



Ten Tips to Get the Most out of a Millennial in Your Business

By Jackie Flint-Zenhye

More than one in three Americans in the labor force are millennials (those ages 22 to 37), according to a Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data. As of 2017, more than 56 million millennials were employed or seeking employment. Like every generation before them, millennials will continue to flood the workforce, and define the impact they have on our businesses for decades to come.

As the generation that was raised amid rapid technology growth, this cohort is well adept to constant change, fierce competition, rapid development and instant gratification. There is a lot of negative media circulating today about the challenges older generations are facing when managing millennials, but like any other business challenge, the key to a successful path forward lays in careful thought and analysis. The very environment that millennials grew up in is a perfect parallel to today's business environment of rapid change, fierce competition and the need for defined results. The same attributes that may be seen as negative in millennials can be alternatively viewed through a positive lens if the managerial approach is designed to meet the target audience. As both a millennial manager and employee myself, I would like to offer you my own anecdotal

suggestions on how you can get the most out of your millennial employees and position them to help take your business to the next level.

I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have enjoyed rapid growth and development in my career, beginning at FENN as an intern right out of school, to serving currently as the director of marketing for FENN's parent company, Right Lane Industries (RLI). Career growth and efficacy relies largely on the individual, but their company and management can also play a crucial role in creating the perfect formula for a successful individual. I have been lucky enough to work for some incredibly talented managers who gave me every opportunity to learn, grow and push myself to succeed. Today as a manager myself, I continue to use and implement some of the tried and true strategies that worked so well to help me succeed.

1 Recognize the importance of company culture — I give FENN, RLI and the people that I work and have worked for a lot of credit. As many know, FENN has experienced new ownership and a major brand transformation in the last several years. This time represented a critical opportunity for change and growth as a whole company, and leadership bravely acknowledged that the organization's needed to evolve — on all fronts. From FENN's products to its culture, the company took a decidedly different and modernized approach to the way it did business. I am proud to have been a part of that transformation and personally contributed to it, but in fairness, this progressive culture also very much contributed to me. I do my best to remember the influential people and factors (many of which are outlined in this article) that helped me thrive in my own career, so I can pay it forward. Like anything, you get out what you put in — so I try to check in with myself regularly to ask what I might do to positively contribute to my company's work environment.

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2 Equal Opportunity (no... really!)

—One of the most valuable gifts FENN has given to me as a millennial and a woman is equality. While it should be a "given" in today's day and age, this is not always the case. As a young female entering what is still a very male dominated industry, I appreciate that I was given a fair chance to work hard, prove my value to the organization, take risks and show success. Being treated like an equal regardless of the demographics of my colleagues enabled me to focus on nothing but rising up for the business. Because my own leaders were willing to give me the opportunity to grow, I remain cognizant of that and keep an eye out for occasions to extend that same opportunity to others. Sometimes a simple chance can change the course of someone's career.

3 Hire the right people — Every

generation will have a variety of talent, and the key to building a business for the long run is to identify, grow and groom the best talent from each generation to sustain the future. It is important to put in the work upfront to identify and hire the best individuals in the market. While there are plenty of millennials in the job market, you should only consider the best and most dynamic millennials of the group, or "A players." I will borrow a phrase from my boss and mentor, Ryan Cutter: "Hire smart; manage easy." Which means, always go with your gut; it knows. Be picky. Be selective. Hire people who have integrity

and care about their job and community. Beyond accessing skill and trade related qualifications, I try to ask interview questions that reveal character, and focus heavily on that. In the end, skills can be taught, but character is inherent. Examples include "What's a big mistake you've made in the past, and how was it handled?" "Who has been a mentor in your life and how did they influence you?" and "Explain a time you experienced conflict in the workplace and how did you handle it?" Everyone will make mistakes or have conflict in their career, but we all know that the way these situations are handled can be career defining. I seek in millennials the same qualities I seek in myself— level headedness, a tenacious "can do" attitude, emotional intelligence, the ability to self-critique, and an insatiable drive to win. These basic guidelines have helped me hire some amazing, highly productive "A player" millennial employees. So, the next time you are looking to hire or access a millennial ask yourself, "Is this an A player?" If the answer is no, move on.

4 Outline potential career paths — “A” players are the ones that will do the most for your organization, but they are also the easiest to lose if they can’t see a future and room to grow within your company. Again, if we consider the environment that millennials grew up in, these individuals have access to and are aware of many other options, so to retain great millennial talent, be

sure you continue to give them new challenges, opportunities for growth, and ways to prove they can shine. I suggest making it a point to meet with them to outline possible career paths and opportunities, and when there is a misalignment between your vision and theirs, address it right away. Millennials are best engaged in their career when they feel like there is a path forward and a future for them.

5 Present top talent with the opportunity to shine — Once you have discussed potential career opportunities, challenge your “A player” millennials with projects that help them pursue those goals. When they are challenged and rewarded for their successes individually and publicly, it strengthens their commitment to their job and the organization. I try to isolate the strengths of each individual and provide opportunities that let those strengths shine. Recognizing everyone’s talents and using them to the company’s advantage means everyone wins. Although public praise is great, when a millennial employee does misstep, counsel and provide constructive criticism in private. The old-fashioned style of public embarrassment and criticism is unnecessary and likely far less effective for a millennial.

6 Provide Structure — A framework of expectations is helpful for guiding employees without the need to micromanage them. Millennials like to have confirmation they are doing well and being successful, so outlining their projects, expectations and deadlines helps create that environment. I like to hold a Monday morning meeting with my employees where I will outline projects for the week and go over the expectations and deadlines associated with them. Each employee’s high level weekly tasks are written on a white board in my office so there is no question about what is expected for both parties. This method provides structure and guidance, but also adequate freedom and empowerment to complete the work. After outlining the initial project, I guide employees to be creative, and to be a part of the solution, encouraging “buy in” and a greater commitment to the path forward. I love to see employees getting excited about the solution because they felt like they were a part of it— after all, who doesn’t like to feel like they made a difference at work today?

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7 Provide Regular Leadership & Guidance — Annual reviews aren't the only time to provide feedback and suggestions anymore. Millennials want to look up to, learn from, and receive daily feedback from their leaders. They seek to understand the whole picture, receive open communication, and to know what's happening in the organization. Leaders should plan to spend a lot of time teaching and coaching and be aware of this commitment to millennials when you hire them. Generally speaking, millennials have been raised with a lot of coaching, encouragement and feedback, and inherently expect that as a prerequisite to their success. On a basic level, remind yourself to maintain an open dialogue, check in regularly and find opportunities to offer guidance and advice. Millennials appreciate, look forward to and feed off this.

8 Listen — In an age where their opinions and social media posts can go viral overnight, millennials love to be heard. They love to feel involved, want to make a difference, and seek to have their ideas be part of the solution. I have seen some people react with the opinion that being heard is a “privilege, not a right,” but I encourage you to be open to asking for opinions and listening more. At a time where business is so competitive, and things are constantly changing, a fresh look can provide a new perspective that you may have missed otherwise. Instead of analyzing a problem alone, deciding on a solution and rolling it out to the team, I like to hold group brainstorming sessions to tease out the best answer together.

9 Millennial employees are up for a challenge and change — A refusal to change will not only kill your business, it will also run off your “A” player millennials as well. Millennials enjoy and thrive on change and evolution. With these two characteristics being a requirement for any successful business

today, take advantage of that parallel. Challenge millennials to help your business evolve, and encourage them to come up with new processes, products or methods to sell those. If you bore and ignore a millennial, they will disengage — if you challenge them to come up with the next big thing—they will generally rise to the occasion and appreciate the opportunity. I have

been lucky enough to have worked for a few amazing people in my career who challenged me to create change. Looking back, the projects seemed a bit daunting for my age and experience, but with trust, guidance and mentoring, I dove in, learned a whole lot and enjoyed making valuable contributions to the organization.

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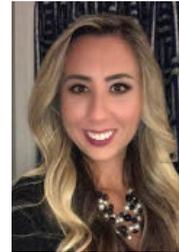
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10 Provide flexible workplace hours — Millennials view a job with strict 8-to-5 hours, as “old school” and unappealing. Putting a box around millennials means you put a box around their enthusiasm and output as well. Millennials have been raised to be “super multi-taskers,” but appreciate flexibility to deliver their results. My employer has always been flexible with me, and this apparent perk has only strengthened my commitment to deliver results because I have felt trusted and appreciated. If I have nothing pre-scheduled, my workday start or end times may fluctuate, but I do not

take the flexibility for granted. I am often found working nights and weekends to stay ahead of my workload and I am happy to put in additional hours for a company that appreciates and trusts me. I am always sure to communicate the same trust and expectations to my millennial employees and have enjoyed great results by loosening the reins and offering freedom to deliver on their weekly assignments.

Millennials grew up in an era where technology, education and social norms differed greatly from the generation that preceded it. Naturally, some overarching group characteristics have developed as a result of

their environment, but this doesn't mean the millions of millennials in the workforce can't be desirable employees. By taking a moment to understand who the audience is and how to appeal to them, you can build the strong, highly productive workforce you need to maintain for the long term success of the business. ■



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