

Millennial Mojo - How to bridge the generational gap through empathy

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Millennials are not to be ignored. 16-35 year olds are the largest generation, and in less than two years they will outspend baby boomers. The future looks bright for those embracing millennial culture.

One can best influence the actions of millennials by being relevant and relatable. Drawing comparisons to boomers often evokes negativity and condescension toward youth—a tendency that repeats itself with every generation. In any relationship, one must develop empathy. That begins by recognizing the events that shape millennial values.

9/11, the collapse of Wall Street, rising cost of education, and a decreasing number of jobs is largely the palette from which millennials paint. PEW Research reports that interests in religion and military have hit an all-time low, likely due to terrorism emphasizing religious conflict and the astronomical cost of war. Meaningful activities outweigh profit since high finance equates to corporate greed. Millennials are the most educated generation to date, but heavily scrutinize the value of highly regarded institutions that ultimately drown students in a sea of debt. Why invest in the future when the promise has defaulted?

Millennials are truth seekers who value people and purpose over products and profits. They are skeptical of authority, lack patience for bureaucracy, and relate best to peers within an electronic social context. They are not as technologically savvy as they are *technologically transparent*—mobile devices are extensions of their beings and a seamless means for self-expression to cultivate social circles. Previous generations found like-minded friends locally by wearing sports team jerseys and rock band t-shirts. Today, we broadcast “likes” globally on social media and instantly engage with respondents. Millennials are consequently the most socially connected and diverse generation.

To attract them, virtually all correspondence should be mobile friendly and channeled through social media, conveying socially responsible messages over promotional jargon. Yesterday’s advertising campaigns no longer cut it. Many activities are fun, but “fun” and “adventure” are not millennial buzz words—they are assumed. The promise of jobs should be a draw, but millennials have been burned repeatedly by false hopes. However, personal development and changing the world remain lures.

While every generalization has exceptions, certain cultures and traditions are losing relevance. Innovation must eclipse nostalgia, and workplace hierarchies (including uniforms) should make way for independent identities and individual achievements.

The silent generation worked hard to support their families while baby boomers work long hours to advance their careers. Millennials work comfortably and view going to work as a results-oriented endeavor rather than a location-based or punch clock activity. They work 24/7 when motivated by the larger vision.

I am optimistic about a future under the leadership of millennials.