Rage against the Machine

The Rise of the Millennials

Presented to: Michael Moore, Professor
TWC521 Principles of Writing with Technology

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May 4, 2007

Introduction

Is it fair to place an entire group of millions of people into a category and give them a label that applies to the entire group? Obviously, not everyone in a particular group will act exactly the same; however, members of a generation tend to share a variety of characteristics with their counterparts.

There are currently four generations of employees in the workplace: the Traditionalists, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials. Each of these groups has its own general set of values, attitudes, and behaviors and changes have occurred as each of the first three groups gained prevalence in the workplace. The Millennials, however, are different from their predecessors in many unique ways. For example, the impact of the digital age on the Millennials makes them vastly different from any generation before them. Merrill states that, "They were shaped by the growth and demise of the dot com era, the Columbine High School shootings, overly involved parents, and the speed of change." (2004, para. 8)

This paper offers suggestions for employers to communicate with, train, motivate, and manage the Millennials as their presence becomes more prevalent in the workforce.

Who are the Millennials?

Several definitions exist for the time period that represents the Millennials. For purposes of this paper, they are the group of Americans who were born between the years of 1980 and 2001.

This group is known by several names, although many people refer to them as Generation Y because they follow Generation X. However, Chester (2002) refers to them as Generation Why because, "They are a generation that demands to know why." (p. 4) The group will eventually do what is asked of them, they just want to know "why" they are doing it. According to Chester (2002), they are constantly questioning:

> Why should I listen to you? Why should I go to school, study hard, and get a job? Why should I work hard and keep my nose to the grindstone for a promise that it *might* pay off down the line? (p. 4)

The Millennials' demand for answers may help make them perceptive and intelligent, but it also makes it difficult for members of other generations to understand them. In addition, it is challenging for managers to communicate with the Millennials.

To better understand the Millennials, it is helpful to identify specific characteristics that may appear in varying degrees in the members of the generation.

Those born between 1980 and 2001 are known by many different names.

WHO ARE THEY?

- Echo Boomers
- Generation Next
- Generation Y
- Google Generation
- iGeneration
- Net Generation
- Nexters
- Millennials
- MyPod Generation
- MySpace Generation

(Wikipedia, 2007)

Characteristics of the Millennials

Before attempting to understand and communicate with the Millennials, it is important to understand some of their characteristics.

- Positive characteristics: adaptable, innovative, efficient, resilient, tolerant, and committed. (Chester, 2002, p. 23)

- Negative characteristics: impatient, desensitized, disengaged, skeptical, disrespectful, and bluntly expressive. (Chester, 2002, p. 21)

Chester (2002) found that:

> Psychologists believe that our core values are programmed into us during our first fifteen or sixteen years of life through major life-shaping influences: Parents/Family, Schools/Education, Religion/Morality, Friends/Peers, and the Media/Culture. (p. 12)

Regardless of their racial, ethnic, and economic differences, members of all generations share whatever was going on at the time: news events, music, national catastrophes, heroes, and heroic efforts. (Zemke, Raines, Filipczak, 2000, p. 17)

A generation is defined by common tastes, attitudes, and experiences. A generation's defining moments are those that capture the attention and emotions of thousands or millions of individuals at a formative stage in their lives. Generations share a place in history and have events, images, and experiences in common, so they develop their own unique personalities. (Zemke et al, 2000, p. 16) In fact, Merrill (2004) believes that if one were to, "Combine a major event with dramatic shifts in the economy and national security, and younger children begin to have a different life experience from those just ahead of them." (The New Global Citizens, para. 3)

The Millennials have never known a world without cell phones, pagers, fax machines, voicemail, ATMs, VCRs, PCs, CDs, MTV, CNN, or overnight package delivery. They are used to an endless stream of visual, auditory, and sensory stimulation. They were raised in a world where one need not wait for anything: the Internet, e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, and DVDs allow quick access to information. Unfortunately, they have also never known a world without AIDS, crack, or terrorist attacks, or a world where kids don't shoot and kill other kids. (Chester, 2002, p. 13)

The Millennials' parents groomed them to become the multitaskers that they are. They have been shuttled from karate class to soccer practice to baseball practice. They grew up at a time when every child on the team got to play, regardless of abilities, and everyone received a trophy at the end of the season. This group grew up being told they are special and that they can do anything they want. This has helped perpetuate a sense of entitlement among the Millennials

Every generation is defined by common tastes, attitudes, and experiences.

DEFINING EVENTS OF THE MILLENNIALS

- Challenger explosion
- Fall of Berlin Wall
- Desert Storm
- OJ Simpson trial
- Clinton scandals
- Oklahoma City bombing
- Death of Princess Diana
- Columbine School shootings
- 9/11 Hijackings

(Wikipedia, 2007 and Zemke et al, 2000, p. 128)

Any Bad News?

What affect does it have on a generation when they observe such events as the recent Virginia Tech shooter and the 9/11 hijackers?

According to a Millennium Generation study conducted by Northwestern Mutual of college seniors in 2001, this group was full of optimism and a belief in a better world. As college seniors, they were ready to face the world, extremely confident and career-minded. (The Third Study, 2001, para. 2, 6) In fact, immediately after 9/11, their confidence and optimism hardly decreased.

But, only a little more than a year out of school, the millennium's first college graduates reported that the impact of the 9/11 terrorist attacks prompted changes to their hopes and aspirations. Another study by Northwestern Mutual, conducted in July 2002, revealed that, while they were still optimistic:

- 70% now said that the attacks had a major impact on the economy compared with just over half (58%) in October 2001.

- 21% (vs. 16% in October 2001) said the attacks had a major impact on their job security.

- 26% (vs. 17%) said the attacks had a major impact on their financial future. (The Fourth Study, 2002, para. 2-3)

But it's not all bad news. Merrill (2004) stated that because they were exposed to far more, at an earlier age, than previous generations, the Millennials, "are resilient, slow to be shocked, quick reacting, and willing to take risks. (The New Global Citizens, para. 19)

Why is this Important Now?

The generations that make up the current workplace are characterized by their demographics, their early life experiences, the headlines that defined their times, their heroes, music, and sociology. (Zemke et al, 2000, p. 17)

The four generations of today's workforce are discussed in Table 1. The Millennials are the fastest-growing segment of the workforce.

Generation	Years Born	Characteristics
Veterans / Traditionalists	1922-1945	American values: civic pride, loyalty, respect for authority, and apple pie
Baby Boomers	1946-1964	Participation and spirit in the workplace. The civil rights, empowerment, and diversity generation.
Generation X	1965-1979	Discouraged and disheartened. Work to live, not live to work. Technologically adept, clever, resourceful.
Millennials	1980-2001	New-fangled version of the civic-minded Veterans. Confident, achievement-oriented, optimistic.

Table 1 - Generations in Current Workplace (Zemke et al, 2000, p. 18-25)

Generational differences may be cause for conflict in the workplace.

Each of these generations has distinctive styles, unique work ethics, different perspectives on work, and preferred ways of managing and being managed. According to Tinnish (2007), possible conflict may result in the workplace because of:

- Communication style and expectations
- Work styles
- Attitudes about work and life
- Comfort with technology
- Views regarding loyalty and authority
- Acceptance of change (p. 5)

A survey by Lee Hecht Harrison indicated that more than 70% of older employees are dismissive of younger workers' abilities and nearly 50% of younger employees are dismissive of the older workers' abilities. (Armour, 2005, para. 38) While Millennials are slow to give respect, they expect respect automatically. (Merrill, 2004, para. 19)

Understanding generational differences is critical to making those differences work for the organization and not against it. (Zemke et al, 2000, p. 17) It is not possible to get the Millennials' best if they do not feel that they are a welcome and necessary part of the team.

Communicating with the Millennials

According to research conducted by Obarski (2007), 18-26 year-olds:

- Spend 28 percent more time online than 27-40 year-olds

- Read blogs twice as often

- Are 50 percent more likely to instant message (para. 5)

It is very clear that Millennials are extremely comfortable with all forms of technology. In fact, no other group is more skillful at using multiple technologies like the Millennials. They instant message, text message, blog, chat on MySpace, and view videos on YouTube. Obarski (2007) believes that video e-mail will be the next big technological area to become popular with this group. (para. 5)

Northwestern Mutual's survey of two thousand college students showed that the Millennials were practically 100-percent-connected to the Internet. These students indicated that the Internet was:

- Their primary news source - Four out of five used computers instead of radio or TV to get their news and information.

- How they corresponded - Nine out of 10 sent and received e-mails frequently.

- How they looked for jobs - More than half had visited Web sites like monster.com. (The Second Study, 2001, para. 2, 3)

In the workplace, it is acceptable and almost expected that employers communicate with Millennial employees via the Internet. Using the Web will help satisfy the Millennials' need for immediate information. However, get to the point quickly; they will only wait three seconds for an Internet page to download before they click away. In addition, they process Web site information five times faster than older generations. (Obarski, 2007, para. 5)

When communicating in person, be brief and direct with the Millennials. They have grown up getting constant feedback and recognition from teachers, parents, and coaches and can feel resentful or feel lost if communication from bosses is not more regular.

Make sure you indicate what you require of them as employees. Millennials expect to be told how they're doing. The Millennials like:

- Ongoing, immediate feedback

- Clearly defined tasks and expectations

- Technology

- Collaboration and teamwork

- Being a respected equal

- Asking questions and challenging assumptions (Merrill, The New Global Citizens, para. 42)

"Give us what we want, when we want it, in a quick, easy format." ~ Millennials

Training the Millennials

To meet the training needs of the generations currently in the workforce, organizations need to provide multiple options for training and communication. For example:

- A Baby Boomer may prefer to receive training in a traditional classroom with face-to-face instruction.

- A member of Generation X may desire to take the training at home over the Internet.

- A Millennial may prefer to download a podcast to her MP3 player (and be perfectly comfortable doing so) and listen to it while driving to and from work (Craft, Kerschenbaum, and Ware, 2007, p. 59)

There will always be a need for face-to-face instruction in a traditional classroom, but it should not be the *only* form of training that a Millennial receives. Organizations must become extremely flexible when providing training for this generation of workers, who will want more options for user location, work platform, and business hours. (Craft et al, 2007, p. 58)

The minds of previous generations were taught to operate like a book or a VCR: access information in a sequential order from left to right, from top to bottom, basically, from beginning to end. The Millennial mind works like a DVD player: access and process information sequentially, in reverse, or in random order. (Chester, 2002, p. 16-17)

They desire choices that allow them to access whatever information they want, at any time, and in any order. Their familiarity with technology and their ability to deal with rapid changes gives them an intuitive understanding of the need to learn and adapt continuously. (Craft et al, 2007, Ware p. 59)

Suggestions for Training Millennials

Following are several suggestions for getting the Millennials interested in your training.

Make it Fun

Search for ways to incorporate fun into the learning experience. Use trainers that the Millennials enjoy and respect who can deliver the content in a fun and entertaining way. (Chester, 2002, p. 87)

Learning needs to be hands-on, interactive, collaborative, and fun. The generation responds well to the engaging, competitive nature of games and simulations and is already accustomed to using informal social networking tools such as wikis, blogs, and podcasts. (Craft et al, 2007, p. 59)

Engage Them

Millennials need to be able to ask questions when they come to mind and not hold them until the end of the trainer's lecture. They need to be involved in their own learning and are too multi-sensory to absorb much information from lecture-only-based education. (Chester, 2002, p. 88) They are used to learning in a highly interactive way. In school, they spent a lot of time working on projects in teams. (Zemke et al, 2000, p. 138)

Millennials are more inclined to stay focused on the training when they are being entertained and engaged in the process.

Millennials are most comfortable in a learner-centered environment. Millennials embrace technology and expect training environments that allow them to rely heavily on collaboration with their peers as a form of learning. (Craft et al, 2007, p. 59)

Make it Fresh

Do not use outdated clichés such as, "Think outside the box." Make sure your training programs are up-to-date and interesting. If they do not need to know every little detail about your company in order to do their jobs, just then tell them what they need to know and why they need to know it. They would rather get the history of your company off the company Web site than be forced to sit through a boring orientation. (Chester, 2002, p. 89) Of course, if the orientation is conducted in a fun, interactive way and you explain why they need to know the information, they are much more likely to remain interested.

Keep up the Pace

Check the messages you are sending with your training personnel and training materials to make certain that they do not talk down to the Millennials. Do not develop training materials at the eighth-grade level, as is commonly the case, as this will insult them and cause them to disconnect.

Train a skill and then let them practice it, through simulation or an actual situation. Then train another skill. Do not believe that you have to teach them *everything* before you let them do *anything*. It is better to go too fast and risk confusing them than to go too slowly and risk boring them. Remember, they are not afraid to ask questions. (Chester, 2002, p. 89)

Reward Skill Development

Millennials craze recognition. An effective training program will offer frequent praise. Each time they acquire a new skill or master a concept, recognize them in some way, preferably in front of their coworkers. (Chester, 2002, p. 90) Refer to *What Motivates the Millennials?* on page 10 for additional information.

Orient Before You Train

Teach them the company's mission and values to help them feel as comfortable as quickly as possible (while keeping it fresh, of course). To be connected to the company, they need to know the history, the rules, the people, the language, the culture, as well as the performance expectations placed on them. A well-designed orientation program helps familiarize the Millennials to their new jobs and makes them feel connected to the organization and its people from the start. (Chester, 2002, p. 92)

Explain the Why

Millennials need to know the *why* so they will be interested in knowing the *what*. Nowhere is that more important than in the training stage. Millennials will not follow directions just because they have been asked to do so; they will question the validity of each and every step, each process, and each practice they've been asked to remember. Explain to Millennials how doing something a certain way will affect them in a positive way. Basically, explain the why behind each new concept and explain how it will benefit them. (Chester, 2002, p. 94)

"Effective trainers attach the "why" to each process." ~ Millennials

Use Eye Candy

Create training materials or revamp existing materials to include bright colors, fun fonts, images, cartoons, and pullouts. Use updated names in exercises that Millennials can relate to such as Brandon, Heather, Christopher, and Amber. The best training programs consist of a variety of instructional methodologies such as those listed in Table 2.

Instructional Methodologies	
Colorful manuals and workbooks	Interactive CD-ROMs
Classroom lectures	Audio cassette programs
Professionally produced videos	Live PowerPoint presentations
Web-based training	Wikis
Blogs	Podcasts

Table 2 - Instructional Methodologies (Chester, 2002, p. 97-98)

"Keep us involved by stimulating a variety of our senses." ~ Millennials

According to Pluth (2007, April), if your budget is tight, try printing only the cover of your training guides in color. Also, use colored paper or colored graphics throughout your guide to draw attention to certain pages or sections. If your budget is *really* tight, at a minimum, use color cardstock for your cover page. (p. 7)

To successfully manage this multigenerational workforce, workplace learning and performance professionals will need to provide training and technology that fits both the learning styles and lifestyles of this diverse workforce. (Craft et al, 2007, p. 58)

Changes in Training Development

Organizational training will move toward more of a blended approach as far as methods of communication and delivery technologies. This approach will require members of training teams to assume new roles, design instructional content in new formats, and be more skilled in using the abundance of available new technologies. (Craft et al, 2007, p. 60)

Trainers will eventually spend less classroom time merely providing information and more time facilitating interaction and collaboration. This transition may be challenging for some trainers; therefore, trainers will need organizational support and additional training to better understand their new roles as mentors and coaches. (Craft et al, 2007, p. 60)

The Baby Boomers' preference for classroom training may make them excellent candidates to become master trainers for the organization. By placing experienced employees in this role, organizations can facilitate the much-needed transfer of institutional knowledge and expertise to the Millennials. (Craft et al, 2007, p. 60)

Designers will need to develop training in shorter segments. They will need to understand how to break down information into manageable chunks that learners can quickly download and review. Extensible markup language and learning content management systems will enable organizations to create training content once but deliver it in multiple formats. By combining the content with well-structured delivery architecture and effective search tools, organizations will enable learners to find and download content quickly in the delivery medium of their choice. (Craft et al, 2007, p. 60)

As time goes by, more and more business learners will acquire their skills via the Internet, online, and via CD-ROM. In addition, Millennials are accustomed to using technology such as wikis, blogs, and podcasts, so as those tools become a standard part of training delivery, it will become increasingly important for trainers to also know how to use those tools. (Craft et al, 2007, p. 60)

The Millennials will be the best-educated generation ever, and will probably continue their education well into adulthood to keep up with rapidly changing technology. In addition, they have the ability to use that technology in unforeseen ways. (Zemke et al, 2000, p. 144)

ABOUT THE MILLENNIALS

Ongoing learning: They seek out creative challenges and view colleagues as vast resources from whom to gain knowledge.

(Armour, 2005, para. 6)

What Motivates the Millennials?

Millennials are looking for management to praise them when they meet expectations and to reward them when they exceed normal performance levels. The rewards do not have to be big or expensive. A well-recognized employee is more loyal, creative, and harder working. (Chester, 2002, 148)

Unlike Boomers who tend to put a high priority on career, today's youngest workers want work-life balance and are more interested in making their jobs accommodate their family and personal lives. They want jobs with flexibility, telecommuting options, and the ability to go part time or leave the workforce temporarily when they start having children. (Armour, 2005, para. 16)

A good recruitment technique is to tell Millennials about company benefits such as flexible work schedules, telecommuting, full tuition reimbursement, and an online mentoring tool. Also tell them about such perks as time off given as awards, flexible work schedules, and recognition.

Remember the four P's for recognition:

"We want to work, but we don't want work to be our lives." ~ Millennials

Public

The value of the reward multiplies if you present it to the Millennial in the presence of his peers. If circumstances prevent giving the reward in public then at least ensure that you share the information on the company Web site, in a newsletter, or on a message board.

Types of rewards include personal e-mails or letters of thanks. For example, take photos of your high-achieving Millennials, write letters about the exceptional thing they did, and post these in a high traffic area where lots of people can see it.

Give exceptional performers the chance to appear in one of your print or broadcast ads, or in your annual catalog or seasonal mailer. Do something for them that is outside the boundaries of the workplace. (Chester, 2002, 148)

Punctual

Keep incentives and rewards on hand so you are prepared to give rewards on the spot as they come up. It does not have to be extravagant; keep a basket with small trinkets in it and allow a high achiever to pick items from it. Include things like gift certificates to restaurants, movie theatres, or bookstores; candles, lotions, calling cards, or picture frames. (Chester, 2002, 150)

Personal

Individualize the reward or recognition for each employee. Find out what they like to do outside of work; the extra effort allows you to reward an employee in such a way that it shows that you went out of your way to honor her. A simple, yet required, suggestion is to learn your Millennials' names, how to spell them correctly, and by what nickname they want to be addressed. (Chester, 2002, 149)

To present cash in a creative way, hold a lottery where employees who have received tickets for achieving something great gets to put their name in a bag to try and win the corresponding cash prize. You can also provide reward cards or points that employees can accumulate and trade in for gift certificate, prizes, or paid time off. (Chester, 2002, 159)

Cash is always a good incentive for high achievers, but find creative ways to present it.

Proportionate

The recognition or reward should match the level of performance being recognized. Pre-plan your recognition and reward program to make certain that you have various levels of incentives to reward specific levels of achievement. (Chester, 2002, 150) For example, do not reward someone with $500 for a relatively minor achievement or you will find if difficult to find an appropriate award for a much larger achievement.

Managing the Millennials

The Millennials may be a very demanding workforce because they have a bright, clear picture of the way work ought to be, and they are used to getting what they want. (Zemke et al, 2000, p. 145) Because of this, they may need more supervision and structure than previous generations, (Zemke et al, 2000, p. 146) but are much less likely to respond to the traditional command-and-control type of management that is still popular in much of today's workforce. (Armour, 2005, para. 9)

They've grown up questioning their parents, and now they're questioning their employers. (Armour, 2005, para. 9) They are very independent thinkers and feel very comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions with anyone. (Merrill, 2004, para. 21)

They have lived their lives filled with activities and learned to balance sports, school, jobs, and social time so they are talented time managers and multitaskers. (Merrill, 2004, para. 18) Multitasking is part of their routine so they don't like to stay too long on any one assignment. (Armour, 2005, para. 19) They become restless and bored quickly and are constantly looking for the next level of challenge. (Merrill, 2004, para. 15) At the same time, they strive for maximum results with minimal effort. They are very efficient and do not get caught up in the details. (Merrill, 2004, para. 18)

The Millennials like:

- Exciting, challenging, thrilling experiences

- Opportunities to be innovative and creative

- To be engaged quickly and kept busy

(Merrill, 2004, para. 24)

Millennials do not expect to stay in a job, or even a career, for too long – they've seen the scandals that imploded Enron and Arthur Andersen, and they're skeptical when it comes to such concepts as employee loyalty. (Armour, 2005, para. 17)

According to Zemke et al (2000), there are basic principles for managing Millennials:

- Budget plenty of time for orienting. Create a clear picture of your work environment - what's good about it, what's not, your expectations, and long-term goals. At the same time, learn about each new employee's personal goals and develop a strategy for interweaving those goals with job performance.

- When it comes to opportunities, throw out all preconceived notions about traditional gender roles.

- In areas where you have lots of Millennials, consider expanding the size of your teams, and appointing a strong team leader.

- Grow your training department because Millennials want to continue their education and develop their work skills.

- Establish mentor programs. Many Millennials have likely been part of mentoring programs in school. Consider matching young workers with your most seasoned people with whom they say they resonate. (p. 146-147)

> **ABOUT THE MILLENNIALS**
>
> **High expectations of employers:** They want fair and direct managers who are highly engaged in their professional development.
>
> **Immediate responsibility:** They want to make an important impact on day 1.
>
> **High expectation of self:** They aim to work faster and better than other workers.
>
> **Goal-oriented:** They want small goals with tight deadlines so they can build up ownership of tasks.

(Armour, 2005, para. 6)

Unlike previous generations who have in large part grown accustomed to receiving an annual review, the Millennials have grown up receiving constant feedback and recognition from teachers, parents, and coaches and can resent it or feel lost if communication from bosses is not received regularly. They expect to be told how they're doing and/or have easy access to that information. (Armour, 2005, para. 25)

Raines (2003) suggests these 12 ideas for managing Millennials:

- Arrange space to share ideas.

- Assign group projects evaluated for the group reaching the goal.

- Set up a "reverse mentoring program."

- Establish a community volunteer program.

- Hold "anniversary celebrations" for entry-level employees.

- Develop a one-year plan (goals and expectations) for new hires.

- Issue certifications to employees who complete a set or series of goals.

- During the hiring process, find out their personal goals and incorporate those into the job.

- Encourage Millennials to speak up in meetings.

- Teach managers and supervisors that "paying your dues" is no longer a valid precept.

- Provide extracurricular activities that are family gatherings.

- Encourage Millennials to set up Internet chat rooms for projects. (p. 181)

"Feedback whenever I want it at the push of a button." ~ Millennials

Summary

It is becoming more and more important to understand the characteristics of the Millennials as their presence becomes increasing prevalent in the workplace. This group of educated, expert multitaskers is innovative and adventurous. However, their impatience and tendency to be bluntly expressive may come across as disrespect to older workers. Understanding this generation and their relationships with the other generations currently in the workplace will provide for a much more harmonious environment for all employees.

Be sure to regularly communicate with the Millennials on how they are doing, while allowing them the flexibility to find whatever information they want, when they want it, online. One of the most important requirements is for organizations to be extremely flexible and creative when providing training for this group. The days of "one size fits all" training are quickly fading. Millennials have a desire to learn but also have a need to be entertained and involved.

Allowing some workplace flexibility will help provide some motivation to the Millennials as they desire a balance in their work and home lives. Also, offer praise to and reward the Millennials, whenever it is possible and appropriate. When managing Millennials, provide regular feedback and expect lots of questions. Do not mistake their independence for insubordination. Challenge them while allowing them to work on various assignments.

Most importantly, always explain the *why* to Millennials and explain how a particular situation affects them.

"We are constantly looking for the next level of challenge." ~ Millennials

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