Mind the gap: professional services and the need to embrace Generations Y and Z.
Introduction

Millennials, or Generation Y as they are also known, have been a conundrum for employers for many years, now.

A misunderstood group of individuals, ironically, their reputation has been dragged through traditional and social media like a cruel game of Chinese whispers; collecting a plethora of pejorative adjectives that warp and twist their identity, whilst amplifying this mythology across on and offline channels.

There has been a failure from both sides; from the millennials, perhaps, to compromise and communicate, and from older generations the lack of desire to hold a mirror up for some good old self-reflection. This has created friction and resentment from both parties and, for many organisations, the consistent inability to collaborate has, in part, led to a nomadic working generation that is more enigmatic than it really should be for employers. However, as the millenial becomes the dominant generation in the workplace, now is the time for the departing generations to put aside their: ‘In my day’ views, and take the opportunity to see how effective, and, indeed, essential, collaboration with these individuals could be for the future of their organisations.

In addition, we begin to welcome Generation Z; a group that also has a great many positive traits to offer the workforce and a collective that we must not make the same mistakes we did with Generation Y.

Whilst we acknowledge that generalisations have limitations, this guide serves to dispel some of the myths, understand the traits of both generations, for the positive, and share some of the ways organisations can work more effectively with these groups of individuals to bring about an improved culture, stronger working relationships and enhanced business growth.
Who are they and why should you care, now?

**Millennials**

For millennials, entering the workforce split the critics. In some cases, this new wave of bright young things were encouraged for their go-get-’em attitudes and entrepreneurial spirits but in many organisations their managers failed to embrace these strengths, seeing this self-confidence as a sense of entitlement.

As Simon Sinek famously explained in *that video*: ‘Apparently, millennials as a group of people, which are those born from approximately 1984 and after, are tough to manage.

They are accused of being entitled and narcissistic, self-interested, unfocussed and lazy – but entitled is the big one.’ Sinek goes on to explain that the millennial is a product of how the Baby Boomer generation raised them and asserts:

‘… we now have a responsibility to make up the shortfall and help this amazing, idealistic, fantastic generation build their confidence, learn patience, learn the social skills, find a better balance between life and technology because, quite frankly, it’s the right thing to do.’

That was in December 2016. Fast forward a couple of years and we’re at a point where this matters more than ever. **By 2020, millennials will account for over a third of the workforce, rising to 75 per cent by 2025**, so the skills and resources will, increasingly, need to come from them. The time has come, if you haven’t already, to get to know them.
A recent study asked managers about perceptions they had of Generation X, Y and Z. In the case of the millennial, **52 per cent of the individuals surveyed believed them to be workplace specialists.** Millennials tend to come with particular, niche knowledge and experience and choose to hone this throughout their careers, rather than working as an operational or strategic generalist. This goes hand-in-hand with the fact that **68 per cent of the sample feel that millennials are committed to succeed**, going about their work with more passion than other employees.

When asked if millennials are team players, this generation scored the lowest of the three, with **only 45 per cent viewing them as collaborative in nature,** instead believing them to be better at independent working. This independence has often been construed as a selfish trait in millennials, born out of narcissism – a view highlighted in Sinek’s talk. But academic research shows a different side, seeing it as more about *individualism.*

Dr. Jean Twenge, Professor of Psychology at San Diego State University, explains: ‘Millennials tend to have very positive views of themselves and they’re more likely to say that they’re above average compared with their peers. At the same time, they’re also more tolerant. These positive self-views are, more than likely, routed in individualism.’ This trend towards individualism, specifically in western countries, is not exclusive to millennials, it’s a cross-generational shift, but, as Twenge puts it: ‘This generation has never known a world that put duty before self.’

This idea of duty could also be applied to how Generation Y responds to the way it works. With the suggested motto: ‘Never confuse your career with your life’, millennials are often perceived as lazy break-takers who demand flexibility in their work to accommodate specific needs around work-life balance. However, the data tells this story rather differently.

As a generation, millennials work as hard, if not harder, in many countries. **73 per cent report working more than 40 hours,** globally, with individuals in the US, on average, racking up 45-hour weeks. Indian millennials claim the highest number of hours worked with a 52-hour week. In addition to this, around 26 per cent of millennials, globally, are working two or more paid jobs. Furthermore, the expectation of retirement is somewhat different to previous generations. **12 per cent of millennials, globally, believe they will never retire.** 60 per cent of this generation see retirement as something that will happen after the age of 65, where 27 per cent believe they will stop work over the age of 70.
With the expectation of this prolonged working period comes the introduction of ‘career waves’. **84 per cent of millennials see themselves taking extended breaks and sabbaticals throughout their working lives.**

Further academic research has found that since 1970 the biggest change in job expectation is that Generation Y looks for jobs with more holiday time, more flexibility and, further, believe that work should be a less central part of their lives.

Twenge adds: ‘This generation that we’re seeing in the workplace – yeah, they’ll do good work for you but really, really crave that flexibility. They want to be able to have a work-life balance, and be able to have their lives outside of work as well.’
Generation Z

Generation Z, also known as iGen, Gen Tech, and Net Gen, is the demographic of individuals born from 1997, and picks up the baton from millennials. Where this group has now started to graduate from university, by 2020, experts believe Generation Z will make up around 20 per cent of the workforce.

We’ve had more time to get to grips with the millennials, and much has been said and written on them, but Generation Z, as it slowly becomes business present, is a lesser-known entity. This is a generation of individuals whose whole lives have been lived in the presence of technology. In fact, this has such a strong influence that 80 per cent say they aspire to work with cutting-edge technology and 91 per cent claim that tech would influence their job choice when weighing the decision against other offers.

This tech-led approach, where employers recognise it, can be a major strength but also a weakness for businesses looking to bring in fresh talent.

As a recent Dell Technologies study found, on the one hand, 77 per cent of the iGen say they are willing to be tech mentors to others in the workplace – to support the personal and professional development of other individuals, which already sets them apart from the millennial who prefers to fly solo. So, collaboration is a strength that can be harnessed for a positive impact on your organisation, both culturally and fiscally.

On the other hand, where they show strength and promise in technology, 52 per cent are less confident in the softer skills required in the workplace, which means that a two-way street must be established. Mike Crones, CIO at technology research and development firm Draper, explains: ‘What we need to be able to figure out is thinking about our leadership styles as they relate to Generation Z; our recruiting styles, our work environments, our technologies, and how they want to use and interact with those technologies and processes.’

So, how do managers view Generation Z? According to recent research, senior staffers found the top-ranking strengths of iGen to be; natural entrepreneurship, technology expertise, as outlined above, and a passion for boosting their people management skills.

A study by the Harvard Business Review also found this trend for natural entrepreneurship to be a key trait as its own study showed around 70 per cent of Generation Z individuals are self-
employed, even as teenagers; teaching piano, making money from a YouTube channel, or finding other creative ways to earn money.

iGen’s commitment to people management is also demonstrable through their work preferences – it might be said that they have a greater desire than their millennial counterparts for human-to-human interactions, professionally. 53 per cent prefer to go into the office versus working from home, whilst 58 per cent want to work as part of a team, rather than individually.

In addition, **75 per cent expect to learn from peers on the job** rather than online programmes. Ultimately, they like the ‘human touch’.

This study also found that **80 per cent believe expressing themselves creatively is ‘important’**, with **94 per cent demonstrating a strong sense of integrity** as they claimed ‘being true to myself’ as a trait they valued.
WP Engine CMO Mary Ellen Dugan explains: ‘Authenticity has been the cry of every generation in some form or fashion. The difference with Gen Z is that they demand authenticity in a new frontier – the Internet. They want guaranteed authentication for every person or brand they interact with online so they can trust a person is truly who he or she says; for social and dating websites, and from retailers as well.’

Build the right culture in your organisations...

Whilst there should never be a one-size-fits-all approach to building and managing an effective team, the millennials and Generation Z do have common traits that will help you when considering how to work with them to ensure everyone can be successful in the working environment. The following suggestions are neither exhaustive, nor are they for every organisation, right now. They are ideas to consider that may help you to think about how to take a more collaborative approach to working with Generation Y and paving the way for the success of Generation Z.
Technology-enablement

One of the traits that both groups have in common is their experience of technology. Whilst millennials haven’t lived their entire lives in the presence of tech, as Generation Z has, they have experienced most of their developmental years with it; taking them through school and into the workplace.

This immersion in technology has created a highly-skilled, tech-savvy group that has certain requirements, which, when adopted, can not only help them to be successful but also bring value to your organisation.

- Embrace the opportunity! Technology should be underpinning any strategy your organisation is engaged with, so capitalise on the resources you have in your company to upskill those who find digital aspects of their role a struggle.

- Be open to new ideas and don’t be afraid to admit you don’t understand something, where it comes to technology and its applications. These two groups have a certain brand of expertise and asking them questions, whilst showing interest, will make them feel valued and benefit you and your organisation in return.

- Provide them with the tools they need to get the job done in their way. This will not only help with staff retention but also increase efficiency across the workforce.

- Try to collaborate in order to deliver the best results by combining tech and non-tech solutions. Shared experiences and knowledge, when applied to a problem, will augment the potential output and help with the personal development of all involved.
Individualism

Both millennials and the iGen exhibit aspects of individualism but differently, that can be complementary for your organisation.

In the millennial, as we saw above, it manifests itself as self-assured and self-interested, with a passionate drive towards solo working.

In the case of Generation Z, the idea of individualism comes out as a desire to be viewed as individuals within a working group or team – they like to embrace their personal and creative output whilst learning from others.

This requires a balancing act, and one that might not come easy to managers who have a more traditional mindset, but the effort will be worth the reward.

- Ensure you have regular one-on-one sessions with your team and listen to what they say. Where possible, try to enable them to work the way they feel comfortable, assessing and discussing goals and results regularly.
• Establish boundaries to protect employer and employee, of course, but, where possible and practicable, relax the rules a little. Millennials and the iGen might not place as much importance on prioritising structure and processes but they do value results, so, ultimately, you both want the same thing, there just might be different routes to getting there.

• Encourage expression of individuality in both groups. This can be something as simple as allowing for a more relaxed dress code or opening up discussion opportunities, in and out of work situations.

**Flexibility – work-life balance**

The value placed on work-life balance, especially in the case of the millennial, has been one of the key sticking points for employers and employees alike.

The failure to meet certain expectations has caused serious attrition and, often, resentment to build in older generations.

The best thing to ask yourself, when considering hiring a millennial or iGen candidate, is this: how can our organisation help them to be successful?

• Share with millennials and iGen the results you expect and, where possible, allow them to follow it through when, where and how they choose. Sound utterly terrifying? As mentioned above, these groups are results-driven, so, ask yourself: if the quality of work is strong and meets deadlines, does it actually matter if it was done at the desk next to you, between 9.00am and 5.00pm, or during an evening, overlooking the beach?

• Micromanage at your peril! Nobody likes a manager breathing down their neck, making your list and checking it twice, but millennials and Generation Z take particular exception to it. Their natural entrepreneurial nature means they value their personal space to think and create as part of the wider workforce. Mutual respect to do the job at hand is key, which will breed a healthy working culture and avoid unnecessary churn.
Integrity and social conscience

This is a group of individuals who are switched on to the world around them. Both generations are more socially and politically aware, and the iGen, in particular, has a strong sense of personal integrity. These qualities translate both as deal-breakers for the role itself but also play a large part in cultural choices. So, for example, a cynical CSR (Corporate and Social Responsibility) programme will be seen as just that – it is no longer enough to simply pay lip service to business ethics, it should be demonstrated, where opacity has been exchanged for transparency in our digital world.

- Encourage side projects, with a social conscience, within the organisation, perhaps as part of the interdepartmental culture, to create positive action that stimulates and adds value within your business.

- Tear up that CSR programme and permeate your organisation with solid values and, where appropriate, activities that mean something in relation to what your organisation does and how you would like it to be perceived.
Recruitment

One of the biggest barriers you’ll have in recruiting great candidates is your organisational policy. Bear in mind, too, that with sites such as Glassdoor, these policies will appear more transparent to those looking for work, which means companies are more exposed where it comes to procuring the best talent.

Employer brand has never been more important than now and where your employees; past, present and future, are your peer reviewers, the power is in your hands to ensure the brand’s reputation remains positive for candidates.

• Engender loyalty by nurturing a respectful workplace. How a working environment is perceived from the inside will, in turn, show itself on the outside to those potential candidates looking to join your organisation.

• Offer a competitive package, beyond financial remuneration. Think about flexible and remote working, accommodate a more modern approach to holidays, consider options for volunteer work, promote entrepreneurial spirit, drive learning opportunities and offer social alternatives to standard desk-working. Basically, be a little more creative, whilst considering the traits of millennials and Generation Z, to be more competitive with your recruitment strategy.

Conclusion

Working with millennials and iGen is not about pandering to the needs and expectations associated with a sense of entitlement, which some commentators have raised as a concern for organisations. Producer and journalist Caroline Beaton believes millennials are entitled but explains that this is not necessarily a bad thing: ‘Entitlement isn’t inherently negative, despite its prevailing connotation. It means simply, “what an individual believes he or she deserves.” This conviction can seed social progress.’ It is about that cultural exchange that comes as one generation begins to become the dominant group in the workplace, whilst the others begin to retire.

Create a seamless transition for your organisation and this will only serve to seed progress for a better working environment, increase employee retention and drive efficiency and growth in your business, as you prepare for its future.
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