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## **Ready or Not, Here They Come: Motivating and Retaining the Millennial Generation** By Amy Larrabee and Erica Robinson of Bell Oaks Executive Search

Television, magazines, newspapers and book shelves are filled with people—some experts, some not—analyzing the most productive way to manage and get the most out of the Millennial generation workforce. Popular headlines have stated:

The “Millennials” are Coming

Whassup? A Glimpse Into the Attitudes and Beliefs of the Millennial Generation

The Millennial Invasion: are you ready?

Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation

Twentysomething: 7 Ways to motivate your millennial

How Will Millennials Manage

Millennials need to get real about work world

What’s surprising is the disapproving and critical tone many of these pieces take. Is this really necessary? Jack and Suzy Welch don’t think so. In their *BusinessWeek* article, “Generation Y’s Bad Rap,” they address the negativity that is plaguing Millennials: “We don’t get it. That is, we don’t get why everyone is so down on Gen Y [Millennial]. We think the crop of twentysomethings breaking into the business world right now is about as energized and exciting a group of “kids” as we’ve ever seen. And we’ve seen them a lot over the past several years ... Overwhelmingly, we’ve found Gen Yers to be hardworking, entrepreneurial, startlingly authentic, refreshingly candid, and wonderfully upbeat. Basically, not to get all mushy or anything, we love them.”

As Millennials ourselves in the executive search industry, we’ve encountered countless perspectives and opinions on working with this generation from both sides of the table. Numerous stereotypes have labeled Millennials as job hoppers, not willing to pay their dues and over-dependent on their parents. Our experiences have illustrated more positive characteristics. We interview hundreds of candidates each year, and have noted some commonalities: They aren’t shy about offering new perspectives and creative, out-of-the-box solutions. They embrace and thrive on change. They are extremely well-educated where Masters degrees are becoming the norm.

Let’s review exactly who this generation is. The Millennial generation has been labeled, debated, studied and analyzed more than any other group of offspring in history. They have been called Generation Y, Internet Generation, ME Generation, Echo Boomers, the Boomlets, Nexters, Generation Next, the Nintendo Generation, the Digital Generation, and even Generation Why, because they never stop questioning the status quo.

Clearly, there is an interest in this age group. What is it that makes Millennials so significant and what does it mean for those who will be hiring, managing and working with them?

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First, they are significant because of sheer size. Initial estimates put potential numbers well over 80 million. Born between 1980 and 2000, the Millennials have already passed Baby Boomers in number. (Sociologists estimate Baby Boomers around 78 million.) The Millennial generation is anticipated to be the largest generation in our country and the first 100 million member generation in U.S. history.

Second, their timing is extremely significant. The first Millennials graduated college in 2002 and are now entering the workforce at the same time Baby Boomers are retiring. Seventy-six million Boomers will retire over the next 25 years, and there are only approximately 46 million Gen Xers coming up behind them. Millennials will impact and influence the workforce for the next 70 years.

Finally, this generation is different than any of those that came before it. Millennials have higher expectations from work and life in general. They are more connected through the technological advances they grew up on, and are managing a multi-tasking lifestyle that includes work and family at a whole new level.

So what does this mean for employers? As Millennials enter the workforce, employers must evolve in order to recruit, manage, motivate and retain these valuable workforce additions. Why valuable? “This is the most high-maintenance workforce in the history of the world,” says Bruce Tulgan, founder of leading generational research firm, RainmakerThinking. “The good news is they’re also going to be the most high-performing workforce in the history of the world. They walk in with more information in their heads, more information at their fingertips - and, sure, they have high expectations, but they have the highest expectations first and foremost for themselves.”

With that in mind, here are some very practical ways—a Top Ten, if you will—to recruit and retain Millennials in the work environment:

10) **Increase responsibility.** Millennials thrive when given real responsibility. It gives them a sense of ownership, while making them feel connected and valued by the organization. Help them see the big picture, then let them run with it. Talk about the successes your company has had in this area when interviewing potential candidates.

9) **Be a mentor.** Millennials have grown up with an abundance of role models—from parents who worked full time and still attended every soccer match and dance recital to the latest batch of reality stars (we didn’t say they were all good!). Cathie Looney, a national speaker, generational expert and certified reality therapist says: “If you want to get the best out of the Millennials, you have to invest in them. You have to give them a mentor to teach them how to navigate the adult world.”

8) **Acknowledge accomplishment.** Millennials have been encouraged by parents, teachers and coaches from an early age. They grew up on a reward-based system and are used to being recognized for hard work and achievement. So a little overt recognition will go a long way. Justyna Czubak, author of *“Millennial” Learning: On Demand Strategies for Generation X and Beyond* states: “This is truly the on-demand workforce. They value speed, efficiency, gratification and results... They need a variety of activities and interactions and they need to move at a brisk clip. They want instant feedback and rewards, so be sure to let them apply new knowledge immediately, and let them know how well they've performed.”

7) **Work together.** Millennials love working in teams. Teamwork was an important element to the Millennials’ upbringing. From preschool to MBA courses, Millennials were encouraged to work in groups and as a result, they have developed strong team building skills and peer bonds. They prefer groups to individual endeavors. As they enter the workforce, one of their greatest strengths is the ability to collaborate and generate a host of new, creative ideas. So, mix them in with your more seasoned staff—you will likely experience a whole new energy.

6) **Listen to them.** Millennials have grown up with loving, attentive parents who value their opinions and give them a voice. As a result, they have been encouraged to think differently and bring confidence and a fresh perspective to the workplace. Andrew J. Chernin author of *Managing and Motivating Millennial Generation Talent* says: “I honestly believe these young 21st century employees can take us beyond the deficiencies in our industrial age carrot-and-stick workplace practices. Leaders can help by listening more

carefully to the values and convictions that motivate their complaints. But more importantly, leaders must find ways to show a lot more faith and trust in this next generation of extremely smart, highly-skilled, thoughtful and kind-hearted young working men and women.”

5) **Life/Work balance.** To Millennials, work is only one part of a well-rounded life. Having the label of the busiest generation ever, they play sports, volunteer in the community, participate in clubs and don't let work take priority over those things. They have seen generations before make significant family and life sacrifices for work and don't want that for themselves. They will put in a 60-hour work week to get the job done, but not every week. Sarah Chuchman, head of diversity at PricewaterhouseCoopers states: “We firmly believe that promoting work-life balance is a ‘business critical’ issue and not simply the right thing to do. Profitable growth and sustainable business depends on attracting and retaining top talent and we know, from our own research and experience, that work-life policies are an essential ingredient of successful recruitment and retention strategies.”

4) **Make use of technology.** Millennials have grown up with laptops, mobile phones, Xbox and iPods. They created an entire language for texting. They are incredibly tech-savvy and consider communication through those enablers the norm. “They'll program your iPhone for you ... they've never lived without the Internet and are quick to adapt to new technology,” says Stacey Woelfel, author of *The Millennials*. An employer that allows employees to leverage technology and provides flexibility via the option to work remotely, flex time or condensed work weeks will have a greater likelihood of retaining Millennials.

3) **Keep them challenged.** Millennials have grown up participating in multiple sports teams, student activities and social clubs. In her article, “Managing Millennials,” Susan M. Heathfield says: “Millennial employees are up for a challenge and change. Boring is bad. They seek ever-changing tasks within their work. What's happening next is their mantra. Don't bore them, ignore them or trivialize their contribution.” Millennials like constant stimulation, new projects and learning opportunities. They lose interest if they feel their work is falling into a routine. Millennials don't complain about challenges, they seek them.

2) **Remember the golden rule.** Treat others as you want to be treated. Respect is a two-way street, and Millennials will contribute more time and effort when they feel they are respected by managers and colleagues. Even though they have not been in the work force as long, they want their results to be appreciated and ideas valued ... they want a voice.

1) **Have fun.** Millennials believe that life is too short to take too much too seriously. Ms. Heathfield continues: “Provide a fun, employee-centered workplace. Millennials want to enjoy their work. They want to enjoy their workplace. They want to make friends in their workplace. Worry if your millennial employees aren't laughing, going out with workplace friends for lunch, and helping plan the next company event or committee.” Millennials want to take one day at a time and make the most of it.

We don't pretend to have all the answers, but in our experiences as Millennials and as executive search consultants, we've discovered many consistencies when it comes to our generation's motivators. Increased responsibility, growth and development, recognition for achievement, and balance. It's not that much different than anyone else. What *is* different is how we process and prioritize, and any company leadership with this level of awareness will succeed in retaining –and capitalizing on—this highly effective workforce.

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