

Millennials are showing up on the radar screens of businesses around the world. They have entered the workforce with higher expectations and radically different goals than their forerunners. Although, they are firmly established in the workplace and a force to be reckoned with, many also consider them to be lazy, entitled narcissists, and self-interested. Known to be detached from institutions, but closely networked with friends, millennials are way different from their predecessors. According to a Great Kiwi Fairness Debate survey of 500 people, millennials are the least likely to offer you a cup of tea or pay for a round of drinks, and they score lower than their older counterparts in almost every social situation.

While Gen-Y is engulfed into several misnomers, this **BUSINESS MANAGER** Roundtable attempts to break the myth and look at the other side of this new breed of employees. A panel of senior leaders and academicians

Dr. Poornima Gupta,

Associate Professor - Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource Management, Great Lakes Institute of Management,

Rachna Mukherjee, Chief HR, Schneider Electric India,

Ajay Nair, Chief

Administration Officer, Housing.com and **Rohit**

Aggarwal, CEO, Koenig Solutions get together in this forum to discuss the best possible ways to manage this workforce.

DECODING GEN-Y



"Knowing the millennial: Perception versus reality"

Cover Feature



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Do you think millennials can actually become loyal, hard-working, reliable employees? What are your experiences of working with the millennial?

Dr. Poornima Gupta: Yes. They can be loyal, hardworking and reliable, may be not to the organization, but to their chosen career. If they do not appear to be so, may be organizations are not doing right things to keep them. What worked in the past may not work.

Gen-Y are more focussed in what they want from life and are not scared to go and get it. They go for instant gratification. They cannot wait! They expect instant feedback rather than wait for formal reviews. They get disheartened or disengaged if they do not see immediate rewards for their performance. For them everything is in the now. They do not like rigid structures of hierarchy and authority. They work better in organic structures than mechanical in organizations.

Gen-Y has grown up with parents who were working hard to make ends meet. This has given them an appreciation of work life balance. They do not hesitate to demand it.

Rachna Mukherjee: Each generation brings with them their own set of strengths and experiences. Today's millennials also carry a very unique and in-demand skill set that is the need of the hour. If they are given the right platform and encouraged to share their knowledge and views, they can ensure a huge amount of knowledge transfer, which is both a successful 'download' of institutional knowledge and an 'upload' of fresh perspectives, ideas and abilities. According to me, millennials want to work in companies that support a healthy work/life balance and provide technology that helps them to work and collaborate in a situation of flexibility of time and place. Their loyalty and reliability is also dependant on getting the right opportunities for development and growth as these are key priority areas for millennials. As Salvador Dali said, "intelligence without ambition is a bird without wings". Millennials seem to be especially conscious of this.

Ajay Nair: The millennials are a dynamic and ambitious breed of workforce who are constantly rewriting the rules of workplace decorum. They have a strong sense of knowing the 'why' and the 'how' of the task at hand.

- ◆ **Loyalty-** Millennial's loyalty entirely depends on the experience provided to them at a work place. There needs to be a high clarity in expectations on both sides and work relations need to be an equal amount of give and take. When both employer and the millennial mutually respect these points, loyalty isn't a concern.
- ◆ **Hardworking:** More than being hard-workers, millennials are smart workers. They believe in using just the adequate amount of knowledge, time and resources to ensure quicker and specific results, to tasks assigned to them, as they are hungry for more!
- ◆ **Reliable employees:** Yes, millennials are reliable. Like any other generation their reliability is to the extent that responsibility and accountability are harnessed and entrusted with them for accomplishing an assigned job.

Rohit Aggarwal: Yes, they can. They think differently, behave differently, but if understood properly, they can be even more productive than the older generation. They might not be loyal to an individual or institution, but they can be loyal to a cause. They don't rely only on remuneration but also

on high-value outcomes such as impact on society and environment.

They might not be as reliable as the older generation but they can still achieve their goals. This Gen-Y is also great at multi-tasking and accepts criticism constructively. Being socially connected and technologically inclined, (as in instant messaging, texting, and Web surfing) makes them efficient, productive and competent employees.

The values and beliefs of these two generations suggest different ideals in the workplace. Generation X believes, "work is a thing you do to have a life (work doesn't define their life). Gen-Y on the other hand seems to want a work-life balance with flexibility to define who they are in their job. How can we bring parity while dealing with cross generation workforce?

Dr. Poornima Gupta: For millennials, the line between work and home doesn't really exist. They just want to spend their time in meaningful and useful ways, no matter where they are. Gen-Y has grown up with parents who were working hard to make ends meet. This has given them an appreciation of work life balance. They do not hesitate to demand it. The challenge is to manage both Gen-X and Gen-Y where Gen-X believe in working hard even at the expense of health and family. Gen-Y are more used to working with women along side of in leadership roles. Women do not expect to be treated differently than their male counterparts. Their expectations from work and home are similar. In order to maintain parity, flexible work options should be available. Sensitivity training for the Gen-X may be desirable to cultivate the tolerance for technology. Older employees should learn to be open to the fresh perspectives offered by younger employees. Since Gen-Y is very comfortable with social media and instant messaging, they do not understand the need to be face to face to discuss on issues. We need to facilitate mentoring between generations. Younger employees should learn to seek help from more experienced employees.

Rachna Mukherjee: The technology revolution has created an ironic twist in traditional workplaces. We need to understand that today; it is common for a young, entry-level to have a better understanding of technology or some aspect of the operations than his/her

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manager. In my view, "reverse mentoring" is one way in which we can bring parity amongst a cross generation workforce. Organizations should look at this methodology as a unique new way to boost workplace ingenuity for greater productivity and create a business environment that is truly knowledge-driven, engaging and as inclusive. In terms of work-life balance and many other aspects of work, the main priority should be embracing differences - be it individual or across generations. This generational diversity, I believe should lead to a truly efficient cross generation workforce.

Ajay Nair: Each generation's work style has its positives and negatives.

We have to appreciate that the world at large is becoming more nuclear and the speed at which life is moving is faster than it used to be with earlier generations. Given this, it is important that we carry an adequate blend of the positives of both generations while forming a work place which is conducive to cross generational work forces. Whether it's to do with solving a problem, building a business plan, executing sales strategy or purely supporting smooth functioning of business, work for both generations should be defined by common goals of success.

Having said this, work life balance is very important especially that the human quotient/emotions at a work place generally cascades into personal lives and vice versa. Getting both these generations to work together and be able to collaboratively support an organization's needs is where HR and its tools on personality management come handy.

Rohit Aggarwal: Gen-Y has a different perception of jobs. They do not separate work from life. They work beyond office time and also attend to personal work during office time. Cross- generation workforce can coexist by having empathetic policies suitable to both generations.

What is the best way to hire and manage Gen-Y employees?

Dr. Poornima Gupta: Generation Y workers are some of the most independent-minded and tech-savvy workers. They give more importance to having strong friendships with co-workers and bosses. They like job flexibility. Gen-Ys not only want flexible hours and schedules, but remote work options because of their perception of the never-ending intersection of work and life. They value both professional and personal growth

opportunities. They also tend to get bored easily and seek out new things. They want employers that offer tuition reimbursement, sabbaticals, and other growth possibilities. They are drawn by competitive salaries. Gen-Ys have more debt (both student loans and credit cards) than any previous generation, and they demand a salary that not only recognizes their contributions, but also helps them pay down the debt. Gen-Ys were usually pampered and raised in a bubble of constant praise and recognition from their families (unlike Gen-X, where spare the rod, spoil the child maxim prevailed), and so this kind of constant reinforcement and recognition is something they expect. So a company having a transparent and fair recognition system would attract Gen-Y more.

Rachna Mukherjee: We cannot define a single way as the best way to hire and manage a Gen-Y employee. However, organizations need to keep in mind the following points if they are keen to retain millennials:

Flexible work timings/places - When it comes to where and how work gets done, the millennial generation loves freedom of choice.

Focus on technology and innovation - Organizations should prioritize practices like BYOD and the provision of more mobile and web-based systems in order to attract and retain millennials.

Provide engaging and interactive on boarding and ongoing training - Companies are trying some internal strategies to speed up the development and keep the interest of millennials going strong, through development around leadership programs; accelerated skill development programs; corporate YouTube Channels; networking with senior managers; and mentorship programs. At Schneider Electric, our blended learning approach, which combines coaching, mentoring, networking and real time project experience, helps us enhance the achievement orientation of our millennial workforce.

Ajay Nair: Hiring of generation Y should ideally be done through multiple informal interviews, especially with the team/managers they will be working with, keeping in mind transparency and clarity. These interviews are most effective when around business simulation exercises. Not only does it create excitement within an employee, but it also gives a perspective of how the employee will respond in given similar situation. On managing such employees, it must be clear that expectations are on a give and take basis. We

should also be aware that as managers they expect us to take care of their career. Gone are the days of seniority awards and longevity in jobs which today amongst millennials is around two- three years. If the job cannot challenge them, lateral or vertical growth is not in horizon, they will find other options.

Rohit Aggarwal: This generation is a little arduous to manage. This generation of employees endeavours challenging tasks and appreciates some amount of freedom and space to work; they prefer work-from-home option and do not like sitting all day in a cubicle.

To motivate Gen Y employees, various volunteering programs for social causes should be made available. Millennials also have a lavish lifestyle which raises their salary expectations.

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How can managers train and motivate this next generation of employees so that their strengths become a benefit to the company?

Dr. Poornima Gupta: They need to continuously learn. Give them opportunities to upgrade their knowledge. Challenge them with special assignments beyond their job descriptions. Create instant recognitions programs, where a work well done gets appreciated instantaneously. Let them be the voice on the social media for the company. Give them space to come up with innovative solutions to problems we did not even know existed. Management styles must be Theory Y for Gen-Y. They also have a very strong entrepreneurial focus, with many planning to start their own businesses (because they can control their own fate). Employers can retain workers longer -- while leveraging that entrepreneurial spirit -- by developing incubator and intrapreneurship programs and opportunities.

Ajay Nair: The strength of this generation typically lies in its ability to multi-task and innovatively look at solutions to larger problems. In order to train such employees it's important that there is clear understanding of their aspirations and career goals. It's also important to work around mid-term career maps and to motivate them as they need to be frequently challenged with problem statements that require resolution through traditional and out of box thinking.

Moreover, recognition and reward, new assignments, higher education, cross functional task force, etc., are much more

appreciated than a mere 'pat on the back' and/or the traditional star awards.

Rohit Aggarwal: Millennials are goal oriented and entrepreneurial. They are more participative than the earlier generations at workplace. Their theory of motivation lies behind "what's next". Work to the millennials brings a kind of fulfilment to them.

Gen-Y employees can be motivated with continuous flow of challenging tasks, empowerment, productive pipelines of assignments along with equitable rewards and recognitions at the workplace. They learn on the job and are also good in self-learning tools or game-based learning. Also, organizations need to pay them well but make them work hard and smart to set the dough.

Gen-Y employees are motivated when given the freedom to work as they please. These employees do not want a manager telling them what to do at every second, but they do desire regular feedback. How critical has it become for organizations to embrace transparency as the younger generations are demanding it?

Dr. Poornima Gupta: This generation is also called the tech generation because most of the innovations in technology occurred during their formative years. They have grown with technology and have seen their parents struggle with the same. As such they trust their peers more than their parents and similarly their superiors. They do not wish to be instructed as they believe they can learn better on their own with the technology available aplenty. They like teamwork and feedback. They prefer to know how they are doing now and not later. They wish to be able to understand how their performance will be evaluated up front. They do not like ambiguity. Gen Y does not hesitate to go to his manager and demand feedback. Therefore transparency is mandatory for gen Y to perform to their optimum level.

Give them a voice. Regardless of seniority in age or experience, give all employees a forum to present their ideas.

Rachna Mukherjee: Millennials want to align their values and interests to the work they do and, more importantly, who they are working for. By providing millennials with a platform on which they can share their ideas with peers and senior stakeholders, you provide them with a sense of empowerment / enablement. The receptivity of the organization for these ideas and the encouragement to share them gives millennials a sense of fulfilment which contributes to job satisfaction. This in turn has a positive impact on the organization.

Ajay Nair: The youth today are looking for working environments where they can demonstrate their skills/potential instead of

fitting into a set regime. Their free, restless and relentless spirit cannot be contained and this is evident from the way they run their enterprises, to the way they design their workplaces and how they face crisis- there's an assertive streak ahead of them.

For generation Y, inspired by globalisation, a workplace is where they spend most of their waking hours and hence, want to make optimum use of time, energy, mind and talent. Further, they yearn to actively participate in the decision-making process. While, helping co-workers gives them a sense of pride, having a say in matters of consequence, gives them a sense of power. Having said that, millennials are constantly seeking newer avenues and opportunities to explore and harness their potential and capabilities. The eagerness to do more and try more is daring them to showcase skills and prove their worth, as they see it. The desire is not to get promoted to the senior position, but aim for key leadership positions in a healthy spirit. Hence is the need to embrace a more transparent framework within the organization.

Rohit Aggarwal: Transparency is non-negotiable for the millennial. Born in the internet age, they expect transparency in all decisions. Hiding anything is indicative of wrong-doing for them and is very demotivating. Consider the flak received by Hillary Clinton for using personal mail for official purpose and allegedly trying to hide facts.

How best can managers challenge the younger generation and keep them engaged and interested in their jobs?

Dr. Poornima Gupta: Focus on the results rather than the way the work gets done. If an employee wishes to stay at home and complete the task, make it possible to do so. If he wishes to come in and work at midnight, well, let him. This generation does not follow the timetable as older ones did. For them, if they are productive at 6 am, they prefer to work at that time rather than to commute to office for two hours. They are comfortable with the technology and can work anywhere. Enable them to do so. This would ensure their loyalty as their creative juices continue to flow and are not hindered by the traditional constraints of time and place. They are also more comfortable working in teams rather than be told what to do. They prefer guidance instead of instructions.

They even learn differently. Gen-X was more comfortable with the traditional styles of learning like classroom and power points. Gen-Y learn better through more interactive technology like gamification, storytelling, etc.

Finally, we should not generalise character issues like immaturity, laziness or intractability with generational traits. Where Gen-X may see a 60-hour work week as a prerequisite to achieving success, most

Millennials might prefer reasonable working hours-with some bouts of overtime when required. The latter may also voluntarily choose to make up the time in unstructured settings like working at a coffee shop on weekends.

Rachna Mukherjee: At Schneider Electric India, our managers enable individual growth and ensure that employees continue to expand professionally through a variety of avenues, largely following the 70:20:10 philosophy of development. For that to happen, we encourage and foster a learning environment and encourage a learning mindset amongst all our employees. A dynamic business environment

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brings new challenges everyday which requires new thinking and fresh ideas. This is a wonderful platform on which we can engage, inspire and develop millennials. Our philosophy and process of role change and career evolution every three years goes a long way in engaging our employees.

Ajay Nair: While undertaking task at work place to achieve larger business goals, managers should be able to break task into problem statements and cascade it down to generation Y to the extent possible. It's also advisable that a small portion of employees' time/ efforts/ valuation is credited to their creativity and innovation. Each problem statement will need clarity in its association with the larger picture. On its own, it's a problem statement with no meaning and with association it's clear on its impact to business.

Rohit Aggarwal: There should be a culture of open communication. Their intent, aspirations, and talent should be given due respect. An environment of healthy competition and culture of meritocracy must be created. They must be constantly challenged for higher targets.

They must be provided all the necessary resources they need to accomplish the defined goals. The company's expectations from them, values and vision of the company must be clearly stated. The best practice to keep employees closely bonded to an organization is to understand their pain points as well. Since this generation is hungry for knowledge and keen on learning new things, creating an environment of learning and innovation brings a feeling of belongingness with the company. 