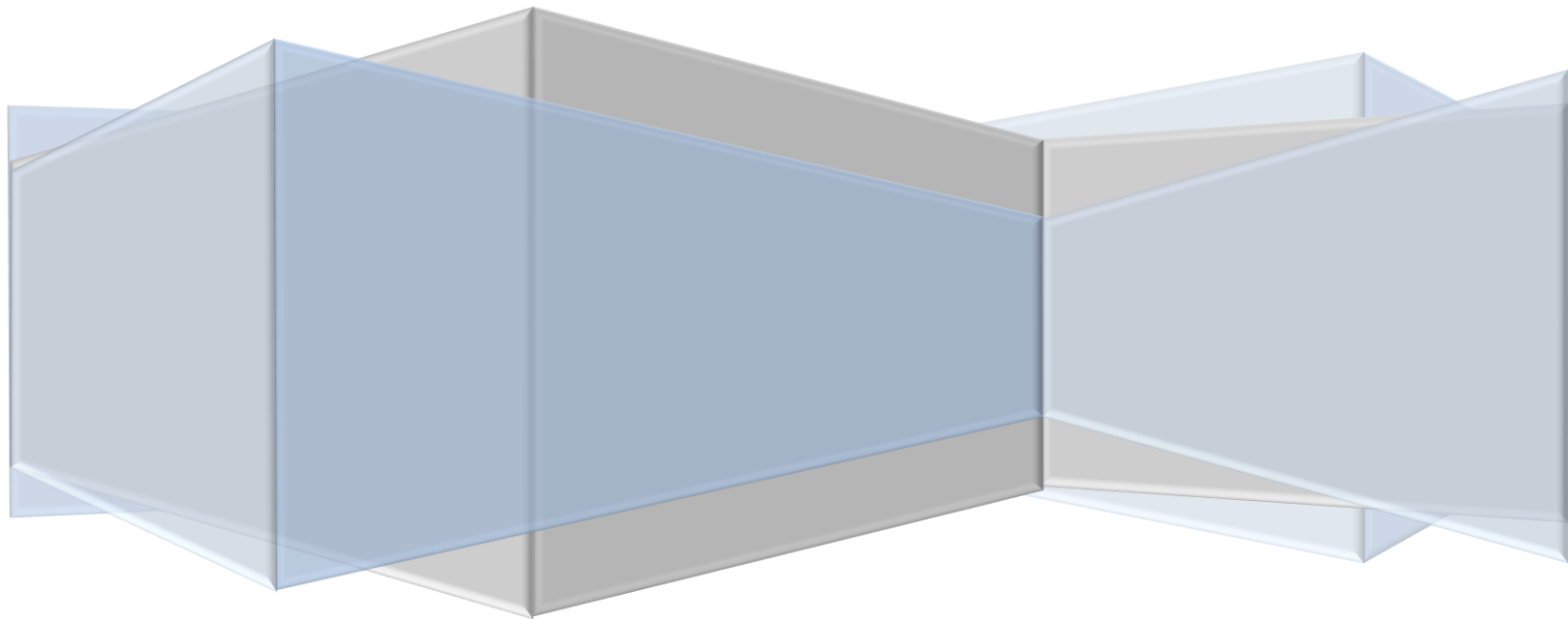


Engaging Millennials in the Workplace

Emerging Workforce Demands Real Time
Feedback

A whitepaper from F&H Solutions Group



Original work by Riia O'Donnell

The American workscape is shifting. The largest and most racially diverse generation in post-war America, millennials, will total 75% of the world's labor by 2025. The need to work with, rather than against, this demographic is crucial to success. Millennials are the most educated, and may be the most socially aware workforce to date, but there are many things corporations simply don't understand about them, and many systems that work against attracting, retaining and capitalizing on this talent pool. But we can learn to speak their language and respond to their needs.

Source: [*The Council of Economic Advisers, October 2014*](#)

Consider their origins. The first generation raised with internet access during their formative years, this generation grew with the breadth of the human experience quite literally at their fingertips. From facts to opinions, science to fantasy, everything is at their demand. They don't know what it means to wait for the library to open and dig through dusty reference materials to find the capital of Liechtenstein: they just Google it (its Vaduz). Millennials were raised with on-demand gratification: they are first the on-demand work force.

In addition to unfettered access to the world, they communicate, socialize, and consume in ways never dreamed of. They post pictures of food before they eat it; tell the world wherever they go; and offer their opinion on everything they encounter. They date, rate, and purchase from the world market as well as the shop down the road. And they see results of their opinions. Companies that fail to meet their standards are publicly shunned, while those that please are rewarded. They expect the best and strive to have it in a world where the best is conspicuously on display for them 24/7/365. Want to raise capital for an idea? Don't wait for a bank loan: Kickstart it. Want to be involved in change? GoFundMe is at their fingertips. The access they enjoy has not only changed their world view, it's changed their work view as well.

Millennials see no reason why the rewards in their personal life shouldn't translate to the professional: in fact they blur the line between the two. They want work-life integration rather than their predecessor's desire for work/life balance. They hope to find work that satisfies not only their need to generate income, but fulfills the vision of their future. The question for companies is how to tap that talent (not just labor) pool?

New Talent Demands New Solutions

What do millennials want from work? A recent survey by Intelligence Group shows their priorities:

- 72% would like to be their own boss. But if they do have to work for a boss
- 79% want that boss to serve more as a coach or mentor
- 88% want work-life integration, a blending of their personal and professional life together

Source: [*Forbes*](#)

In addition, millennials shun being just another number in a large workforce: they seek opportunities to invest their talent where they can make a difference. While not every company's mission is to change the world, millennials want to believe in what they do and for whom.

The media joke about the millennial work ethic: they're slackers, entitled, the "gimme" generation: but facts belie the myth. A 2014 survey noted that millennials, Boomers, and Gen Xers are fairly even across a wide spectrum of expectations and desires in the workplace.

Career Goal	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers
Make a positive impact on my organization	25%	21%	23%
Help solve social and/or environmental challenges	22%	20%	24%
Work with a diverse group of people	22%	22%	21%
Do work I am passionate about	20%	21%	23%

Source: [IBM Institute for Business Value Millennial Survey 2014](#)

The difference may be that millennials more forcefully express their wants, and, since they're well-versed in giving real-time feedback, their views are heard. Imagine 10 years ago being able to rate or disparage your employer publicly: now there are websites devoted to exactly that. Even mainstream job search boards have a place to rate (or trash) your current or former employer. The millennial expectation to be heard cannot be overestimated.

But the truth is, however more forcefully, publicly, or effectively they're saying it, they want what all employees want: to grow along with their employer, to partner and engage with the work they do. They're driven by feedback that's ongoing and encouraging and not just getting it, but giving it as well. In most companies thoughtful feedback is rare, and in the form of annual performance reviews, which are not satisfactory to millennials. The notion that they would wait for a year to hear how they're doing, set goals, or correct problems is nonsensical to the on-demand worker: and the marketplace is starting to agree. As many companies ditch annual ratings for real-time feedback, a Fast Company survey shows millennials aren't shy about their disdain:

- 69 % of millennials think the system is flawed
- 62% feel "blindsided" by a performance review
- 74% feel "in the dark" about how managers and peers think they're performing
- Over 50% reacted to a performance review by looking for a new job, complaining to co-workers, etc.
- Nearly 85% would feel more confident if they could have more frequent conversations with their managers

Source: [Fast Company](#)

What millennials want is on-demand communication and feedback that is thoughtful and productive, and employers are beginning to see the benefit. The number of employers that are either changing their rating system or giving up on it altogether for a feedback-based model is growing. The trend has increased from 4 percent in 2012 to 12 percent in 2014, according to a

Corporate Executive Board (CEB) Survey of Fortune 1,000 companies. As more and more major companies publicize their success in making the switch, the trend will likely continue.

Source: [SHRM](#)

Changing the Mindset

While the rating system intended to impart information, it was clearly too little, delivered too late. If the purpose is to encourage, correct, and mentor staff, then ratings fall short. Shifting to on-demand communication and feedback, encouragement is given when needed, problems are averted before they become irreparable, and innovation is fostered. For the company, that translates to ownership, engagement, and a bump to the bottom line.

Ask any owner what they want in an employee and the answer will be the same: staff that treats the company as if it were their own. Employees want to be partners, not producers, and communication is critical in any partnership. When companies move to a feedback-based system, it's viewed as a means to help achieve the employee's goals, along with the goals of the company's. But there's more.

Simplification is a bonus. Companies avoid countless hours of staff, managerial, and Human Resource's time to generate paperwork that disrupts, upsets, and is then typically ignored until the next cycle.

In a highly fluid marketplace, companies have to be ready for change at a moment's notice. When communication is open, change is easier, and faster, to affect.

Why Do We Hire?

Why do we hire people? If we're simply looking to produce product, we can find a robotic solution. We hire people to tap into their talents, their strengths, and their points of view. We look for innovators, people with fresh ideas and perspectives, but we often stifle these very qualities in our new hires to get employees into lockstep. With access to this most diverse generation, best practices capitalize on strengths. While their predecessors accept diversity and inclusion as a moral and legal imperative, millennials look to exploit diversity, even celebrate it. They feel no need to downplay their differences. They believe their diversity adds value in the workplace: but a recent survey shows they fear supervisors disagree:

- 86% of millennials feel that differences of opinion allow teams to excel
- Only 59% of millennials believe their leaders share this point of view.

Source: [Fast Company](#)

As we compete in the global arena, diversity is exactly what's called for. How do diverse consumers view us if we approach them from a single perspective? We have, at our fingertips, a talent pool of diversity that not only allows us to better understand the consumer, but are anxious to have their ideas heard.

Knowledge is there for the taking if we will only listen. The way to transform, improve, or innovate is likely to begin with differences of opinion. When employers open lines to communicate the results can be astounding. Front line employees know what's working and what isn't; they hear what the customer wants; they know how to improve systems and processes, if we'll just allow them to be heard.

For a generation raised on offering their opinions, providing feedback options and open surveys to millennials is innate. They want to tell us what they think: we need only give them the tools and opportunity. But the risk associated with communicating has to be eliminated. Yet another argument for switching the rating system to a feedback-based model: when the punitive is taken out of the equation (that idea could hurt you at evaluation time; that failure might cost your annual increase), employees communicate ideas that be unpopular but necessary; ideas that might fail or could be the next big thing; or might be the insight needed to affect change.

Whether looking for an overall pulse of the organization, its mission and systems; or specifics on projects, procedures or people, surveys give millennials an avenue to vent, to question, and to opine. For a generation raised on rating a world that's valued its opinion, the fit is textbook. For employers who want to capitalize on the talent pool that has more diversity, more education, and more global savvy than any before, the timing is perfect. Real-time feedback gives millennials what they want, and it pays back to employers over and over again.

Perhaps the challenge for employers isn't trying to figure out what millennials want: it's opening the lines of communication for them to us themselves.