

Stop Talking About Work/Life Balance!

TEQ and the Millennial Generation

By Meagan Johnson



The millennial generation is filling the ranks of our ever-changing workforce. Sometimes referred to as Generation Y, or the Echo Boom, the millennial generation is the 80 million people born between 1980 and 2000.¹

Mighty baby boomers take note; your millennial children have dwarfed your 72 million and are poised to become the largest generation in the workforce. Roughly 10,000 new millennials reach the legal drinking age every year (21 years old)² and in five years, 40 percent of the workforce will be part of this generation.³ It is estimated that in 10 years, 75 percent of the workforce across the globe will call themselves the millennial generation.⁴

The millennials are the first generation to reach adulthood during the early years of the new millennium. Millennials are more ethnically diverse than past generations, more racially accepting, more likely to have a tattoo, more open to immigration than older generations, and are more likely to sleep with their cell phones.⁵

As baby boomers' numbers in the workforce begin to diminish, it becomes more important than ever to an organization's financial success to harness the skillsets that these young people can contribute. Their managers claim this generation wants instant gratification, praise, a fun work environment and a casual dress code. Human Resources is often left feeling that millennials hold all the cards: if they do not give into their demands, this generation will quit in the blink of an eye.

This is not the case. Millennials do want to make a difference in the workplace, and they want to challenge the "old ways of thinking." In Deloitte's survey of 7,800 young people, two of the fundamental findings were that the millennials perceive that innovation is being stifled by management's attitude, and that a company should be judged not only on a monetary basis but also on the impact it makes in society.⁶ In the 2014 Millennial Impact Report, over 90

percent of millennials are aligning their skills with organizations that are making a positive impact on society.⁷ They are eager to change the landscape of today's workplace and leave their individual mark. They just want your help to do it!

Here are some actions you can take to work more effectively with millennials and harness the incredible energy and fresh perspectives they bring to our workplace today.

Stop Talking About Work/Life Balance!

According to baby boomer company owner Alec Johnston, "When I hear someone tell me they want *work/life* balance, they are really telling me that they want more time off to goof around."

BusinessDictionary.com defines work/life balance (WLB) as, "A comfortable state of equilibrium achieved between an employee's primary priorities of their employment position and their private lifestyle."⁸ Work/life balance is nothing new. We have all struggled with how much time we spend at the office versus our own personal interests.

Baby Boomers Live to Work

They will likely cancel personal activities if the work is not done or their boss asked them to stay late. To baby boomers, the term "work ethic" translates to putting in long hours at the office and sacrificing personal interests until the job is complete. The line between work and play is very distinct. There is time to work and time to relax.

Generation X entered the workforce in the late 1980s and early 1990s, during the recession preceded by Black Monday, the largest one day stock market crash. Gen Xer's cries for WLB became a backlash to baby boomers' intense dedication to employers and long hours spent at the office. For Generation X, WLB became synonymous with "working to live" rather than "living to work." Gen X championed the home office and began demanding flexible working hours. They felt at ease working earlier

or working later to get the job done so they would have free time to spend with friends and family. The line between working and free time became hazy; they felt comfortable putting a load of laundry in, working from home in their pajamas, and making one or two appearances at the office.

What happened to WLB and the Millennials?

The millennial generation has been on the forefront of the ever-changing technology wave. They may not have invented many of the technologies we use today (think Bill Gates and Steve Jobs) but they adapted the new technologies into their lives at an early age and for many of us, have become the “experts” we turn to when our smartphones, tablets and laptops confuse us.

Millennials perceive that technology makes their lives easier and makes their generation distinctive. According to Nielsen, more than 70 percent of millennials feel that technology makes their lives simpler; more than 50 percent feel that technology brings family and friends closer; and almost 25 percent ranked technology as the top defining characteristic of their generation.¹⁰ Technology has given the millennial generation the ability to work where they want and when they want.

It is not about balancing how much time you work versus how much time you spend on your leisure activities, it is a combination of both. It is a lifestyle of both working and personal activities that are merged into one. This is *Technology Equilibrium* (TEQ), a term I coined that describes the successful blending of life and work via technology.

Technology Equilibrium has erased the line between work and personal life altogether. The millennials do not recognize a distinction between work and personal life because technology has made it so easy to move from one to the next. According to the Cisco Connected World Technology Report, 90 percent of millennials check their phones, texts, and social media before getting out of bed and over 65 percent spend as much time if not more with their friends online versus in person.¹¹

In that time before getting out of bed, the millennial has, in a typical case, responded to a customer request, communicated with his or her overseas team, updated his or her online calendar, read his or her Twitter feed and made happy hour plans with friends via OpenTable. Can Generation X and baby boomers do this? Of course they can, but for the millennials, adopting TEQ means there is not a distinction between

the work tasks and the non-work tasks. The millennial does not think of communication with a client as work and making dinner reservations as leisure; it is all the same thing. Most important, by embracing TEQ, the millennial does not resent one part of his or her life interfering with the other because work and life have become one.

Apps and social media have facilitated the TEQ lifestyle with the millennial generation. At one time, apps and social media were seen as ways to play games on our phones, think Angry Birds, or an anonymous way to spy on people we dated in high school (we have all done it, or thought about doing it, via Facebook). Apps and social media have matured from being solely social game-playing mechanisms to both entertainment venues and business tools. Apps and social media successfully blend life and work via technology.

Currently, apps and social media’s importance in the HR world is becoming more apparent, more than 90 percent of organizations use them for recruiting and greater than 70 percent have had favorable hiring outcomes through social media;¹² however, companies continue to place outdated rules or even social media bans on their employees. According to research firm Statista, one out of five companies block Facebook on company computers.¹³ I have spoken with countless audience members who tell me their companies do everything from prohibiting cell phones in the office, to not allowing tablets in meetings, blocking all social media sites on company computers, or installing cameras in the break rooms with hopes of “catching” the younger generation using social media during office hours.¹⁴

These tactics are not only futile; they stifle the ability of millennials to take a TEQ approach while working for your organization. The rules also convey to the millennials that you do not trust them or value the skillset they bring to the workplace. More importantly, research is discovering people who use social media sites at work are more productive. A study by research firm Evolv shows that employees who access several social media sites retain more, get more done, and stay at their jobs longer.

What can Organizations do to facilitate a TEQ Workplace for the Millennials?

First, get rid of bans on social media. Social media has become the smoke break of the 1970s and the water cooler chat of the 1980s. It is a mental reset for all employees, not just

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the millennials, to check in, connect and take a breather. Rename social media, *social mental floss*, and you may feel better about the time people spend checking their Twitter feed.

This does not mean you can't have rules. A good social media policy is smart business. The rules need to make sense and apply equally to everyone.

For example, a social aid organization that caters to single parents has a ban on posting anything about the clients they serve. Sara McCarthy, a Gen X manager, says that, "Our clients talk about sensitive issues when they visit us. We do not want the clients to feel embarrassed or feel violated if they see pictures

A good social media policy is smart business.

of themselves entering our offices or waiting in our lobby. We tell employees that because of these reasons, they cannot post anything about whom we serve at the office. We do, however, encourage employees to post how they feel about the work they do and post photos of themselves and co-workers."

Recently on Yelp, I read a scathing review of one of my favorite places to eat. The review did not criticize the food or service, but focused on one of the senior managers. The review took several mean jabs at the manager and seemed to be written by a disgruntled employee. Some organizations place social media rules for fear of negative comments that its employees may post. If that is the case, create an internal platform where your employees can vent without retribution. This not only allows people to "get it out of their system," it also gives management an opportunity to really "hear" what is plaguing their employees and take action.

Intel's social media policy is specific regarding what not to share, i.e., confidential information. But it also works from the assumption that their employees are mature individuals. Intel asks their employees to be "transparent, truthful, yourself, and up-to-date" when it comes to social media.¹⁵ Intel further instructs their employees not to reveal confidential information, not to bash the competition, to admit when they make a mistake, and to correct their social media mistakes.¹⁶

Some organizations rely on employee discretion. Olivia Johnson (millennial) is a member service representative for a financial institution, stating that, "The company expects us to act responsibly when it comes to social media. They do not want us to get drunk and post pictures of ourselves everywhere. They expect us to use common sense."

Having a progressive social media policy is a critical factor for the millennials and their TEQ

approach to work. Thirty-three percent of the millennials ranked "social media freedom" more important than salary.¹⁷ As more and more of them join the workforce and assume management leadership positions, social media will become a larger part of the communication toolbox. Remember when it was all about the Three Rs – reading, writing and arithmetic – of education? Now, we need to add social media to the equation. According to Future Workplace's Multiple Generations @ Work survey, by year 2020, 60 percent of the millennials believe that "social media literacy will be required of all employees."¹⁸ It behooves all organizations to become more social with social media.

We are People, not Widgets. Reward us as Individuals.

Carol Kauffman, VP and director of Development and Communications at Neighborhood Housing Services of Phoenix, and a baby boomer, recalls, "When I first began my career, my boss came back from vacation with a small gift for everyone on her team. She gave us all the same identical gift. At the time, I appreciated the thought and I know she did what she thought was fair. You can't do that with the younger generation today. Millennials expect to be motivated individually."

I had a "seasoned" audience member approach me after a presentation and tell me that motivation could be summed up in two words: "your paycheck."

It is tempting, especially following the great recession, to feel that people, especially younger people who lack years in the workforce, should express gratitude and be thankful for a paycheck and not concerned with other perks or rewards.

Millennials do not equate a large paycheck with job satisfaction. In a Brookings Institute study, over 60 percent of millennials claim that "they would rather make \$40,000 a year at a job they love than \$100,000 a year at a job they think is boring." According to the study, *Understanding a Misunderstood Generation*, the millennials feel pay is not as important as having more intangible benefits.²⁰ Almost half of the millennial generation would rather not have a job than work at a job they despised.²¹

A paycheck gets people in the front door. What keeps the millennials past their probationary period is more than just a salary. What motivates a person can be as unique as their fingerprint; however, millennials do have some common characteristics to consider when it comes to motivation.

Jaxson (millennial) an inside sales rep for a sports equipment manufacturer, states that, "I work here because I love sports. I work in a cube all day; I am not crazy about that aspect of my job, but the company rewards us and makes it easy to lead a healthy lifestyle, which is important to me. They have a health-wise program with a gym, locker room and showers, which are free to the employees. There is a chiropractor, coach and a personal trainer. Every time you work out with your trainer, you get points and the points add up for additional vacation days. You can also earn extra points by getting a physical every year or visiting the dentist. One of the sales reps lost a considerable amount of weight using a Fitbit bracelet, so the company got everybody one. The company also encourages everyone to be smoke-free."

Not all organizations can afford as many perks as Jaxson's employer, but every company can create a bonus program that is not expensive, but still has value for millennials. For example, smaller companies allow employees to take a longer lunch if they are taking an exercise class during their lunch break.

Comp days are strong motivators for the millennial generation because it allows them flexibility. If your company can't afford to allow someone off for an entire day, give "slack hours;" time during the day when the employee can do whatever they want; such as update their social media, read, watch their dog online via their nanny-cam or take a nap.

Other groups have small perks to create a happier work environment. Have a dry cleaning service pick up at the office, a massage therapist come in to give 15-minute chair massages, or (my favorite), bring in free food. These are the types of rewards that make the workplace a pleasant place to be.

The key to motivating the millennial generation is leaving the final look and feel of the reward in their hands. The more ownership they have over the reward, whether it's staying healthy, receiving flex-time or in-office perks, the greater the value, i.e., more motivating for the millennial generation.

They want their career and lifestyle to complement each other, they want TEQ, and they want to be motivated differently. They also want to make a difference and influence great change moving into the future. The good news for HR is that the millennials recognize that the greatest impact they can have on the world is through their employer. When we are willing to work differently with each other, only then will we take multiple generations and truly work successfully as one.

Endnotes

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About the Author



Meagan Johnson is a generational expert, speaker, and co-author of the bestselling book *Generations Inc., From Boomers To Linksters Managing the Friction Between Generations at Work*. She is the de-facto expert when it comes to navigating the maze of generational quandaries that every organization faces. Known as the "Generational Humorist," she has entertained and educated thousands of audience members from all around the globe. Among her many satisfied clients are SHRM, Dairy Queen, Burger King, Cadillac, American Express, Harley-Davidson, Monster.com, and the CIA (although the work she did at the CIA is classified!). A third-generation native of Phoenix AZ, she lives with her tall husband and four dogs, who have a total of 15 legs (not including the husband)... you do the math! Want to know more? You can reach her at Meagan@MeaganJohnson.com.