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A Workforce to Reckon With

Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life.

—Confucius

Here they come to a workplace near you. They're the Millennials. They portend a revolutionary transformation of the workplace. They are also the first group that can truly be called the "Technological generation." Like no generation before them, they grew up with sophisticated technology, and it has come to define their lives.

But that is not the only thing this upcoming generation will bring to the workplace. In many ways, they may be the best-educated generation ever. In contrast to their predecessors, they've spent, on average, more hours in the classroom and more days in school. They participated in after-school tutoring programs, along with untold numbers of enrichment and private-tutoring programs.

The Millennials are also the products of the most overinvolved parents in the history of parenting. Their Baby Boomer mothers and fathers have become famous for a parenting style that included heaps of praise and plenty of parental hovering, for which they've come to be nicknamed "helicopter" parents.

One thing is certain: The Millennials are bringing to the workplace a new type of work ethic and a very different perspective than that of their Baby Boomer parents.

To many Boomer managers, it often seems as though the Millennials have little to no work ethic at all. But nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, as well educated and technologically savvy as they are, Millennials simply don't look at the requirements of getting a job done in the same way.

When Baby Boomers complain that the Millennial set doesn't seem willing to put in the legendary 50 to 70 hour workweeks that Boomers were famous for, their children might just as likely reply, "Why does it take you so long to get your job done?"

The Millennials expect a workplace that caters to their needs and their sense of time. It isn't that they're not adaptable. It's just that they see the world of work in very different terms.

Managers, Check Your Attitudes at the Door

It's not surprising that Baby Boomer managers and coworkers often take a dim view of Millennials. When Boomers entered the workforce in the very late 1960s and early 1970s, they had a very different set of career expectations. Boomers, not unlike their parents, expected to sign on with a single company for life. They expected to rise up the corporate ladder and eventually retire with a fat pension.

Imagine the Boomers' shock when major economic shifts resulted in corporate consolidation, massive layoffs, and the complete reordering of the employment landscape.

The children of those Boomer parents (our Millennials) watched as mom and dad ended up having to move from job to job throughout their careers. Millennials learned an important lesson that their parents eventually came to understand: There is no reward for loyalty to a corporation. Even long-term Boomer employees and those with outstanding track records went on the chopping block when

economic conditions forced cutbacks. As it turned out, the Boomers didn't end up working a lifetime for one company. They ended up shifting jobs and even tackling new careers as the economy continued to mutate.

So, it is no surprise that the Millennials take a very different view of their career expectations. They don't expect lifetime employment and don't necessarily expect company loyalty. Some writers refer to them as "free agents," and in many ways, that's how they see themselves. They expect that their talent and skills will carry them far, and they're not shy about sharing those expectations with bosses, starting day one on the job. The minute they feel that their employers may not be providing career opportunities, these younger employees are indeed very likely to jump ship. This, too, alienates many Boomer managers.

But it would be a mistake to write off the Millennials as arrogant as a whole. They may actually be the most productive, innovative generation in history. Their high confidence is justified in the level of education and technology they have been exposed to. They expect much from their employers in terms of position and opportunities because it's their mindset. They are always thinking about what's in it for them. And in some cases, it isn't actually a case of arrogance, so much as it is a matter of well-justified confidence.

A 2008 survey conducted by Twenge and Campbell found that recent high-school students are very self-confident, predicting that they will perform extremely well in important adult roles. Two-thirds of recent high-school students believe they will be "very good" workers, roughly equivalent to the top 20 percent of performance. Only half of their parents' generation predicted this. Additionally, half of recent high-school students believe they will be "very good" spouses and parents, while only one-third predicted this in the 1970s.¹

As noted earlier, companies and organizations around the world run the risk of being left behind if they don't recognize the potential value of this generation. By failing to attract and retain talented

Millennials, these organizations are literally risking billions of dollars in lost revenues and potential profits. Sadly, the current evidence suggests that most companies haven't yet connected the dots.

Is Your Atmosphere Fun?

The Mature generation would *never* have considered the workplace to be a source of fun. Work was to be endured, not enjoyed. Boomers weren't much different in their expectations, but they at least demanded that the workplace adapt better to their needs. Flextime, maternity leave, casual Fridays, and work-at-home options are all Boomer inventions. Work may not have been fun, but at least the company was supportive.

Millennials, on the other hand, bring an entirely different concept of fun at work. And it begins with their workplace tools.

As the first generation to be raised with technology, Millennials relate technology first and foremost to feelings of pleasure and enjoyment. While their parents struggled with complicated spreadsheets and arcane computer terminology, their children were happily playing computer-based games. To Millennials, technology means Nintendo and PlayStation, *Super Mario Brothers* and *Quake*, Game Boys and iPods.

Not that Millennials are reluctant to use technology for actual work. Remember, throughout school they also used the Internet for research, Microsoft Word for term papers, and PowerPoint for book reports. They are accustomed to using the latest technology, and they fully expect it to be engaging and fast-paced, filled with energy and surprises. In other words—fun.

Likewise, when it comes to the workplace and work itself, Millennials fully expect to be engaged and busy. They also expect plenty of human interaction, including in their use of technology. Unlike their Boomer parents, for whom e-mail is nothing more than another overflowing in-basket, their children see the computer as a

ubiquitous form of communication. E-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, and social-networking web sites are all familiar tools for the younger generation.

Based upon their orientation to fun and technology, we can draw certain conclusions. Managers need to consider ways in which they can create an environment on the job that is fast-paced, engaging, and enjoyable. Obviously, not all work is fun, and most jobs contain a necessary amount of drudgery. However, when you go to the trouble to create a fun atmosphere, you not only attract Millennials, but you also unleash their naturally high energy levels. Think of the Millennial mantra as “work hard, play hard.”

Bringing more joy into the workplace can also go a long way to reduce stress and increase productivity. In fact, in the 1,727-respondent, 2006 KEYGroup survey, one in every five respondents indicated that their productivity suffered because the company caused unnecessary stress, such as unclear deadlines.

Many organizations are taking concrete steps to develop a high-energy, social work climate. In some cases, casual Fridays have been replaced with ice-cream socials or end-of-the-week happy hours.

Some offices have even been known to organize spontaneous Nerf fights or to arrange after-hours paintball contests, just to break the monotony and generate some energy. Not only are these fun activities, but they also prove to be excellent team-building strategies!

Increasingly, many organizations are also setting aside time to organize employee trips. These can include theatre and sporting events, as well as community trips to museums, landmarks, and historical sites. They are enjoyable, serve as a reward, and contribute to team building as a side benefit.

Some companies, such as Google, even install Napping Pods for the employees' onsite to ensure that their workforce is adequately rested. Scientific studies conducted by Takahashi & Arito show that a short nap midday can boost the productivity of employees.²

Another way that organizations are cultivating a fun, intense work atmosphere is by replacing Muzak with television. It may seem jarring to older workers, but many employers are placing televisions in common areas and break rooms. In some cases, they even position televisions throughout employee workspaces, making the office atmosphere more closely resemble a sports bar. Televisions, once a clear taboo in the workplace, are gaining new currency among employers who seek to create a kinetic sense of energy in the office.

There are several justifications for this strategy. “Muzak” (a term for background instrumental music) was once thought to induce calmness and enhance employee productivity. Calming it may have been, but Muzak’s productivity-enhancing properties are questionable. Instead, corporations are making news broadcasts, sporting events, and even MTV available to employees in an attempt to make work more enjoyable.

Even though TV may be a distraction to some, Millennials are used to it. A 2008 Motorola survey of 1,200 Millennials from five countries in Europe and the Middle East found that not only do Millennials themselves engage with new technology, but they also actually influence their parents to do so, even if they don’t live in their home.³ They are the all-time multitasking champs, and they have rarely done anything in their lives—from homework to reading to conversing—without the background chatter of televisions, MP3 players, and other electronic distractions.

However, technology looms far more significantly to the Millennial set than as a mere backdrop. Technology is at the heart of the Millennial generation’s work ethic.

It’s Not Your Father’s Meeting

How many times have many of us exited a corporate meeting after two hours, wishing we could somehow get that time back? It’s ironic, but most employees and most employers complain about the

lack of communication in the workplace. Yet at the same time, both managers and employees often express frustration over the futility of meetings without end (and seemingly without purpose).

Well, it shouldn't be surprising that Millennials find meetings no more interesting than the rest of us. But be that as it may, organizational meetings are a way of life and are not likely to go away altogether anytime soon. However, if we pay attention to the skill sets that Millennials bring to the workplace, we may actually find ourselves in fewer meetings while enjoying better communications.

Ironically, many of the technologies that so sharply define the Millennial generation aren't really new. They've actually been available to the Baby Boomer generation that preceded them in the workplace for quite a few years now. It's just that Baby Boomers haven't always taken to these communication technologies in large numbers.

One of the biggest differences between Boomers and Millennials may be in their reliance on virtual communications. Millennials seem to use virtual communication more often than Boomers, and we're starting to see their overdependence on it as opposed to in-person contact. However, one point should be noted right at the outset. There is a need in almost every business environment for person-to-person meetings. Certainly, employee relationships with their bosses demand it to some extent, and nearly all relationships with coworkers depend on it.

E-mail has already revolutionized employee communications. That fact won't differ for Millennials entering the workplace. Millennials, however, are far more enthusiastic about sending text messages or engaging in instant-messaging dialogs. Unlike e-mails, these are real-time communications that allow people to interact spontaneously, albeit with short blasts of messages.

So far, instantaneous-communication technologies have not become pervasive in the workplace, but you can expect to see their rise as more and more Millennials join the workforce. Ironically, these technologies might actually herald the decline of e-mail or

voice mail if employees come to prefer instant communication to communication that is delayed.

Many Boomer parents already express their frustration with Millennials who, when they can't reach mom or dad by phone, choose not to leave a voice mail message. To Boomers, this is unfathomable. But Millennials just seem to dislike leaving messages (or listening to them). They figure that when your caller ID shows who called, you will simply hit redial and engage in a real-time conversation. Millennials just can't see the value of wasting time by leaving a message or retrieving one.

So, we may end up seeing the decline of voice mail, and perhaps to a lesser extent the decline of e-mail, but with a corresponding rise in text messaging and instant messaging.

We might add here the suspicion that the Millennial generation may well be the worst-spelling group of people in history. In addition to the *intentional* misspellings that are a necessary part of texting ("R U there?") and instant messaging, Millennials simply show little patience for spell-checking their communications. The essence of modern communication is speed, not accuracy. E-mail, instant messaging, and text messaging are all virtually instantaneous mediums, with no time to run a spell-check.

We will probably see a rise in the technology of videoconferencing, as well as in virtual meetings and online collaboration. Videoconferencing is certainly not a new technology, and there are many companies that use it extensively. But considering the depth of our technology, it's not a communication strategy that most organizations use to bring together widely dispersed work locations. You no longer require elaborate and expensive video equipment to join a large videoconference. Today, one need only be equipped with a computer or a laptop and use of Skype.

Similarly, we have long had the technology that would enable us to engage in online collaboration with other employees utilizing the Internet, along with computer-based voice and video. Software programs and services such as NetMeeting should make it very cost

effective for employees spread out across the globe to work closely together to coordinate efforts or solve problems.

But again, these technologies have existed for many years but have not yet come into widespread use. Now along come the Millennials, who are both highly technological and very comfortable with virtual communications. The “Facebook generation” could well come to redefine the nature of work in both space and time.

Your father may have been content to attend weekly staff meetings and the occasional all-hands meeting once a month. The Millennials, however, will expect more immediate communication in real time, with the least amount of inconvenience (and boredom) possible. This could well end up being a “Brave New World” for networking.

Will You Be My Friend?

But speaking of networking, we should acknowledge that the Millennial generation has a very different view of networking, and specifically how to network, than their parents did. Millennials are inveterate “joiners” when it comes to online social networks. The Facebook phenomenon is a case in point.

Facebook was founded in 2004 by a student at Harvard University. The site was designed to provide a place for students to create profiles and visit other students’ profiles to learn something about each other’s interests and background. Each profile might contain information about favorite music, schools attended, classes taken, and other matters of personal interest. The intriguing concept was allowing visitors to “join” a person’s profile by listing yourself as a friend (with corresponding links back to your own profile).

By 2008, after only four years of operation, Facebook yields more than 132 million visits a day! Its older competitor, MySpace, only attracts a mere 117 million visits! Although the founders of these popular sites have been challenged to find ways to earn money from this global phenomenon, it is readily evident that the Millennial

generation loves the concept of social interaction taking place in a virtual environment.

Businesses have not been immune to the appeal of social-networking sites, either. Another more venerable social-networking site is LinkedIn, which in a manner of speaking is a Facebook- or MySpace-style site that is intended for business networking. While LinkedIn is not as large as the more popular sites for younger people, in its own way, it has been just as much a surging success.

Another social-networking site with immense popularity among young people is YouTube. This video-driven site is also only a few years old, yet its rapid rise to popularity led Internet search-giant Google to purchase the site for \$1.65 billion in 2006. The videos that people post to YouTube are typically amateur and personal. Yet, many of the visitors post videos about their jobs, their companies, their services, or their products. While the principal thrust is not a social-networking web site for business use, YouTube has actually become a surprisingly powerful marketing tool and a very effective way to reach Millennials. For example, when a couple of Millennials alleged that they were victim to age discrimination on a Southwest Airline flight, Southwest posted the company's response on YouTube. Even political candidates are on YouTube.

There are two elements to Millennials' affinity for social networking that organizational recruiters need to pay attention to. One is that social-networking sites provide recruiters a way to connect with potential employees. Not surprisingly, organizations are creating presences on Facebook, MySpace, and other social-networking sites. Even YouTube is a source for recruiters to send a message about working for their company.

But in the real world (as opposed to the virtual world), the phenomenon of social networking among Millennials says something about their desire for socialization. While they can be quite content to engage in virtual human contact, at the end of the day—and most certainly at the end of the workweek—they're still looking for actual human contact.

That's why many organizations sponsor the aforementioned social events, such as ice-cream socials and Friday happy hours, as a way of allowing their employees to interact and build relationships.

While they may be masters of the virtual world of bits and bytes, the Millennial generation, like generations that preceded them, still depends upon face-to-face contact and human touch.

The Achievers

One thing that may separate the Millennials from the generations that came before them is the extent to which they have been nurtured. Their parents, the Baby Boomer generation, behaved very differently from the way *their* parents had treated them. The World War II generation had a tendency to practice the philosophies that children are "better seen than heard" and "spare the rod and spoil the child."

In reality, of course, most of the Mature generation provided an unprecedented level of material comfort to their children. Most of their offspring also enjoyed a level of education that previous generations could only dream about. But when the Boomers began having children of their own, they carried the challenge of parenting to an extreme (just as they carried most things to an extreme).

To Boomer parents, it wasn't just a question of their children being well fed, well clothed, and well educated. The Boomers wanted and expected their children to do better than they did. To that end, they pushed, pulled, cobbled, encouraged, bribed, and motivated their offspring to reach for the stars.

Boomers were extremely involved and busy parents. Despite typically being a two-income household, the Boomers chauffeured their kids *everywhere*, from school to after-school activities. They ushered the Millennials to Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, church groups, traveling sports teams, tutoring centers, summer camps, and more.

And those summer camps were a far cry from the summer camps of the Boomers' youth, where lazy days were spent making leather wallets and paddling around the lake.

Summer camps in the Millennials' era began to specialize, offering a unique focus—camp by camp—on pursuits such as computers, space exploration, sports, performing arts, and a myriad of other avocations.

One of the overall results of this intense level of parental attention was that the Millennials grew up receiving lots and *lots* of feedback. They're used to higher levels of praise and encouragement than correction. Although they are often uncomfortable in the workplace if they don't receive lots of feedback, our experience has been that many struggle with corrective feedback.

Supervisors who have hired and trained younger employees are already seeing this. Annual performance reviews are inadequate to Millennials, who want real-time feedback and often prefer scheduled face time for performance discussions. It may seem like a lot of hand-holding, but it's a very effective way to get Millennials motivated and to keep them on track.

This is both a challenge and an opportunity to those who are charged with managing Millennials. For the average Millennial, feedback is indeed the “breakfast of champions.” The use of positive reinforcement to shape behavior will need to become a standard practice (if it isn't already), because Millennials are unlikely to respond well to negative reinforcement or reprimands. Guidelines to help Millennials give and receive positive and corrective feedback follows on page 29.

And don't forget to provide feedback to them as they demonstrate leadership competencies on the job. A record-keeping format that works well also follows on page 29.

Another way that the Millennials' craving for feedback is showing up in modern organizations is through employee-recognition and incentive systems. In the old days, it used to be enough for employers to post goal-tracking charts on break-room walls and conduct simple awards ceremonies to herald employee achievements. Today, members of the younger generation look for greater evidence that their achievements are recognized.

Guidelines for Giving Feedback

1. Be specific.
2. Focus on performance.
3. Consider the needs of the receiver.
4. Focus on performance over which the receiver has control.
5. Give timely feedback.
6. Check for understanding.
7. Document discussion.
8. Watch absolute words, such as “always” and “never.”

Record Keeping for Accomplishments

Write an “Emmy speech” for each employee, recognizing and acknowledging each one’s contributions.

This is a person who demonstrates:

(identify a leadership competency or an admirable quality that this employee displays)

Who has achieved:

(identify this employee’s accomplishments)

(Name of employee)

For one thing, the goals have to be tangible and readily measurable. Second, the rewards themselves need to be goods or services that the Millennials actually value. Gift certificates are fine, so long as they are to venues and events that Millennials deem cool. If the rewards for high achievement are quality merchandise, such as iPods, they have a much greater impact. It's not just the recognition itself that impresses Millennials. High-quality rewards send a message that their effort is truly valued, as are they.

Many employers have had a great deal of success creating incentive programs to reward employees, especially their Millennials, for completing a predetermined schedule of learning and development programs. Millennials tend to value education in any event, but providing recognition for accomplishing a learning plan really gets their attention. Some employers have even used a point system for completing training objectives that permitted their employees to pick and choose from a catalog of gifts. The custom nature of this type of reward is really appealing to young people.

Because Millennials place a great deal of value on collaboration, it's often equally effective to reward them for their efforts as part of a team. By defining team goals and setting up rewards for hitting benchmarks, completing the project can be more productive in the long run. It can certainly provide an opportunity to insert a little team building as well.

Recruiting Strategies for the Cool Crowd

Marketers have discovered that Millennials can be a very difficult market. They are known for having a short attention span. It's a great quality to possess when you're multitasking, but it's a bad characteristic for those trying to present a message. Couple that with the Millennials' ingrained distrust of hype and spin, and you have a recipe guaranteed to drive marketers crazy.

Over the years, however, a few organizations have learned some effective techniques for getting their message in front of Millennials

and earning their trust. One of the secrets that successful marketers have discovered is that Millennials place a very high degree of trust in word-of-mouth communication. A suggestion or recommendation from one of their peers carries vastly more weight with Millennials than a ton of glossy advertisements.

Perhaps it was inevitable. No generation in history has been exposed to as much advertising and as many commercial messages as the Millennials have!

Further, they have grown up in an era in which reporting the news has been superseded by expressing opinions. Talking heads have given way to shouting faces. Sometimes it seems that facts are in short supply, but we seem to have no end of opinions. And not just on television.

Opinions abound on the Internet. Almost any product that you can buy on most web sites comes with a stack of reviews from other people who've purchased the product before you. Articles published on magazine or newspaper web sites are evaluated and commented on by readers. Blogs exist on almost any subject by the thousands, and each and every blog is accompanied by feedback and discussion. Needless to say, social-networking sites are filled with compendiums of likes, dislikes, recommendations, advice, and other forms of opinion.

Marketers have responded to this characteristic of the Millennial generation with creative and unusual marketing campaigns geared toward generating positive word-of-mouth messages about their products.

Shoemaker company Vans scored big with Millennials by sponsoring skateboard tours and the X Games competitions. Jones Soda reached Millennials where they lived by selling soft drinks in clothing and music stores, tattoo and piercing parlors, and sporting-equipment shops before hitting the mainstream of beverage distribution. The challenge for each company, it seems, is to find a way to make that connection with the younger generation. Millennials have to see a way in which they can identify with a company if an organization

wants any chance of them becoming fully engaged, either as customers or employees.

Viral videos are a good example of how word-of-mouth messages can spread like wildfire among Millennials. The advent of YouTube and the proliferation of cell-phone cameras has led to an explosion of amateur videos on the Internet. Much of what you see on sites like YouTube also comes from clips, commercials, and old video recordings. But whatever the source, when a clip catches the fancy of Millennials, they quickly spread the word, and the video in question gets viewed millions of times.

Savvy marketers have figured out how to take advantage of that phenomenon by posting commercial messages cleverly designed to look like video shot by amateurs. Oddly enough, one would think that the Millennials would resent the fact that a popular clip is actually a commercial message. However, if it's well done—meaning truly clever and funny—the Millennials will forgive the commercial nature of the clip.

The meaning is clear. Marketers—including employment recruiters—have to use modern media in a clever way to attract the attention of Millennials. This would be especially true if your goal is to communicate that yours is a cool organization.

One organization, for example, distributed video cameras among its employees and invited them to make recordings of some of the fun things they got to do while performing their jobs. Those videos were then posted to YouTube, where visitors could get a real insider's look at work life within the organization: A very clever use of modern technology to attract the younger generation!

Keys to Chapter 2

- Boomers demanded that the workplace adapt better to their needs. Flextime, maternity leave, casual Fridays, and work-at-home options are all Boomer inventions.

- Millennials relate technology first and foremost to feelings of pleasure and enjoyment. To Millennials, technology means Nintendo and PlayStation, *Super Mario Brothers* and *Quake*, Game Boys and iPods.
- Millennials also used the Internet for research, Microsoft Word for term papers, and PowerPoint for book reports. They are accustomed to using the latest technology, and they fully expect it to be engaging and fast-paced, filled with energy and surprises.
- Millennials fully expect to be engaged and busy at work. They see the computer as a form of communication. E-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, and social-networking web sites are all familiar tools for this younger generation.
- Many organizations are taking concrete steps to develop a high-energy, social work climate. In some cases, casual Fridays have been replaced with themed Fridays, ice-cream socials, or end-of-the-week happy hours.
- Increasingly, many organizations are also organizing employee trips to theater and sporting events, as well as community trips to museums, landmarks, and historical sites. They serve as a reward and contribute to team building as a side benefit.
- Millennials are the all-time multitasking champs, and they have rarely done anything in their lives—from homework, to reading, to conversing—without the background chatter of televisions, MP3 players, and other electronic distractions.
- Instant-communication technologies have not become pervasive in the workplace, but you can expect to see their rise as more and more Millennials join the workforce.
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- One of the overall results of this intense level of parental attention was that the Millennials grew up receiving lots and *lots* of feedback. They're used to higher levels of praise and encouragement than correction.
- Many employers have had a great deal of success creating incentive programs to reward employees, especially their Millennials, for completing a predetermined schedule of learning and development programs.
- Because Millennials place a great deal of value on collaboration, it's often effective to reward them for their efforts as part of a team. By defining team goals and setting up rewards for hitting benchmarks, completing the project can be more productive in the long run.
- Millennials place a very high degree of trust in word-of-mouth communication. A suggestion or recommendation from one of their peers carries vastly more weight with Millennials than a ton of glossy advertisements.
- Millennials have to see a way in which they can identify with a company if an organization wants any chance of them becoming fully engaged, either as customers or employees.
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