The Millennial Effect

Brenda Clark, CHRE

It's a topic that's long been top-of-mind for HR, pundits, consultants and the news cycle itself: what do Millennials want – and how can we mobilize, motivate and mentor them as they inevitably begin to reshape the face of the workplace?

This month's cover story is all about integrating Millennials (those born between 1980 and 1995) into the five-generation workforce – a task that may seem a daunting one at first glance. With a work life-expectancy that's longer than ever before, the challenges of combining so many different cohorts is an unprecedented one. How can HR meet the needs and work preferences of five separate generations, when some of those work preferences are polar opposites? How can we manage ever-rising benefit costs while also addressing competing priorities from different generational cohorts?

It's impossible to please everyone all the time – but how can HR create a balance between different generational priorities?

As the cover story reports, 90 per cent of human resources professionals feel that Millennials have different values and motivations than other generations in the workplace, according to HRPA's 2016 survey of 1,026 association members. A mere 10 per cent of HR professionals feel the generations are the same in that respect.

Millennials prioritize work-life balance, meaningful work, a flexible work environment and up-to-date tech, the survey found – and turnover rates are high, illustrating the fact that if the environment doesn't suit them, many Millennials has no qualms about moving on to greener pastures rather than dedicating 30-odd years to the same employer.

Open office spaces, collaborative work, passion projects, constant feedback and flex time are also among the oft-cited Millennial work wish list – items that may not even be on the radar for other generations.

But while it's important to gain a robust understanding of what different generations need, it's important not to silo them. In order to foster the greatest collaborative value in the workplace, we must also focus on how to best work together. As digital natives, the digital shift is often associated

with Millennials – but it's not exclusive to Gen Y. Those impacts are overarching – as are shifts around remote work, open and collaborative office spaces, digital advancement and high-tech tools – so it's critical that all cohorts can speak the same language when it comes to these ubiquitous business shifts.

That's where mentoring comes in. As HRPA recommends in the survey, mentorship and sponsorship, reverse mentoring and, particularly, a formalized mentorship program, are of upmost importance in integrating Millennials – and harmonizing the flow of work, information and collaboration between the generations.

Once those lines of communication are opened and that knowledge-sharing finds a formalized foundation, the lines between the generations begin to fade. As I said, HR can't please everyone all the time – but it is possible to create a balance and harmony amongst generational cohorts that breaks down many of the barriers. And isn't that what HR does best?

Brenda Clark, CHRE, is chair of the Human Resources Professionals Association.

{ **BUT WHILE IT'S IMPORTANT TO GAIN A ROBUST UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT DIFFERENT GENERATIONS NEED, IT'S IMPORTANT NOT TO SILO THEM.** }