Bracing for the Millennial Workforce: Looking for Ways to Inspire Generation Y

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The 75 million members of the extremely child-centric Millennial generation are known for their distinctive traits, such as a preference for personal attention and high esteem of their abilities. As new entrants to the world of work, this team-oriented, technology-savvy, idealistic generation is awaiting the inspiration, leadership, and motivation we owe them. Ensuring a rewarding outcome in guiding this hyper-connective, creative cohort is a challenge we cannot escape. Through semi-structured interviews, this qualitative inquiry explores the values and communication styles of Generation Y and discusses the opportunities lying within revealing and nurturing their resources through the principles of transformational leadership.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Millennials are known for their different views on life compared to generations before them. This divergence transpired as a result of a blend of many factors, such as the accelerated speed of everything, the multiplicity of communication devices, increased traveling opportunities, and the greater amount of parental nurturing they received. Many of this generation's parents are affluent middle-agers who are now confronted with progenies who are drawn to the "softer" side of life: art, poetry, music, and the surreal world of games. When asking these youngsters why they are so strongly drawn to an unreal world in which they become a fictional character, they will explain that it enables them to live out their wildest dreams and achieve a high level of skills appreciated by their peers. While many of them excelled in high school and college, they don't seem attracted to the current structured world of work out there. Many of them seem to explore their options, waiting for the right moment or opportunity to come along, and not in a hurry to proactively chase it.

Yet, the time is nearing in which this 75-million strong generation will have to take its turn in the workforce. Born between 1977 and 1981, the Millennials are the product of a heavily child-centric upbringing in America. They, therefore, harbor some interesting traits: high self-esteem, self-centeredness, propensity to multitask and team orientation.

Given the changed needs of today's corporations and communities, the increased awareness about environmental and stakeholder care, and the increased global competition, there is tremendous need for workers who dare to think creatively and critically, and understand the need to resolve new problems in innovative ways. Given their affinity for electronic games, poetry, music and the arts, the Millennials could be a timely and much needed asset to the urges of the corporate world.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM, SIGNIFICANCE, AND REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Millennials have been often described as being diverse in opinions, fascinated by new technologies, and collaborative by nature. This group (also referred to as the NET Generation, or Generation M, Y, or Echo Boomers) are the children of Babyboomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) or of early-wave members of Generation X (born 1965–1982), and represent approximately one-third of the American population.

It could be argued, that socially, the Millennials are a more stable generation compared to their predecessors, while at the same time, during their formative years, there has been tremendous increase in the immigrant population, and therefore, more appreciation for diversity (Abrams, 2006; Buchanon, 2010). Also, Millennials have been raised with the optimism that all things are possible through collaboration and solidarity. The idiosyncratic traits of this generation are enduring, yet reflect somewhat of a detour from the more traditional behaviors of their predecessors.

Economically, they have also seen more stability than their predecessors. They have been engaged in various childhood activities such as sports and music lessons and academic daycare which have provided them with a different level of engagement. This engagement has spilled over into the classroom where Millennials have been taught to work in teams, and where the expectation for a heightened level of collaboration is present. Technologically, they are also the first truly digital generation who will not consider platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, or Youtube to be novel.

It is not atypical for a teenager to be working (successfully!) on a trigonometry problem while in front of a computer hooked up to at least three monitors, instantly messaging on her cell phone to several peers, playing an electronic game with yet another different group of friends, and watching a freshly downloaded episode of "Top Gear." For the Millennials multitasking and being social have always been a way of life. Not only are they interested in technology--they are experts in the field.

The technological environment is accepted as a norm by these digital natives. Staying connected has become a part of their culture and it is atypical for someone in this generational cohort to not have at least one electronic device that can be used as a communication tool throughout the day. An average college graduate has spent less than 5,000 hours of her life reading but over 10,000 hours playing video games and over about 20,000 hours watching TV and on average, Millennials spend more than $100 a week on technology-oriented products and strongly influence more than 80 percent of all spending in their households (Erikson, 2008; Pensky, 2001). Unlike previous generations, who relied on emails and phone conversations, the Millennials need to be connected to their peers in real time. They are comfortable with virtual presence, and the digital mobile platform has become the primary medium of information exchange, making them more informed and curious, while the faster pace of information generation makes them seek instant gratification (Sweeney, 2006). Consequently, they tend to expect feedback immediately after finishing a designated task.

The Millennials grew up in a time of economic prosperity; they were socialized through "mommy and me" groups and played soccer from the age of three. They typically have strong bonds with their parents, especially their mothers, and they stay well connected even when they go away to school. Often indulged as a result of changing child-rearing practices, they are also the most protected generation in terms of government regulations on consumer safety. Since very early childhood, their lives were highly scheduled and secluded. They were expected to excel and are used to being consulted in the decision making process. Socially, Millennials had fewer siblings and with relatively stable divorce rates, got better parental attention. Their inclination toward drugs and sex has also stabilized--making them more

productive and less disillusioned in institutions (Abrams, 2006). They tend to be conventional, accepting of societal rules and expectations; they are team- and achievement oriented, with external locus of control—but often needing help determining reliable sources of information (Buchanon, 2010).

E-books have come to replace traditional books, and dictionaries are now replaced by websites such as Wikipedia and Google Scholar. Instant and up-to-date news is the expectation and opt-in communication is increasingly more desirable for this cohort. Through these electronic media, from early childhood, this generation has been thriving on instant and continuous feedback on their performance, and they display little tolerance when this feedback is delayed (Schrum and Levin, 2010). The Millennials can be behaviorally compared to the so-called Greatest generation, born between 1901 and 1924, or GI, or Civic Generation—in that they have strong feelings about civic order, traditional values, family centrism, and dependence on trustworthy institutions. While Baby boomers are known for their narcissism and focus on values, Generation X-ers , in contrast, are cynical and highly self-accountable. They successfully balance work and personal life and are technically adept, and while they are typically family oriented, diversity-aware, and achievement oriented, they have issues with long-term commitment (Sujanski, 2009). As the Baby boomers retire and Generation-Xers move into the upper tier of organizations, the Millennials are ranked in the lower and middle tiers of management, where their roles transform from learning organizational values to applying such values through corporate leadership. Contrary to popular beliefs, Millennials do not value social and altruistic rewards more than boomers or Generation X. Intrinsic rewards, such as interesting work and growth opportunities, still rank at the top of all work values for all generations.

Because the Millennials seem so strikingly similar to the famously capable GI generation, they are perhaps the ideal generation to inherit the chaos of the early years of the twenty-first century—to restore order and purpose, to stabilize the country, and to create a sense of belonging (Kotkin, 2010). "Which path the United States ultimately takes will be determined by the Millennial Generation's willingness to engage in a vast civic endeavor to remake American and its institutions and the willingness of the rest of the country to follow its lead" (Winograd and Hais, 2011, p. 70), state the authors of *Millennial Momentum: How a New Generation is Remaking America*. They claim that the new generation is capable of leading America into the new "civic ethos" by bringing up compelling examples of their community service, social entrepreneurship, and volunteerism. The Millennials, according to these authors' survey analyses, desire to collaboratively solve societal challenges while upholding the principles of transparency and fairness. Unlike the introverted Generation X-ers, the disillusioned and idealistic Baby boomers, and the pragmatic Silent Generation, the Millennials respond to fear and uncertainty by personal engagement in public service.

They understand that to transform the country they need to bind together through the latest technological innovations. The most culturally and ideologically diverse generation in the American history, they have come of age expecting to be heard and to make change, believing that every vote, and virtually every choice they make-matters. Realizing that the hope for change they had voted for during the 2008 elections was nearly destroyed by the financial crisis brought upon them by their own parents, Millennials realize events like this illustrate what happens when a privileged few are allowed to take what they can and leave the rest in the dust.

THE STUDY: METHODOLOGY

In order to more closely examine the values and preferred communication styles of the millennial generation, a qualitative study was conducted, which involved randomly accessed convenience sample of 150 participants in Los Angeles metropolitan area. Data were collected anonymously using paper-and-pencil method. In order to encourage the richest possible variey of topics interpretations, participants were asked to answer the following two open-ended questions:
1. What drives you?
2. How do you connect?

The collected data were analyzed using the following techniques. The researchers went through each individual response, reading it and making in-depth notes to themselves. The coding began as goal-free. As an emerging process, being led by the data from one response to the next, this technique allowed the researches to improvise on the early findings in the data and develop the codes, or what later transpired as the two themes for each question, reflexively.

The first step was to obtain a general sense of the information and reflect on its overall meaning. As a result of this process, the authors probed more deeply into the data, so as to be perspicuous of its complexity, in order to characterize it more precisely. The developing concepts based on the emerging codes and categories within each of the responses became the focus of further analysis. The researchers performed these tasks for several of the collected responses and clustered together similar topics, such as the "why"s and the "how"s of millennials' motivation. They then took this list back to the original sources, abbreviated the topics as codes and marked the appropriate segments of the collected responses with the codes (such as "significant others", 'children", "art", "nature", etc).

After comparing and analyzing the notes taken on the first few dozen of responses, the researchers agreed on the preliminary list of topics to be identified throughout the manuscripts. They then applied the codes to the manuscripts and ensured that the codes were not duplicated. Further coding proceeded as goal-directed, labeling the rest of the collected responses with the codes agreed upon.

Intra-rater reliability was established by each of the co-researchers through re-reading the available data multiple times and verifying her original coding, trying to be aware of their own biases. Each coder went back and forth between the data and the coding to understand the nuance of the language in each source. The authors believe that this constant assessment of data within each source, between the sources, between developing codes, and between the codes and the sources data, insured a reasonable level of intra-rater reliability.

Once inter-rater reliability was established through code/topic comparisons, the researchers proceeded with analytical coding, where themes were patterned into categories. The authors arrayed the codes by category to determine the properties and dimensions of each theme, searching for critical defining characteristics in each one. This approach was used until all excerpts were accounted for in the analyses, discarded as non-germane, or moved to another category where they were more congruent with the meaning under development. The themes were discerned through discussion between co-researchers. As the result of the process of data reduction, the researchers arrived at the following thematic divisions:

Question 1: What drives you?
1) Causes:
   a) Challenge
   b) Personal growth
   c) Making a positive impact
   d) Success
   e) Financial stability
   f) Ability to help
   g) Change
   h) Injustice
   i) Spiritual faith
2) People:
   a) Parents
   b) Significant others
   c) Children
   d) People with sense of urgency
   e) Positively intended people
Question 2: How do you connect?
1) "Philosophy":
   a) Being humble and respectful
   b) Being able to feel what others feel

      c) Being open to experiences
      d) Being true to oneself
      e) Overcoming fear
      f) Building trust
  2) "Mechanics":
      a) Face-to-face time together
      b) News and research
      c) Social media
      d) Art, music, nature, pets
      e) Travel, adventures
      f) Exploring commonalities in backgrounds
      g) Joking and laughing
      h) School and work

We acknowledge that the outcomes of this thematic analysis are open for scrutiny and opinion. However, we believe we have captured the common themes that ran throughout the collected responses about what motivates the millennial generation and about how they connect.
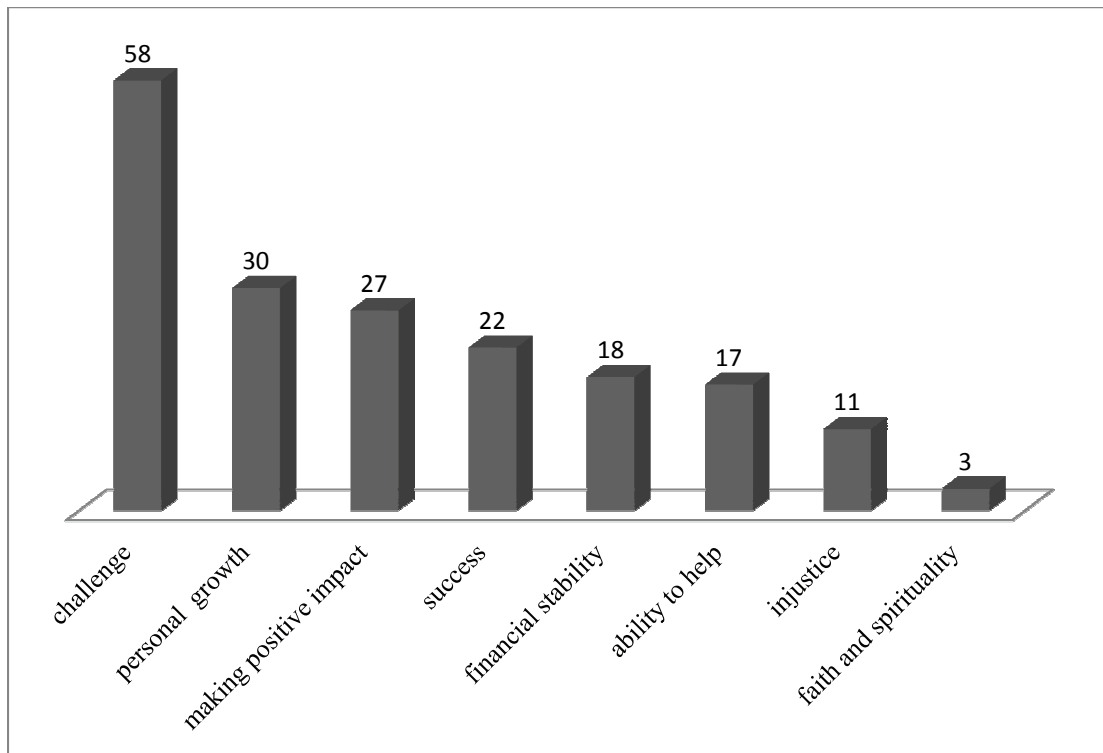
STUDY RESULTS

Out of the originally collected 150 responses, 132 were deemed usable. Each participant referred to multiple causes and groups of people who motivate them, as well as to multiple ways by which he/she connects – which explains the sums of responses for each category exceeding 132.

TABLE 1
THE CAUSES BEHIND MILLENNIALS' DRIVE: NUMBER OF TIMES
EACH FACTOR MENTIONED

Challenge	58
Personal growth	30
Making a positive impact	27
Success	22
Financial stability	18
Ability to help	17
Change	17
Injustice	11
Faith and spirituality	3

FIGURE 1
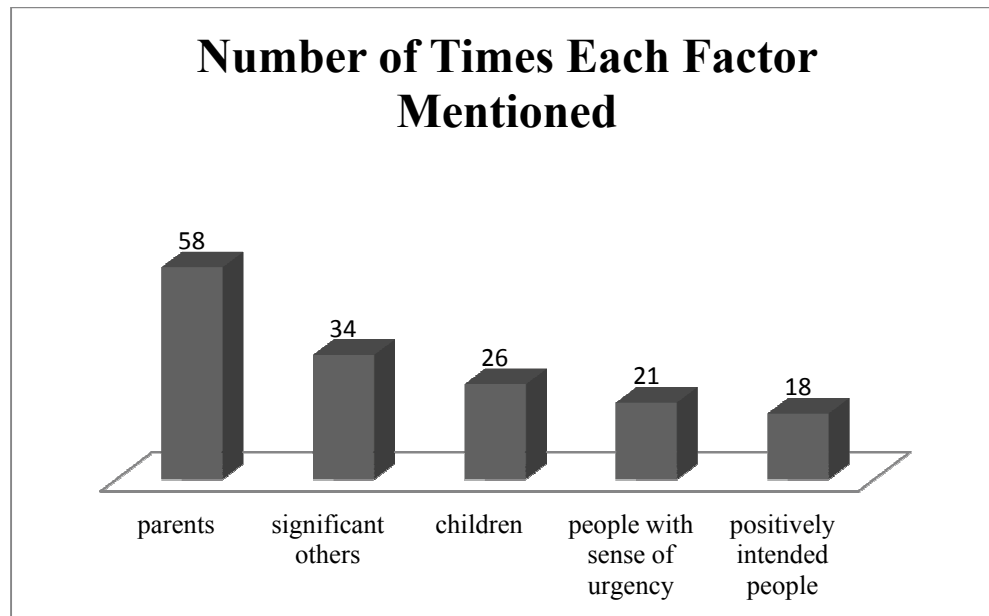**THE CAUSES BEHIND MILLENNIALS' DRIVE**

In reviewing the causes for their drive, it becomes obvious that an overwhelming majority of the participating Millennials are drawn toward challenge as a driving motive for performance, expressing it this in widely divergent wording, "wanting to prove themselves in their own eyes as well as the eyes of others", "identifying a goal and then feeling determined to accomplish it", "engaging in competition of some kind with others", and "demonstrating that there are different ways of getting results". The cluster "personal growth" was illustrated through "self as a driving motive", "formulating a vision and setting out to make it happen", "listening to the heart", and "focusing on lasting happiness." The cluster "making a positive impact" was represented by statements such as "wanting to bring a positive change in the world," "sensing and playing into positive energy", "striving to bring innovation where needed," or simply, "bringing more love into the world."

TABLE 2
THE PEOPLE BEHIND MILLENNIALS' DRIVE: NUMBER OF TIMES EACH FACTOR MENTIONED

Parents	58
Significant others	34
People w/sense of urgency	26
Children	21
Positively intended people	18

FIGURE 2
THE PEOPLE BEHIND MILLENNIALS' DRIVE

Number of Times Each Factor Mentioned

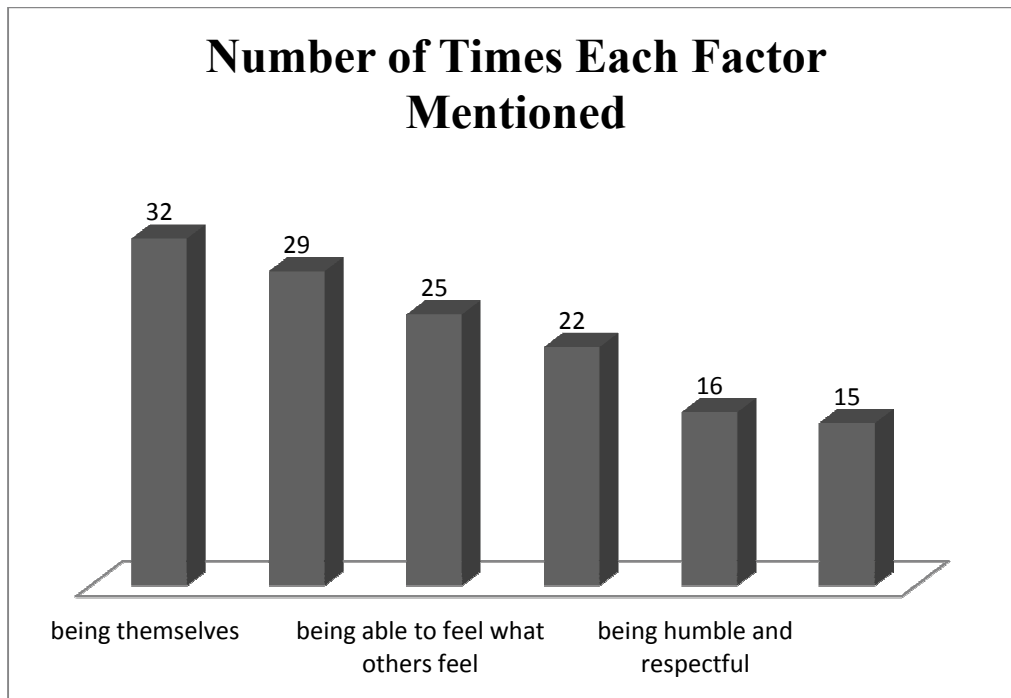| Category	Value
parents	58
significant others	34
children	26
people with sense of urgency	21
positively intended people	18

In alignment with the findings of our literature review, "parents" were mentioned in the overwhelming majority of the collected responses. The category "people with a sense of urgency" consisted of supervisors, business relatives, and others they looked up to for their career progress. The cluster "positively intended people" comprised friends, mentors, formal and self-identified teachers in different settings.

In response to Question 2, "How do you connect?", the following findings are identified:

TABLE 3
"THE PHILOSOPHY" OF CONNECTING: NUMBER OF TIMES EACH FACTOR MENTIONED

Being themselves	32
Being open to experiences	29
Being able to feel what others feel	25
Building trust	22
Being humble and respectful	16
Overcoming fear	15

FIGURE 3
THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND MILLENNIALS' CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

Number of Times Each Factor Mentioned

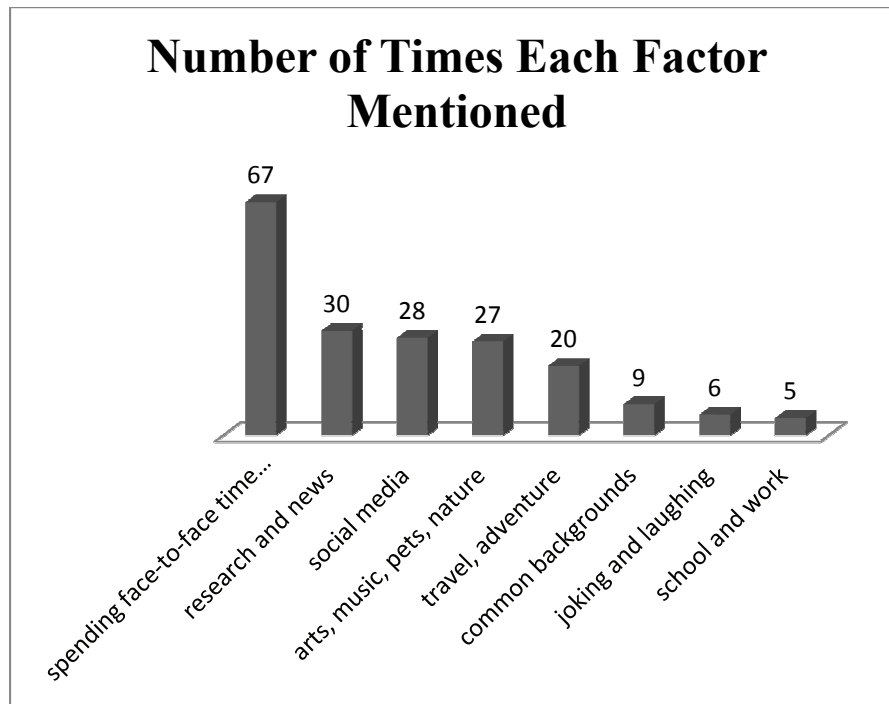|	being themselves	being able to feel what others feel	being humble and respectful
Value	32	29	25	22	16	15

Respondents expressed the importance of not deviating from the purpose they set for themselves. They indicated opening one's mind and overcoming fear of change as ways to connect with others. Participants also conveyed the values of compassion, and respect, through which they want to build trust.

TABLE 4
THE "MECHANICS" OF CONNECTING: NUMBER OF TIMES EACH FACTOR MENTIONED

Spending face-to-face time together	67
Research and news	30
Social Media	28
Arts, music, pets, nature	27
Travel, adventure	10
Common backgrounds	9
Joking & laughing	6
School & work	5

FIGURE 4
HOW MILLENNIALS CONNECT

Number of Times Each Factor Mentioned

67 — spending face-to-face time…
30 — research and news
28 — social media
27 — arts, music, pets, nature
20 — travel, adventure
9 — common backgrounds
6 — joking and laughing
5 — school and work

The fact that there were such a high percentage of participants referring to multiple ways of face-to-face connecting led the researchers to believe that, in spite of their technological savvy, members of this generation don't differ much from their predecessors in means of connecting. Yet, one should also consider the second main cluster of themes, consisting of, a) "news and research", b) "Technology/social media", and c) "Arts, music, pets, nature" to detect that the gravitation of this group toward social media and the more ethereal areas of life is also highly important. If these three sub-clusters were grouped together, they would add up to 84, thus shifting to the most important way Millennials connect.

Overall, the result of this qualitative investigation is a positive finding, thereby confirming existing studies and literature. Nevertheless, these results should be treated with caution as the sample was limited geographically to the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Even though a larger sample from a greater geographical area would allow for stronger, better grounded, inferences in regards to what motivates the Millennials and how they form personal and professional bonds, the authors are comfortable in suggesting that transformational leadership style is likely to fit their needs and communication style most intuitively.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR THE MILLENNIALS

Consideration should be given to the diversity of the generational cohorts working within organizations today. Some may argue that organizations cannot, and should not, apply the same style of leadership used on the previous generations, to motivate the Millennials. While the traditional leadership approaches such as developing a vision, and leading by example, have proven effective in most leadership situations, it could be argued that taking the energy to understand the unique circumstances and characteristics of the Millennials will promise to go a long way in moving organizations, and our country overall, forward. For the Millennials, even though they are the most educated and connected generation, perhaps their biggest strength lies in their diversity. Unlike previous generations, Millennials are well versed in seeking and gathering information from the media and in turn, using that information to increase

awareness, and when able- use that information to better society. Older generations tend to bypass, ignore, or are not even aware of the breath of media outlets available.

Although diverse and idiosyncratic in behavior, this generation has grown up with structure and supervision. With parents as role models, this generation will most likely respond to leaders who have honesty and integrity. Therefore, transformational leadership fits the needs of the Millennials situation most intuitively. Transformational leaders create synergies within organizations by working together with their flowers to achieve organizational goals through creating a culture of meaning that boosts loyalty and nurtures collective potential (Kuhnet, 1994). Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized attention are the four "I's" of transformational leadership style. Transformational leaders motivate followers to do more by the following processes: (a) raise followers' consciousness of goals and values, (b) transcend followers' sense of self-interest, and (c) motivate followers' higher-level needs (Bass, 1985, p. 20).

Influence encourages change to occur when leaders act as strong role models, with high standards of moral and ethical conduct, and in turn, the followers emulate those sets of values. Inspirational motivation works as leaders communicate their high expectations of those they oversee and effective leaders continuously reinforce their respect for those they lead by acknowledging their contributions to the growth process of their peers, and by thanking them, consistently, for doing quality work.

Intellectual stimulation is the third factor in the process of transformational leadership, and this construct entails encouragement to innovate and challenge one's own beliefs, while engaging in creative problem solving (Bass and Riggio, 2006). It is important to note that creativity and innovation are not interchangeable, as creativity is the thought and innovation is the action involved in developing the thought and making it useful to oneself and to others. Within a stimulating and autonomous work environment, leaders must encourage all team participants to provide constructive feedback to each other and reflect on this feedback during debriefing and planning sessions. In doing so, the collaborative environment is strengthened by healthy critique.

Individually supporting, coaching, and mentoring younger generation into their professional lives through one-on-one advising, coaching, and mentoring is the centerpiece of the process of transformational leadership and thus the fourth and final construct in transformational leadership – individualized consideration. Individual consideration is intended to use the leader's skill to provide a supportive climate, and to coach staff to be fully actualized. Indeed, breakthrough moments of truth, or windows of learning opportunity, are rare, precious, and unpredictable; they do not wait for the official office hours, as they are dependent upon being able on capitalize on those elusive Aha! moments. Millennials most intuitively appear to be a perfect fit for the transformational leadership model.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The tools needed to motivate the Millennial generation differ greatly from the tools used to motivate those from the Baby boomer generation. The latter were a part of the largest generation of active workers who self- identify their strengths as organizational memory, optimism, and willingness to work long hours. Boomers grew up in organizations with large corporate hierarchies rather than flat management structures and team-based job roles (Strauss and Howe, 1997). Growing up as a generation who are accustomed to being on a first name basis with their superiors and who are routinely encouraged to flex their autonomy skills, Millennials have drastically different expectations for their employment experiences. They seek challenges, yet work/life balance is of utmost importance to them (Twenge and Campbell, 2009).

The Millennials coming into organizations are not seeking a career experience—they are not interested in climbing the corporate ladder, pleasing the boss, and making more money. They are prepared to work just as hard as the older generations, but they will not respond productively when simply placed in a cubicle and expected to perform at a desk eight hours a day. Being well educated, highly skilled in technology and self-confident, this generation expects stimulation, collaboration and compensation. Work needs to be interesting to them, and managing them successfully means allowing them to work in

different ways (Buchanon, 2010; Gilbert, 2011). They will not automatically respect someone who is older or who holds a superior position—they will respect only those who show appreciation for them as well. Studies also show that Millennials are primed to do well by doing good: "Almost 70 percent say that giving back and being civically engaged are their highest priorities" (Buchanon, 2010, p. 169).

Company values and the idea of corporate and social responsibility (CSR) are increasingly more important to this generation and hiring the right talent is only part of the challenge organizations face today. How businesses create challenges and learning opportunities that motivate the Millennials to give of themselves to their potential is of the greatest importance, as this cohort places significant importance on not only recognizing current issues affecting the world today, but rather developing initiatives that directly assist in bettering those social problems.

Ideas and products offered by organizations need to be seen as solving important problems for people and organizations that are able to successfully portray this image and communicate effectively with this generation will be able to hold on to, and make the most of, the best new talent.

Research shows that performance management is one of the top motivational drivers for all generations currently in the workplace; however, Millennials tend to value timeliness, frequency, and clarity more than any other generation. According to Hertzberg (1987), competency, choice, progress, and meaningfulness are the key elements that will determine an employees' levels of motivation. Specifically, proper training, autonomy, relevance and overall meaning (virtue) are key factors that determine young employees' decisions to become and ultimately stay or leave and organization. Other considerations include the following: family/work balance, job mobility, being part of a socially minded organization, flexible hours, and perceptions of fairness when comparing compensation packages with other companies'.

It has been said that people do not care about how much you know until they know how much you care, and this is no different for Millennials. The younger workers within this generation need to know that the boss, as well as the company, cares about them; they want stimulating work and they want to see the long-term value of the training they are now receiving. In essence, being able to link skill to relevance and organizational value is essential in gaining their loyalty.

Accordingly, the opportunity for organizations to turn the interest, skills and competencies into organizational strengths is evident. These interests will one day turn into innovations and if handled with care and consideration, organizations could successfully use these somewhat innate tools of the Millennials to gather information quickly and more efficiently. Managers need to look for opportunities for creative challenges, too: asking them about how problems can be solved will reveal more in-house talent (Skiba and Baron, 2006).

For the Millennials, tasks are better tackled when broken into components. Further, concise feedback is better received at short intervals. Also, immediate gratification is what motivates this generation, so frequent deadlines will create a sense of urgency. Clear explanation of expectations and sincere praise will often surpass money when a attempting to motivate Millennial employees, as it creates a sense of value and community.

When considering performance management, as mentioned earlier, one must be mindful that Millennials are a digital generation that thrives on interaction and is used to continuous feedback. In the wake of proliferating web2.0 companies such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Glassdoor, WikiLeaks, and so on, which created a new forum of transparency assisting us in determining pay, skill, and position equity, they need frequent and timely feedback on their job performance and career development, so traditional semiannual reviews are insufficient. This feedback also needs to be framed and delivered in the format that they will be receptive to. They need check lists with specific suggestions on how exactly they can improve. This feedback should also be presented in a manner that is clear and specific and leaves no room for misunderstanding.

Equally important to praise and feedback is the Millennials' desire to be creative. Having grown up in the environment where information is available almost instantly through Google, Wikipedia, and other sources, rather than finding answers to even the most complicated questions, this generation wants to get involved in considering solutions to new and complex issues that require creative problem-solving.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The study findings and the discussion brought out some critical insights about Millennials to the forefront. When considering the areas of attention in guiding the Millennials toward preparing for the workforce and attaining desired results in our connection with this generation, it seems important to be aware that they are expected to be especially responsive to influence (role models): Millennials have a highly individualized view and carefully select their role models. These role models, who are usually people in their close proximity, can exert critical influence on their performance. Most importantly, perhaps, Millennials are also likely to respond positively when high expectations are communicated to them.

Individualized consideration, then, or quality mentoring, is critical for their development and retention. Millennials were raised to appreciate structure, direction, explanation, and engagement, so an effective mentoring strategy would need to involve all of these components. Having been mentored throughout their childhoods but in a participative manner, Millennials will respond to being lead, not managed. They will likely respond to managers who are seen as team leaders rather than domineering, micromanaging bosses. Millennials want leaders who are passionate, inventive, and entertaining and, in large, find attractive work environments to be filled with humor, silliness, and even a certain level of irreverence. They also need to know the reason behind the tasks that are assigned to them.

Millennials tend to examine leadership from a different lens than the generational cohorts that came before them. Their background of sheltered affluence and lifelong exposure to virtual reality have made them non-responsive to static instructions. Practical experience is valued over title and rank and their desire to take the wheel and learn by trial and error is what often leads the members of this generation down a road of discovery and learning. Working within a collaborative environment is also essential. Allowing for a reasonable level of autonomy and self-direction is healthy for Millennials, and in getting such autonomy, Millennials are likely to feel a certain freedom and thus be more creative in thought and innovative in action. This cohort's ability to uniquely understand and interact with one another via technological means and on a personal level makes them an attractive generation to work with. Their proficiency with technology, and their constant desire to be engaged with real-life issues that matter to them, influence their life decisions, experiences and even the material that they choose to study and apply. It is for all these reasons that we believe the path to fully realizing the Millennials' potential lies through applying the principles of transformational leadership, tapping into their hyper-connectivity and optimism, to engaging them in social entrepreneurship.

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