true belief, we simply make assumptions. We must ask ourselves then, have I ascribed a motive and belief, to this individual's behavior, without any true supporting evidence? So I ask you, do your assumptions about Gen Y prevent you from engaging them on a deeper level – in essence shying away from a more personal relationship? (Hint: "personal" is what Gen Y is looking for).

Motivation of the Millennial Employee

To motivate is an odd statement. It implies that someone must first be unmotivated, and according to research, that is impossible. People are motivated all the time; they just aren't always motivated to do what we want them to do. I could sit on my couch all day and watch tv, but that wouldn't mean I'm unmotivated; I'm in fact motivated to do exactly what I'm doing over something else, no different than an employee who is constantly late on deadlines. Is s/he unmotivated? No, it's just that his/her motivation lies elsewhere, maybe online talking to a friend, or ordering that birthday present for a significant other. So how do we motivate? According to Fredrick Hertzberg there are a few things we must realize before we can eat this elephant. First, we must understand that simply eliminating the things employees dislike about their jobs, does not motivate them. It only brings their satisfaction level closer to neutral. If we want our employees to feel good about their jobs and to be motivated to do better, then we must also add items to the enjoyment/enrichment category. The second thing about Hertzberg's theory is that motivation can be broken down into four elements, and it's these elements, competency, choice, progress, and meaningfulness, that determine employee's levels of motivation. Are they competent in how to perform their jobs? Do they have choice in the way they perform their job? Do they see how their specific task or project plays a part in the bigger picture? Is the work they're doing meaningful to them in some way? Identifying deficiencies in these category(ies) will be the key to how to start motivating an employee, including Gen Y.

Retention of the Millennial Employee

The bottom line in all this is that with happy employees, comes a higher retention rate, and any managers knows that it is more cost effective to retain an employee, than to fire, hire, and train. So no matter which figure from above we're using, retention is the culmination of the process. We can either see it as a need that arises at some point in the employee's career, or the ultimate goal in a structured life-cycle. While the ability for an organization to Engage and Motivate will be the backbone to retaining employees, there are some additional areas that employers should consider. These areas are not new to the world of Gen Y thinking, but when used as add-ons to a strong foundation, they can be the deciding factor in a young employee's decision to stay or go. These include family/work balance, job mobility, being a part of a socially/civically-minded organization, flexible hours and time off, and the realization that the workforce is constantly comparing salary/benefits/promotion plans with other companies.

In the end, the most notable companies have found that sometimes retention is just not an option. That the deciding factors are outside the control of the company; however, that hasn't stopped some companies from re-recruiting a dynamite candidate a couple years after s/he has left. This is a huge area of interest for organizations, especially as the age tide begins to turn. First step for any organization is to make sure the engaging conversations are occurring.

Want to learn how to capitalize on the newest workforce generation?

For more information or assistance on how you can motivate, engage and retain the Millennial generation please contact us at info@newdirectionsconsulting.com or by calling 800.730.3631

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