

A photograph of a young woman with dark hair, smiling and pointing her right index finger upwards. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. The background shows other people in a blurred setting.

The Secret Truth About Motivating Millennials

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To individuals already in the workforce, the newer generations of workers may seem lazy and entitled. It is suggested that changes in technology, along with the emergence of social media and smart phones, are in part responsible for these observed differences in Millennial workers.

However, technology has the potential to impact working styles in a significant way, and progress shouldn't be misinterpreted for laziness or apathy. Similarly, a generation raised on social media shouldn't be associated with narcissism because of mere access to a different communication network.

This whitepaper aims to demonstrate that generational stereotypes do more harm than good and ultimately prohibit leaders from building meaningful relationships with employees. It also presents an alternative view on generational affinity that suggests the inherent motivations of all workers contain similarities, across all generations.

The Negative Impact Of Generational Stereotypes



Generational feuding is a longstanding tradition, yet the hostility toward younger workers these days feels more pervasive than ever before. When issues arise that appear common within a particular age group, organizational leaders may make the mistake of blaming the workers' generation for being comprised of a certain type of individual.

In some instances, Millennials who achieve success in their own way challenge the corporate world's long standing recipe for

"how to make it". As a result, the perception of how to achieve success puts time-tested methods of high performance at risk. This may lead to fear-based stereotyping that further distances the generations from one another at work.

In reality, casting generational stereotypes not only prohibits relationships and understanding, it also limits an organization from getting to the root of various key issues and imperatives. Blaming individual's generational membership provides a scapegoat for failing to uncover root issues and diagnosing meaningful changes that might resolve common issues.

Breaking Down Generational Biases



Generational biases can occur within organizations when leaders make broad generalizations about how workers within a certain age group behave. When diagnosing problems, leaders may make assumptions about what members of certain generations will like as a way of tailoring a “one-size-fits-all” solution to a stereotype of what a certain generation prefers.

One of the most strongly supported findings from psychological studies is that of individuating information, which suggests the more time people

of different demographic backgrounds spend getting to know one another, the more they begin to see each other as individuals. Demographic, and in this case generational, stereotypes dissolve and the unique personalities and motivations of individuals become apparent.

For example, Millennials are stereotyped as a highly casual generation. In broad terms, we picture Millennials working in front of tablets inside loud, bustling coffee shops. Their dream job may involve coming in at 11:00 AM, dressed in shorts and flip-flops, while simultaneously holding a latte and their dog’s leash. Boomers, on the



other hand, are stereotyped as traditional nine-to-fivers that only get work done in the office and view face-time as highly important. Broadly speaking, when boomers are out of the office, work isn't getting done.

Just by reading these examples, one realizes the unfairness associated with these kinds of generational stereotypes. Once we get to know individuals beyond the generational stereotypes, we quickly realize that those stereotypes may be true of some, but certainly not most. In fact,

we will likely notice that there are similar motivators among individuals inside both generations.

Generational stereotypes put up barriers to individuals within the organization. Uncovering cross-generational commonalities can be a strong leadership advantage because it gives leaders insights into the true motivations that lie within their teams rather than acting on unproven motivational myths.

Leveraging Individual Motivators



The primary benefit of realizing what motivates an individual vs. what motivates an entire generation of workers is the ability for organizational leaders to leverage those individual motivators. In addition, leaders can leverage cross-generational commonalities in order to scale their efforts toward individuals motivated in the same way.

During times of change, when new corporate imperatives are launched, or when higher performance is desired, managers can tap into individual motivators. This becomes particularly useful when communicating change or new initiatives, structuring teams, and when considering a work context to best utilize the motivators of each individual. A leader is far better equipped to get these things right when they're armed with a deeper understanding of the members of their team than surface-level generational stereotypes.



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