

## Engaging a Modern Workforce

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The most critical issue facing our industry today is attracting and retaining people. At least this is what we continue to hear. However, I think the issue is more nuanced than that and it's important to identify the correct problem in order to solve it. I believe the specific challenge today is with understanding the emerging expectations of a new generation and engaging this generation, which leads to higher retention and reduces the need for recruiting.

Most business owners and senior leaders in our industry are Baby Boomers (55-73) and GenXrs (40-54). I don't see these generations trying to understand the new generation of workers. In fact, I the opposite. They're expecting Millennials (22-38) and GenZrs (22 and under) to "suck it up" and conform to them, not the other way around.

Because of this, these older leaders approach the attract and retain people issue with a focus on getting people in the door (recruitment) and appeasement (their version of retention). After all, that has been a proven formula for their entire lives. Until now.

Some of you are reading this and saying to yourself, "Are you kidding me? These spoiled, lazy, entitled snowflakes who don't show up for interviews need to be understood and coddled even more? Give me a break..." I understand this reaction but I also know that it leads us in the wrong direction.

I know many Baby Boomers who have left the industry – sold their businesses – because they just couldn't deal with it anymore. That's an option. Another option is to open your mind to some new ideas and be open to change. That's a better option, actually. After all, your children and grandchildren are probably Millennials and GenZrs. Wouldn't it be good to understand them and how to engage them in the workforce?

Millennials are now the largest generation of our workforce, over 73 million, making up 40% of all workers today. We need to understand them if we hope to survive. However, much of what has been written about Millennials is not accurate and employers are making bad decisions in an effort to appease these "entitled, lazy, snowflakes."

My two children are Millennials. My daughter is 30 and my son is 29. They are not entitled. They are not lazy. And they are not snowflakes. But they did grow up in very different environment than I did. They are different. Not wrong, but different. That's the point. Every generation is different and if you want to "blame someone" just look in the mirror.

According to Gallup, Millennials are the least engaged generation, which is not an indictment on Millennials but an indictment on us. Only 29% of Millennials are engaged at work. 55% are not engaged, and 16% are actively disengaged. That's not good. In addition, 21% have changed

jobs within the last year, 6 in 10 are open to different job opportunities, and only 50% plant to be with their company one year from now.

Here's the thing. Millennials aren't changing jobs to move up. They're changing jobs in search of an employer who understands them, cares about them, and where they're expectations will be met. They have the luxury of doing so because they can. Millennials are unattached, unconstrained, idealistic, and connected. The reality is that they don't need you and your job. They can go anywhere and do anything. That's not a bad thing, but it is different.

My brothers and sisters (Baby Boomers) live in the Grand Rapids area within a few miles of each other, and near our childhood home. However, our children are dispersed around the world. My daughter started a coaching business and relocated to Los Angeles after building a successful real estate business in Boston. My son is doing mission work in Bogota, Columbia, where my first grandchild was born. This is how Millennials roll.

According to extensive Gallup research, there are six emerging workplace expectations of Millennials. These are six big shifts that every employer needs to be aware of and react to.

### **My Paycheck > My Purpose**

Previous generations would endure a job for decades simply to earn a paycheck. Those days are over. The next generation wants to know that their work has meaning. The mission matters. Compensation needs to be fair but it's not the driving factor that it once was. It has never been more important to develop a clear and compelling mission; one that is true and meaningful. Patrick Lencioni's book, [The Advantage](#), nicely explains how to approach discovering your mission. Why is this important?

Anyone who volunteers their time or financially supports a cause, only does so when they are in full support of the particular cause. Giving of your time, talent, and treasure in exchange for nothing in return only feels good when you believe in the cause. Mission matters. When there is a clear mission that really matters, work becomes much more than just a paycheck. And, there is less focus on pay, benefits, and "what's in it for me." Less whining and more effort. Sign me up!

### **My Satisfaction > My Development**

Despite what you read in some articles Millennials do not want to be coddled. It was my generation that was the "me generation," focused on ourselves. Millennials are insulted by meaningless freebies. In fact, these patronizing attempts will only backfire. What they really want is to be developed on a clear path. They want to grow, learn, and improve. They expect to be invested in and provided a road map for development and support along the way.

Today's successful employers are talking about development plans in their job postings, interviews, on-boarding processes, and coaching sessions. Development is an expectation and a promise from day one. Is that a bad thing? Absolutely not. But it is different.

According to the [Gallup State of the American Workforce Report](#), lack of development and career growth opportunities is the number one reason employees leave a job.

### **My Boss > My Coach**

Previous generations had bosses that would appear periodically, bark orders, and then leave. That was normal. Today's leader is expected to be more of a coach who takes time to invest personally in each relationship. Despite what you hear about Millennials, they do not want to be handled softly in some condescending way. They expect a coach who is tough, demanding, and who will drive them to be the best versions of themselves. Anyone who played sports understands that a great coach isn't a softy, who is overly empathetic, and accepts every lame excuse.

Today's leaders need to be great coaches. This includes everyone in a supervisory position, from crew leaders on up. A great coach is actively involved, present, engaged. Coaching is more than the next fad. Great coaches have been around for a long time, but they were rare. Today, every supervisor needs to be a great coach. How do we make that happen? GrowTheBench.com has some great course material to get you started.

### **My Annual Review > My Ongoing Conversations**

Previous generations accepted what has become a poster child for bad management practices – the dreaded annual review. If you've ever endured one of these, you know what I mean. Fortunately, a much better replacement is regular, ongoing feedback between a manager and his or her subordinates, which allows for minor corrections in real time and opportunities to acknowledge what is going well.

In corporate America, a quarterly feedback session is the replacement for the annual review. This is an informal conversation between a supervisor and a subordinate, focused on support and development. We have developed a nice template that you made adopt. Our gift to you.

If you haven't read Gino Wickman's book, [Traction](#), I highly recommend it. He explains his EOS process and the magic of quarterly timeframes to drive performance and accountability. This same process is magic for an employee and his or her supervisor.

### **My Weaknesses > My Strengths**

Strengths-based leadership has replaced an outdated remedial approach that never made any sense. Traditional educational and management approaches have focused on a person's

deficiencies and weaknesses. Instead of developing talents, we have tried to remediate our shortcomings. What a waste of misguided effort.

We all have natural talents. Why not take this natural talent and develop it into something amazing? This is what the next generation is expecting from their employers.

The best tool I'm aware of for discovering natural talent is the CliftonStrengths assessment, combined with supplemental personality assessments like EVERYTHING DiSC. These provide life-changing insights into the uniqueness of the individual and offer tools for teams and companies to leverage these unique talents. My company offers training and coaching in conjunction with both of these assessment tools, if you're interested.

### **My Job > My Life**

The next generation does not approach the world in the compartmentalized way that my generation did. Work, family, and personal lives are all intertwined. This is why a bad job is not tolerable for a Millennial where it was for my generation.

This shows up in some interesting ways, including with parental involvement. According to Gallup, 75% of Millennials involve family and friends in career/job decisions. Employers who embrace this involvement and actually facilitate it are miles ahead of their competitors.

You might be saying to yourself, "Wow! That's a lot. Is it worth it?" Great question. According to Gallup, companies in the top quartile of engagement have:

- 21% higher profitability
- 17% higher productivity
- 70% fewer safety incidents
- 24% - 59% lower turnover, depending on annual turnover rate
- 40% fewer defects
- 41% less absenteeism

If you're wondering, employee engagement may be quantified by using a tool called the Q12. This is an online assessment that will provide you with engagement scores in 12 areas for the company as a whole or by any subset (team, branch, division, manager, crew, etc.). Very powerful information, especially if tied to incentive compensation.

Highly-engaged employees are less likely to leave, reducing your need to recruit replacements. They also become your best recruiters. Apply the concepts of The Ultimate Question to your people. An employee who is a 9 or 10 will actively recruit for you because they love their job, they're all in with the company, its mission, and just can't help themselves but tell everyone they know about it. No referral bonus needed. Thank you very much.

Are you up for a good challenge? Is this the year that you will decide to embrace a new generation of workers? I hope you will. After all, what's the alternative?

Now go forth.

### **Resources Mentioned**

GrowTheBench offer – 30-day free all-access pass, available at [WNLA.GrowTheBench.com](http://WNLA.GrowTheBench.com)

The Advantage by Patrick Lencioni

Traction by Gino Wickman

CliftonStrengths by Gallup

EVERYTHING DiSC by Wiley

The Ultimate Question by Frederick Reinheld

Quarterly Coaching Template – see attached