We are IntechOpen,
the world's leading publisher of
Open Access books
Built by scientists, for scientists

6,900
Open access books available

186,000
International authors and editors

200M
Downloads

154
Countries delivered to

Our authors are among the

TOP 1%
most cited scientists

12.2%
Contributors from top 500 universities

Selection of our books indexed in the Book Citation Index
in Web of Science™ Core Collection (BKCI)

Interested in publishing with us?
Contact book.department@intechopen.com

Numbers displayed above are based on latest data collected.
For more information visit www.intechopen.com

Chapter

Maintaining Positive Employee Relations: Does It Apply to Millennials?

Josiane Fahed-Sreih

Abstract

Recruitment, selection, employee appraisal, performance management, compensation, training, and development are all human resource functions that experts are always studying and are considered at the heart of human resource management; however, employees expect more than that. They expect to have a safe work environment, they expect to be treated fairly, and they expect to grow and be recognized in their organizations. Anyone suffering from unfair treatment at work knows how demoralizing this can be and how this can poison trust and reduce employee morale and negatively impact employee relations and performance. When an abusive behavior is observed, this would trigger adverse reactions in addition to further unethical behavior, even if the abusive behavior is hitting a co-worker not the employee himself. When management and employees report a fair treatment, this means that employees are treated with respect and fairly and have demonstrated concrete actions towards fairness and respect. This chapter will highlight the millennials' behavior as related to HR and will identify how the company can keep a positive environment and positive employee relations yet better productivity in the presence of millennials.

Keywords: positive employee relations, human resource development, millennials at the workplace, generation Y, motivation, employee attitude

1. Introduction

Millennials are also referred to as generation Y. They are born between 1980 and 2000 (or 1979 & 1994). They represent a sizable population cohort; they are the first generation to have been born into households with computers and to have grown up surrounded by digital media. They are heavy media consumers, creators of personal content on the web, and always described as the "look at me" generation. Needless to say that they are better educated. Since baby boomers are gradually phasing out of the current workforce, millennials are replacing them in order for businesses to continue operating [1, 2].

For this reason, it is important to understand the characteristics of this generation as well as what satisfies it on the job and what bothers it. For example, a study conducted on 148 millennials claimed that males are more satisfied on the job than are females, while females are more committed to the organization than males are [3]. Moreover, millennials who proceed to get a graduate degree are found to be more loyal to the company than those who did not earn a graduate degree [2] (**Table 1**).

Traditionalists (1925–1945)	Baby boomers (1946–1964)	Gen Xers (1965–1980)	Millennials (1981–2000)
• Hardworking	• Hardworking	• Entrepreneurial	• Tech savvy
• Respectful	• Idealistic	• Flexible	• Appreciative of diversity
• Value loyalty	• Committed to harmony	• Self-reliant	• Skilled in multitasking
• Conformers who resist to change	• Self-centered with a sense of entitlement	• Comfortable with technology	• Very short attention spans
• Disciplined and pragmatic	• Workaholics	• Lazy	• Not loyal to organization
• Work and family lives never coincide	• Self-motivated	• Skeptical and cynical	• Demand immediate feedback and recognition
• Dress formally	• Do not appreciate feedback • Dress Formally	• Question authority figures • Desire work-life balance and flexible schedule	• Integrates technology in the workplace • Expect to have many employers and multiple careers • Work dress is whatever feels comfortable • Lack basic literacy fundamentals

Table 1.
Differences between generations (Positive and negative traits).

2. How are millennials influencing organizations?

Millennials are influencing the organization with their individualistic traits. They have a positive self-esteem and assertiveness. They also have negative narcissism. For millennials, these increased self-esteem and assertiveness support their belief in the right of individuals to succeed and contribute in the workplace regardless of their background (e.g., the number of years they have spent performing a certain job) and in their right to be treated as an individual entity on the job and not as a part of a larger group. Nevertheless, these characteristics might also be the reason behind their quick exasperation and lack of determination. When independence begins to influence the degree of an individual's narcissistic traits, this could lead the individual to feel entitled, thus fueling their incessant need to gain instant recognition and attention.

Millennials are also risk averse and as such have difficulty dealing with ambiguity and nuance; they often require a clear path to success with clearly defined rubrics and well-defined expectations and constant feedback from their supervisors. According to [4, 5], there are several factors that influence millennials on the job, which in turn drive millennials to influence the organization. Such factors could be the social identities of the employees, which affect the organization in different ways depending on the way individuals understand and comprehend these identities [5, 6].

Millennials and older generation of workers have differences in values which is affecting millennials' acceptance. When millennials communicate and act according to their backgrounds and values, others' assessments of them may reflect expectancy violations. Only when the new member is deemed valuable to the workgroup and organization do others reciprocate the relationship with commitment. Coworkers begin to ask for the new member's opinions, delegate significant tasks to the new member, and develop meaningful working relationships with the new member.

Boomers	Millennials
Career is an essential component of their identities	Building a career is not a primary motivator
Sacrificed on behalf of the firm	Work is to support the lifestyle they desire
Wait their turn for promotion	
Resistance and lack of commitment perception	**Interest in flexible career paths that will allow them to balance play with work**

Table 2.
Differences between boomers and millennials.

Senior workers' believe that millennial newcomers should have to "pay their dues" as they did when they were young workers.

But boomers are different than millennials; the table shows the difference between those generations (**Table 2**).

3. Millennials preference for smaller organizations

Millennials strongly prefer smaller establishments. Millennials seem to be rejecting the luxury offerings of large establishments, seeing instead the bureaucratic and impersonal environment as unappealing. Regardless of establishment size, co-worker support is a critical part of the work environment for millennials.

3.1 The relationship of millennials to technology

According to Pew survey, 75% of millennials are members of an online social network. 62% of millennials, more than any other group, connect to the Internet using a laptop or handheld device. 83% keep their cell phones next to them 24 h a day; they are always in touch if they need or want to be.

Millennials' comfort with new media technologies suggests that they bring to the workplace potentially beneficial characteristics related to the use of communication and information technologies (CITs), such as the Web and instant messaging.

Moreover, millennials are of the generation best known for its technological capabilities [7, 8]. They are able to use several technological devices simultaneously and multitask efficiently. Millennials are also known as the .com generation, which explains why they are so tech savvy and efficient when using technological tools [9].

3.2 Millennials' bad habits

Millennials have a tendency to behave in a bad manner in organizations, they always make demands instead of requests, they are over confident, and have a tendency to talk instead of listen, and they prefer the text based communication to the face-to-face communication. They are multitasking, knowing they are always plugged in, and for them assuming a certain behavior or action is always okay.

3.3 What satisfies the millennials in their job?

According to one Pew study (2007), 64% of millennials say that getting rich is the most important goal in life for their generation, and another 17% cite it as their generation's second most important goal. They actively seek leadership opportunities where they can communicate altruistic values as they become leaders.

Millennials' parents were extremely concerned with their children's image and also valued their children's opinions as knowledgeable consumers, even involving them in grown-up purchases (from cars to family vacations).

Millennials have high expectations on personal achievement. They expect to find work that is well paying and meaningful, and even to become famous, according to the popular literature.

Millennials do not see money as their only source of happiness. Like generation X workers, they feel rewarded by work arrangements that offer them more flexibility and new technology. They want to make a difference in the world. If the right job is not available, many are volunteering for organizations such as the Peace Corps or AmeriCorps. Some millennials seem to be satisfied by volunteering or even working in jobs that do not have a high salary or wage, so long that they are able to maintain their living standards, by living with their guardians or parents or by being dependent on their parents to cover for their necessities.

4. Relationship of millennials to their supervisors

Millennials view strong relationships with supervisors to be foundational for negotiating their roles initially, as well as for their long-term satisfaction in the organization.

For millennials to achieve higher job satisfaction, an open communication environment is favored.

Millennials would share information, convey bad news, evaluate job performance regularly, create a supportive climate, solicit input, and make appropriate disclosures.

Millennials are unlikely to accept an organizational policy that information is communicated on a "need-to know basis." Millennial employees disagree with their supervisors when it comes to the communication of information. While supervisors might refer to tell employees only the information they feel employees must know in order to complete a task, millennial employees on the other hand prefer to be included in the decision-making process or at least fully informed of how the process occurred. Furthermore, supervisors tend to feel more comfortable discussing information with other supervisors than with their immediate subordinates. In addition, supervisors usually also stress on giving their subordinates instructions that relate to the task without focusing much on the sociological and emotional aspect of communicating the information.

In addition, according to [10, 11], challenges might arise in the organization due to differences between generations or cohorts, and differences in the ways these generations prefer to be managed. If these preferences are not given the right amount of attention, they might grow to become large enough to be able to hinder organizational success. Furthermore, one of the leading reasons that drive employees to quit an organization is the poor management of the supervisor or the supervisor's management that is not compatible with the millennial employees [12].

Moreover, Ref. [13] states that supervisors belonging to the baby boomers and generation X generations need to take into consideration the differences between them and employees belonging to the millennials' generation. Moreover, they should actively attempt to create an environment that fits millennials, challenges them, and motivates them in order to produce the best quality of work and the best results [13].

5. Managing millennials

The way to manage millennials should be different from managing older generations, for that to succeed, managers should:

1. Make teamwork part of the company structure—Everyone working together with defined roles.

2. Take advantage of their electronic literacy—Experience and knowledge can help expand communication both internally and externally for your firm.

3. Embrace diversity and flexibility—Millennials are willing to stick with companies that have diverse management teams and flexible work environments.

4. Focus on results—Relax the rules to have millennials as hard workers who get results

5. Allow telecommuting or working remotely—To have more success attracting and retaining millennials.

According to [14], millennials are primarily looking for six things on the job from their supervisors. First, they work better with leaders not supervisors. Second, they want to be challenged to do better. Third, they appreciate being able to work in groups. Fourth, they want to enjoy the work they are doing. Fifth, they want to be respected, and finally, sixth, they want to have flexible options [15].

6. Why are millennials leaving?

57% of millennial workers say it is not very likely or not likely at all that they will stay with their current employers for the remainder of their working life. 62% of generation X workers will never leave their current employer. 84% of baby boomers expect to remain with their current employer for the rest of their working lives.

Based on this information, it is crucial for employers to understand what motivates the millennial generation if they hope to retain these valuable employees.

Baby boomers often advise millennials to persist and be patient—the rewards for their efforts, money, status, and respect will come. However, given the individualistic characteristics of millennials, such as their self-esteem, their sureness, and their self-absorption, together with their aversion towards risk and their incapability of managing vagueness, millennials may not be ready to deal with the reality of the workplace and its severity in certain cases.

The capabilities that enabled generations such as baby boomers to endure and prosper at work, such as being able to negotiate their part, being able to adapt to circumstances that are not ideal, and being able to persist in the face of the uncertain tests which they might encounter, are not the forte of the next generations such as the millennials, which might explain their readiness to leave a job at any time and quit.

Furthermore, Ref. [16] claims that there are different reasons as to why employees leave their job, and these reasons vary based on the country. In the United States, the five most common reasons for a millennial to quit his/her job are negligible pay increases, lack of opportunities to advance, too much overtime required, no room for teamwork, and an inflexible supervisor [16].

7. How to retain millennials?

Given the costs of turnover, employers have gone to great and costly lengths to attract and retain the millennials. To do so, businesses practices and industry standards must be examined. Giving millennials a bigger paycheck, or even a higher position with an additional increase in pay, may be the key to attract them; however, considering pay is of lesser importance to them with respect to other factors, using it as an incentive might not be sufficient to retain them.

Since having flexible working hours, known as flextime, as well as time for leisure, such as paid vacations or paid days off, are known to be important incentives for millennials, many employers are offering these options in hopes of appealing to millennials and retaining them. Corporate surveys, such as the one conducted by Deloitte in 2009, as well as academic studies, such as the one conducted by [17], show that millennials greatly appreciate having the freedom to complete their tasks in whichever manner they desire, so long as the job is done.

There is no one reason for millennials to leave a job. When millennials perceive a certain unfairness, whether it is because of practices enforced by the employer, or standards brought about at the industry level, or common practices derived from the labor market, they are most likely to regard the situation as unreasonable and unsurmountable, which would cause them to quit. Through such behaviors, millennials seem to be sending a message that they do not accept the norms that were set by the preceding generations, specifically the ones agreed upon by the baby boomers, relating to considering the extended hours of work as a necessity in order to advance in one's career and show commitment to one's organization.

Considering how much millennials value the equilibrium between the time they spend at work and the time they spend doing leisurely activities more than the previous generations did, disturbances that are the result of asymmetrical schedules annoy millennials because they render them unable to control these disruptions or maneuver around them, meaning that the employee will be more likely to indulge in absenteeism or behaviors that are counterproductive. The supervisor or manager will in turn notice this.

Moreover, Ref. [18] claims that knowing or understanding the needs and wants of employees helps in retaining them. He mentions several ways that are effective in order to retain millennials in an organization, such as providing them with more benefits and a flexible schedule, an option to choose, better resources, and opportunities for training and development [19].

8. How to fix the workplace for millennials?

Category	How to handle this	Reason
Environment of the work	Give employees a schedule that is flexible and a comfortable workplace. Generate occasions to interact socially, such as get-togethers and outdoor activities	Millennials give friendships and standard of living greater value than work. They value marriage, children, and family above work
Opportunities to learn and benefit from training	Reimburse employees on tuition fees as well as train them	Baby boomer parents brought up their children to believe that they key to success is a good education
Recruitment	Highlight the methods in which the organization gives back to society	A big percentage of millennials claim that contributing to society is one of their top priorities

The onboarding process	Expose employees to multiple business units and provide them with intranet means that they could pace to their own comfort to help them establish relations with other workers	Millennials want connections, checkpoints, and mentoring
Ethics concerning work	Millennials only consider their job done when they have tackled it in the best and most rapid way. This way they can optimize on their time and effort	"…when we (Baby Boomers) were younger, you had a piano teacher who expected you to practice your piano and work hard at it, and the parents expected it. Now, parents say, Have fun, learn the piano, and practice a little bit," says WSJ columnist, Jeffrey Zaslow. Millennials were not brought up to think of the next step, their main focus was always on the current task
Being motivated	Reward employees with time off that is considered paid	Millennials view their jobs as "something to do between the weekends"
Relationships with the upper managers	Win the employee over. However, be careful while doing that as the line between "boss as advocate" and "boss as friend" is thin	Millennials primarily remain in their job due to their loyalty towards their boss or supervisor. However, discontent with their employer or manager is also the number one reason why they leave. Millennials appreciate a close relationship with a caring supervisor
Management	Inform them of the required results and let them figure out the means to achieve them. This might be their chance to come up with a more efficient process. To extract their best performance, link it to company goals and objectives, as well as hold them responsible for their mistakes and appreciate their achievement. Imposing on them one way to do things may drive them to leave	Millennials were raised and taught how to solve their problems on their own, with technology at their side, linking them to the rest of the world. For this reason, they do not cope well when given orders and hate being told what to do without explanations of the purpose behind the task. Despite being impatient, they have a thirst for learning and acquiring new skills. Millennials consider themselves able to go with the best offer on the table. Furthermore, the support of their parents allows them the luxury of only choosing what they please in terms of job acceptance
Work assignment	Provide millennials with several things to do as well as the potential to interact with the clients. Furthermore including them in projects where they can interact with upper level employees	They are great multitaskers with 10 times the speed and technical knowledge of their older siblings. Although they have their own way of thinking, they do like to work as part of a team. They also value making an impact and challenging the norms
Feedback on performance	Coaching sessions may be useful opportunities where millennials get to discuss their career paths. Moreover, regular evaluations and revisions will also shorten the feedback loop and provide employees with performance evaluations	Millennial employees feel that they earn and deserve a promotion quickly, and their performance evaluations and constant feedback reinforce this notion
Reducing turnover	Create career paths with a timeframe short enough for them to envision. Reward small successes along the way	They set short-term goals and are resistant to paying their dues

It is becoming more and more difficult to satisfy, motivate, and retain millennials in the workplace. In addition to the explained behavior of millennials that is different from boomers, some employees are subject to bullying and victimization, which makes some employees singled out and mistreated. This is a serious problem.

For example, one survey of 1000 employees in the United States concluded that about 455 said that they had worked for abusive bosses. The US government said most would agree that bullying involves three things:

1. **Imbalance of power**. This includes people who use bullying to control or harm others, while those who are bullied will have a hard time accepting others and defending themselves.

2. **The intent to cause harm**. Those who are bullying are not doing it accidentally; they intend to harm others.

3. **The effect of repetition.** Those who engage in bullying intend to harm and hence keep on repeating their behavior over and over again, and this bullying can take many forms:

    a. **It could be social:** Victimizing the person by spreading rumors, trying to leave people out on purpose, trying to break out friendships

    b. **It could be verbal:** Through teasing and name-calling

    c. **It could be physical**: Through hitting, punching, or shoving

    d. **It could be cyberbullying:** Through using the Internet or using mobile phones or other digital technologies to harm others. Through the social media

There are more people who seem to be more harmed by bullying and are more likely to be the victims. Those who are submissive victims are more anxious, cautious, quiet, and sensitive. And there are more proactive victims who show aggressiveness in behavior and others who are victims with low self-determination who leave it to others to make decisions for them. High performers in organizations can create more envious people around them and suffer from victimization. Building teams and creating cohesiveness within the team through training and social gatherings and friendly interteam competition can help reduce the envy and sometimes heal off such envy and reduce victimization.

Beyond fairness, maintaining positive employee relations requires the establishment of communication programs, which would allow management to recognize the problems, allow employees to voice their concerns, and express their opinions and related issues.

Employees always feel better when the organization has communication programs put in place. Many employers though use communication programs to bolster their employee relations efforts. On the assumptions that employees would feel better when they are in the knows, they would appreciate their employers much better when kept in the loop. Encouraging an open door policy and using the webpage and the Internet to keep employees knowledgeable about the company policies and procedures and about the events taking place in the company are all positive to keep employees aware of what is going on. Keeping employees informed boosts the communication programs and improve communication in the company.

The communication from bottom up is also very healthy in order to keep management knowledgeable about what is happening in the company and what is bothering employees. In order to maintain positive employee relations and in order to short-circuit inequitable treatment, companies are using communication programs such as suggestion boxes to allow employees to voice their opinions, or they host employees to focus groups and get their feedback. They are also connecting to employees via messaging or creating web-based hot lines. Exit interviews are also a way to allow employees to voice their honest opinion while providing another opportunity for employees to sample the quality of their employee relations with their supervisors as well as their peers and to test the internal environment of the organization. Managers might also use, in addition to open doors policies, "management walking around" to informally get employees feedback on how are things going.

Similarly, employers use climate surveys and use attitude and morale surveys to support employee relation efforts. They use the surveys to measure the employees' attitude towards a variety of organizational issues, such as safety, role clarity, leadership, fairness, pay, and whether they can simply improve employee relations. So conducting climate surveys helps management identify the psychological environment, in terms of things like concerns for employee well-being, supervisory behavior, flexibility, appreciation, ethics, empowerment, political behaviors, and rewards.

Many employers use online surveys such as "know your company" survey, in order to get results whether employees are proud to work in their companies, or surveys to assess how satisfied they are with their companies, with their jobs and with their supervisors, and whether the job leads to recognition and respect. Google for instance conducts a "Googlegeist" survey which focuses on the willingness to leave the company.

Providing opportunities for a two-way communication improves employee relations, especially employee recognition and award programs help achieve satisfaction. Knowing that all those survey and programs need planning, 75% of companies have employee recognition program, and 5% are planning to have them and to implement them soon. When planning for such programs, one needs to develop the adequate criteria in order to motivate employees to work towards them and in order to have a rational process for actually rewarding employees and awarding recognition awards.

Another way to encourage involvement for millennials in the workplace is to use social media and photo sharing in order to encourage involvement. One survey found that just over half employers use social media tools to communicate with employees and to help develop a sense of community. In addition with millennials, one can use problem-solving teams and quality circles and later engage employees in self-managed teams. Another way to improve employee relations for millennials is to use suggestion systems, which can produce significant savings.

In conclusion, companies should develop well-planned communication programs and can make use of social media in order to engage their millennials in the work place.

Author details

Josiane Fahed-Sreih
Department of Management Studies, Institute of Family and Entrepreneurial
Business, Lebanese American University, Byblos, Lebanon

*Address all correspondence to: jsreih@lau.edu.lb

IntechOpen

References

[1] Azalea A, Omar F, Mastor K. The role of individual differences in job satisfaction among Indonesians and Malaysians. European Journal of Social Sciences. 2009;**10**(4):496-511

[2] Kaifi BA, Nafei WA, Khanfar NM, Kaifi MM. A multi-generational workforce: Managing and understanding millennials. International Journal of Business and Management. 2012;**7**(24):88

[3] Bott J, Faulk D, Guntupalli A, Devaraj S, Holmes M. An examination of generational differences and media exposure. The Journal of Applied Management and Entrepreneurship. 2011;**16**(4):78-100

[4] Arsenault PM. Validating generational differences. Leadership and Organization Development Journal. 2004;**25**(1/2):124-141

[5] Campione WA. The influence of supervisor race, gender, age, and cohort on millennials' job satisfaction. Journal of Business Diversity. 2014;**14**(1)

[6] Bodenhausen GB. Diversity in the person, diversity in the group: Challenges of identity complexity for social perception and social interaction. European Journal of Social Psychology. 2010;**40**:1-16

[7] Eastman JK, Iyer R, Liao-Troth S, Williams DF, Griffin M. The role of involvement on millennials' mobile technology behaviors: The moderating impact of status consumption, innovation, and opinion leadership. Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice. 2014;**22**(4):455-470

[8] Gibson LA, Sodeman WA. Millennials and technology: Addressing the communication gap in education and practice. Organization Development Journal. 2014;**32**(4):63-75

[9] Farrell L, Hurt AC. Training the millennial generation: Implications for organizational climate. E Journal of Organizational Learning & Leadership. 2014;**12**(1)

[10] Alexander KM. Generation Y knowledge workers' experience of work motivation: A grounded theory study [Doctoral dissertation]. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Capella University; 2014

[11] Curtis BJ. Supervisor Behavior: Its Role in the Working Relationship and Retention of Millennial Nurses. 2015

[12] Girard MJ, Lapides J, Roe CM. The Fifth Discipline: A Systems Learning Model for Building High-Performing Learning Organizations. Handbook of Human Performance Technology: Principles, Practices and Potential. 2006. pp. 592-618

[13] Bartz D, Thompson K, Rice P. Maximizing the human capital of millennials through supervisors using performance management. International Journal of Management, Business, and Administration. 2017;**20**(1):1-9

[14] Raines C. Managing Millennials. Connecting Generations: The Sourcebook, 16. 2002

[15] Gupta P, Goyal P. Gen Y attributes—Antecedents to teaching pedagogy. Vision. 2018;**22**(1):78-87

[16] Goforth A. Why millennials quit their jobs. Benefits Selling. Breaking News. 2015

[17] Twenge JM. A review of the empirical evidence on generational differences in work attitudes. Journal of Business and Psychology. 2010;**25**(2):201-210

[18] Tulgan B. How to retain millennials. Accounting Today. 2016;**30**(5):37

[19] Jayasundera JMA, Jayakody JASK, Jayawardana AKL. Perceived organizational support and turnover intention of Generation Y employees: The role of leader-member exchange. Sri Lankan Journal of Management. 2016;**21**(2):1-35