



“FROM WEDDING RINGS TO NOSE RINGS”

PART 4 – Millennials

The Millennials are the youngest generation representing those people born in 1979 and after. This group makes up approximately 8.88% of the Catawba County workforce. For this generation, work is not a place you go; work is a thing you do. Wall Street Journal columnist [Ron Alsop's recent article in the WSJ, "The Trophy Kids Go to Work,"](#) title comes from work-related attitudes of the generation that got trophies for just showing up at soccer. If there is one overriding perception of the millennial generation, it's that these young people have great -- and sometimes outlandish -- expectations. Where do such feelings come from? Blame it on doting parents, teachers and coaches. Millennials are truly "trophy kids," the pride and joy of their parents. The Millennials were lavishly praised and often received trophies when they excelled, and sometimes when they didn't, to avoid damaging their self-esteem. They and their parents have placed a high premium on success, filling résumés with not only academic accolades but also sports and other extracurricular activities.

Employers realize the Millennials are their future work force, but they are concerned about this generation's desire to shape their jobs to fit their lives rather than adapt their lives to the workplace. More than 85% of hiring managers and human-resource

executives said they feel that Millennials have a stronger sense of entitlement than older workers, according to a survey by [CareerBuilder.com](#). The generation's greatest expectations: higher pay (74% of respondents); flexible work schedules (61%); a promotion within a year (56%); and more vacation or personal time (50%). Millennials, of course, will have to temper their expectations as they seek employment during this deep economic slump. But their sense of entitlement is an ingrained trait that will likely resurface in a stronger job market. Some research studies indicate that the millennial generation's great expectations stem from feelings of superiority. Millennials want loads of attention and guidance from employers. An annual or even semiannual evaluation isn't enough. They want to know how they're doing weekly, even daily. The Millennials were raised with so much affirmation and positive reinforcement that they come into the workplace needy for more. But managers must tread lightly when making a critique. This generation was treated so delicately that many schoolteachers stopped grading papers and tests in harsh-looking red ink. Some managers have seen Millennials break down in tears after a negative performance review and even quit their jobs. In performance evaluations, it's



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still important to give the good, the bad and the ugly, but with a more positive emphasis.

Millennials also want things spelled out clearly. Many flounder without precise guidelines but thrive in structured situations that provide clearly defined rules and the order that they crave. Managers will need to give step-by-step directions for handling everything from projects to voice-mail messages to client meetings. It may seem obvious that employees should show up on time, limit lunchtime to an hour and turn off cell phones during meetings. But those basics aren't necessarily apparent to many Millennials. As employees they are looking for an orientation that will train them to do the required work. They are used to video technology and expect it as a part of orientation; they do not view it as impersonal.

Although millennials have high expectations about what their employers should provide them, companies shouldn't expect much loyalty in return. If a job doesn't prove fulfilling, Millennials will forsake it in a flash. Indeed, many employers say it's retention that worries them most. These workplace nomads don't see any stigma in listing three jobs in a single year on their resumes. They are quite confident about landing yet another job, even if it will take longer in this dismal economy. In the meantime, they needn't worry about their next paycheck because they have their parents to cushion them. They're comfortable in the knowledge that they can move back

home while they seek another job. The weak job market may make Millennials think twice about moving on, but once jobs are more plentiful, they will likely resume their job-hopping ways.

These outspoken young people tend to be highly opinionated and fearlessly challenge recruiters and bosses. Status and hierarchy don't impress them much. They want to be treated like colleagues rather than subordinates and expect ready access to senior executives, even the CEO, to share their brilliant ideas. Companies have a vested interest in trying to slow the millennial mobility rate. They not only will need Millennials to fill positions left vacant by retiring baby boomers but also will benefit from this generation's best and brightest, who possess significant strengths in teamwork, technology skills, social networking and multitasking. Millennials were bred for achievement, and most will work hard if the task is engaging and promises a tangible payoff. Clearly, companies that want to compete for top talent must bend a bit and adapt to the Millennial generation. Employers need to show new hires how their work makes a difference and why it's of value to the company. Smart managers will listen to their young employees' opinions, and give them some say in decisions. Employers also can detail the career opportunities available to Millennials if they'll just stick around awhile. Indeed, it's the wealth of opportunities that will prove to be the most effective retention tool.



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Many of these younger employees were born to older mothers and never knew grandparents; as a result they are attracted to and fascinated with older adults. Many will seek out the oldest co-workers as the one to ask questions and shadow. It is also found that the Millennials are more akin to boomers in that they prefer a personal relationship with their boss. They are frustrated working in a system that constantly purchases the latest technology. They realize a rental plan will be more productive, as the diagnostic will become obsolete often within a few years of purchase.

They grew up hearing, “Say what you mean and mean what you say.” Others may view this communication style as blunt, while a Millennial sees it as simply being honest. Millennials are best characterized by the word fear. They are the first generation to have terrorism as a part of their daily life. They see violence as a given in the world. Fully 40% are only children. In their lifetime they will see words such as aunt, uncle and cousin disappear from the vocabulary. Family to them includes close friends and is not dictated by matrimonial or blood ties.

The different generations can do well in the workplace provided understanding is given to their different styles. As we will hope to point out in our series of articles, gone are the days when everyone in the workplace looks alike. The multicultural workforce is here to stay. Therefore, it is in our best interest to learn how to create an environment where members of a variety of ethnic, racial, religious and gender backgrounds can thrive. Like most things in life, those things worth having don’t always come easy. If not managed properly, cultural and gender differences can increase costs through higher turnover rates as a result of interpersonal conflicts and miscommunication. However, the benefits of this diversity includes improve decision making, innovation and greater success in connecting with the community we serve. Creating a workplace where employees of all backgrounds feel accepted takes time and lots of effort. Be patient and be willing to learn from the mistakes you make along the way. Celebrate when you achieve certain milestones and remember that every day you are getting closer to achieving a workplace where the word “diversity” is no longer spoken. It just happens.

(Most of the information in this article was taken from the article “From Wedding Rings to Nose Rings...Generational differences in the Workplace and in the Practice Setting”, by Marilyn Moats Kennedy supplied by Leading to Change and the book Career Intelligence by Barbara Moses.)