

Top 10 questions to ask about the multi-generational workforce and Millennials at work

Bridging the generation gap

How to engage your multi-generational workforce and customers

Your workforce is changing rapidly. While Baby Boomers are staying in the job market longer, Gen X is struggling to move up the corporate ladder. At the same time, Millennials are flooding the employment pool with unique expectations, and will make up the majority of the workforce in the next five years. In order to engage this multi-generational workforce and retain the top talent, you need to adapt your talent management strategies now to respond to your peoples' changing needs.

Here are some questions all boards and management teams should be asking when thinking about the multi-generational workforce and Millennials at work.

1. Characteristics of the multi-generational workforce

Do we understand the different values and motivations in our multi-generational workforce?

By looking at what drives people engagement, you can clearly see differences in what each generation values and what they look for in an employer. While your Boomers sought good paying jobs, recognition and status, your Millennials want to be part of a diverse team, learn new things every day, have more flexibility to manage their lives and interact with people through social media. Identifying these differences and addressing them proactively will help you retain top talent.

2. Recruitment

How are we making sure we're finding the top talent?

If you're not connected daily to potential recruits through social media then you're missing out on some of the top talent. Your recruiters should be using social media sites as key sources for finding non-active job seekers. Not only will these potential recruits learn about your organization, you'll learn a lot about them from their social media profile. To assess talent, focus on the candidate profile your organization needs for the future, which is moving much more towards leadership capabilities and less on technical skills. Qualities like being able to adapt to change, understanding and supporting a team and being flexible are increasingly important in a multi-generational workforce. Recruitment techniques need to move beyond the traditional interview in to assessment centres, profiling and other methods to help get a fuller picture of the capabilities of the people you are hiring.

3. Retention

What kind of work environment and practices do we have in place to drive retention?

For the Millennial generation, they need to feel emotionally connected to their place of work to be engaged and to stay. Retention, for this generation, is founded on four key drivers: a flexible work environment, engaging work and development opportunities, a sense of community and competitive pay. Are you supporting these drivers by ensuring your organization promotes flexibility, learning opportunities, the ability to give back to the community and by offering competitive compensation?



4. Balance and workload

Excessive and prolonged work hours has been found to predict higher turnover, lower commitment and reduced job satisfaction. How are we addressing this imbalance?

Work/life imbalance has a negative impact on people's commitment to their work and may even influence their choice to leave a job, and this is even more pronounced with top performers and Millennials. Looking at different ways to manage your workforce through, for example, offering flexible work hours, flexible time off programs and supplementing your workforce during peak periods with contingent workers, are a few ways to address this issue to mitigate the risk of losing your top talent.

5. Leadership development

As a Baby Boomer or Gen X, what are some of the things I need to learn or change to manage Millennials?

Millennials don't expect their employers to manage their career or provide them with job security, but they do expect learning and development opportunities, engaging work and flexibility in how they work. Your leaders will need to adapt to this style of working. Learning about what this generation needs from you, and monitoring how well you're doing is how you can demonstrate to your Millennials that you value them and want them to stay.

6. People and teams

Do I have the right people with the right skills in place to manage more flexibility in the workplace?

Just as talent needs are shifting, so too is the way business is conducted. Flexibility is important to all generations, but is critical for Millennials. We are seeing the rise of more and more virtual teams which present unique challenges for management in terms of providing leadership, coaching and general oversight to a team that you don't see, and who don't see each other in the workplace every day. What technology do you have in place to make work more efficient, productive and flexible and do your leaders trust their staff to be productive in a virtual workplace?

7. Cultural change

How are we addressing the cultural change that needs to take place to support a multi-generational workforce?

Having leaders who are comfortable working within a flexible work environment and who are **supportive** of a flexible culture is critical. This is a challenge for leaders who didn't grow up in that type of flexible environment. Equally, the need to give continual recognition and appreciation for a job well done is very important to the Millennial generation. Think of it as 'instantaneous feedback'. For many leaders who were occasionally told they were doing a good job, this is another big change to realize that Millennials need more regular feedback and appreciation for their efforts. Remember, for Millennials, flexibility and appreciation are major drivers of commitment, so your corporate culture will need to adapt to reflect this trend.

8. Learning and development

What kinds of learning and development solutions do we have in place to support our people's development?

Millennials expect skill development in return for delivering high quality work. They want to be continually learning and improving their skill sets. We continue to see a trend towards the gamification of learning solutions to adapt to this generation's needs. It's a different approach to learning and one many organizations are adapting. To engage your workforce, what solutions do you have in place for developing your people on an ongoing basis? Take into consideration all of your options—secondments to other offices or groups, formal and informal mentoring and other experiential learning opportunities, like job shadowing to help meet this growing need from your teams.

9. Compensation

Are there differences in how each generation perceives compensation?

How people perceive their pay plays a key role in retention and job satisfaction. Millennials aren't as concerned with pay (providing the pay is competitive) and choose to stay with an organization for other reasons. Giving your Millennials more control over their career path, development opportunities and work/life flexibility are things to keep in mind to retain them.

10. Planning for the future

Why's understanding the multi-generational workforce so important for leaders today?

In a relatively healthy Canadian job market, top performing Millennials can and may go elsewhere—either for an environment that they perceive will help them grow professionally or improved work/life flexibility. Due to improvements in technology and increased mobility, competition for the top talent continues to be a challenge. If you don't stay vigilant and continue to find ways to adapt to and support your changing workforce needs, you risk losing your best and brightest.

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