

cover feature



**NEW KIDS**  
*on the*  
**BLOCK**

HERE'S WHY GEN Y IS CHANGING THE  
GAME – AND HOW ORGANIZATIONS  
SHOULD ADAPT

By Liz Bernier

A stable 30-year career with the same employer, the same cast of coworkers and a predictable promotion trajectory used to be practically a guarantee; now it's the exception to the rule.

Millennials – now the most populous generational cohort in the workforce – are entering a brave new world that looks little like the employment landscape their parents experienced. This ain't your grandmother's office job – Gen Y is standing on shifting ground, coping with changing employment models, an uncertain economy and global business climate, and quite often, organizations that are built for (and built by) previous generations, with little attention paid to the preferences, cultural norms and work styles of the emerging workforce.

Gen Y (generally defined as those born between 1980 and 1995) is now steadily moving from entry level roles to mid- and senior-level leadership roles in organizations the world over, making it increasingly critical for human resources to gain a solid understanding of the generation – how to attract them,

retain them and integrate them within organizations, according to the whitepaper *HR & Millennials: Insights Into Your New Human Capital*, released in November 2016 by the Human Resources Professionals Association (HRPA).

“It's no surprise that companies are facing a ‘loyalty challenge’ when it comes to Millennial workers,” said Bill Greenhalgh, CEO, HRPA. “There can be up to four different generations in today's workplaces and if companies aren't taking steps to mitigate the potential tensions that generational differences can make, they will face major problems.”

## GENERATIONAL TENSIONS

A full 90 per cent of human resources professionals feel that Millennials tend to have different values and motivations than other generations in the workplace, according to a 2016 survey of 1,026 HRPA members; only 10 per cent of HR professionals feel the generations are the same in that respect.

However, these differences are not simply the result of their younger age. Many researchers agree the



Millennial generation is different from other generations, in-part because of the environment they have grown up in. According to a study by the Boston College Centre for Work and Family, there are several environmental factors that have helped create the Millennial generation. These included the impact of technology in daily lives such as the Internet and smart phones, changes in the availability of secure jobs and delays in making “adult commitments” such as having children or getting married, according to the HRPFA whitepaper.

The majority of organizations have experienced retention challenges in regard to Millennials; 64 per cent of HR professionals say that this generational cohort tends to turn over more rapidly than other generations.

Deloitte found that 61 per cent of Millennials said they will leave their current employers in the next four years, creating a “loyalty challenge” for employers caused by various factors.

In order to adapt, employers need to carefully examine policies, strategies and best practices while also

educating themselves about what Gen Y wants in the workplace.

“Millennials are the future of the Canadian economy, and it is critical for organizations to understand how to attract, retain and integrate them,” said Greenhalgh. “And that is where HR professionals can help.”

### WHAT'S ON THE WISH LIST?

So what exactly is it that Millennials want at work – and how can HR help bring these things to fruition?

One of the most significant and oft-cited elements that Millennials prioritize is work-life balance (or, a term that many prefer, “work-life integration”), according to the whitepaper. In fact, only 20 per cent of Millennials would accept a promotion if taking one would negatively impacted their personal and family lives.

Sofia Niazi, a Millennial herself who works as a full-time teacher and freelance illustrator, said in a 2016 *Guardian* interview that the concept of pursuing enjoyable work, or “playbour,” is of particular importance for Millennials because of the unreliable, uncertain return



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on investment in today’s unstable labour market.

“Before, if you were slaving away at a job you didn’t enjoy, at least you could rest assured that you were paying off a mortgage and that eventually there would be some return on your hard work,” she said. “When you know all the money you earn is not going to guarantee you any security in later life then I think you are less willing to do an unsatisfying job. I think that’s why the idea of ‘playbour’ [work that feels like leisure] is quite important for Generation Y.”

Yet creating a flexible, balanced work environment seems to be significantly less important to employers, according to the HRPA survey. Twenty-eight per cent of Millennials believe their work-life balance is worse than expected – and the majority of employers have

not yet made significant adjustments in that regard.

HRPA surveyed its members to see what portion of their organizations have changed their vacation or flexible work policies in order to attempt to improve Millennial retention. The survey found that a full 79.4 per cent of respondents worked at organizations that have not changed their policies, and 20.6 per cent have modified their approach in some way, with 12.6 per cent of respondents indicating they had changed their flexible work policies specifically. In addition, many survey respondents indicated that their organizations have adjusted policies related to various leaves and vacation days.

### **ADAPTATION GAPS**

Work-life balance is not the only area where there’s room for





improvement. The survey found that only 10 per cent of companies have done anything to integrate Millennial employees with their other co-workers. At the same time, just 14 per cent of organizations train managers specifically on how to work with Millennials.

Sixty-three per cent of Millennials feel their employers are not fully developing their leadership skills, while 77 per cent of

Canadian Millennials felt their company's ability to provide leadership development was "weak." This is particularly significant, since research has shown that Millennials would prefer employers offer training and development above all other benefits. This training could come from formal training programs, mentoring or even collaboration.

Another important area of focus is that of formalized



## GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

	TRADITIONALISTS	BABY BOOMERS	GENERATION X	MILLENNIALS
<b>BIRTH YEARS</b>	1900-1945	1946-1964	1965-1980	1977-1994
<b>Assets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience;</li> <li>• Dedication;</li> <li>• Loyalty;</li> <li>• Emotional maturity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service oriented;</li> <li>• Dedication;</li> <li>• Team perspective;</li> <li>• Experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptability;</li> <li>• Techno-literacy;</li> <li>• Independence;</li> <li>• Willing to buck the system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collective action;</li> <li>• Optimism;</li> <li>• Ability to multi-task;</li> <li>• Techno-savvy</li> </ul>
<b>Liabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reluctant to buck the system;</li> <li>• Uncomfortable with conflict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not necessarily budget minded;</li> <li>• Uncomfortable with conflict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skeptical;</li> <li>• Distrustful of authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for supervision and structure;</li> <li>• Inexperience</li> </ul>
<b>Motivations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connecting their actions to the overall good of their organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaders who get them involved and show them how to make a difference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permission to work on their own schedule</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connecting their actions to their personal career goals</li> </ul>
<b>Preferred methods of communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal;</li> <li>• Personal interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voicemail;</li> <li>• Email</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instant messages;</li> <li>• Text messages;</li> <li>• Email</li> </ul>

SOURCE: MURPHY, SUSAN A. (2007). LEADING A MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE. AARP. ACCESSED AT: [HTTP://ASSETS.AARP.ORG/WWW.AARP.ORG/\\_ARTICLES/MONEY/EMPLOYERS/LEADING\\_MULTIGENERATIONAL\\_WORKFORCE.PDF](http://assets.aarp.org/www.aarp.org/_articles/money/employers/leading_multigenerational_workforce.pdf)

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mentoring programs. One survey conducted by Bellevue University's Human Capital Lab showed that Millennials who participate in a mentorship program have a 23 per cent higher retention rate than those that do not. Reverse mentoring programs, in which Millennials are involved in a knowledge exchange with more senior leaders within the organization, are also considered particularly helpful. Yet despite this, the HRP survey found that 60.3 per cent of

respondents did not have an official mentoring program at their organization – and those companies that do have a mentoring program most often have an informal one.

But building mentorship programs, as well as focusing on creating a flexible and collaborative work environment, are key to successfully integrating the generations – and helping Millennials achieve their full potential at work.

“(Millennials) have a different set of beliefs and expectations about





behaviour in the workplace than previous generations,” said Patrice Thomson in her TED Talk on Intergenerational Harmony, adding that this can increase the tension between the different generational cohorts within the workplace.

“It is crucial for companies to create environments that are collaborative and inclusive, so that all of us are encouraged to bring all of our hearts and our minds to the workplace.”

Greenhalgh would tend to agree. “By offering flexible work options, ensuring technology is part of your workplace, offering reverse mentoring programs and even providing generational training, companies can help improve intergenerational issues, their retention of Millennials, and their overall competitiveness,” he said.

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