

# Why Your Millennial Employees Could be the Best Thing that Ever Happened to Your Business

by Carl F. Hicks, Jr.



*My client, Jim, recently told me about an incident with one of his younger employees that still had him shaking his head. At Jim's request, Kevin, 25 years old and fresh out of grad school, had readily agreed to swap one of his planned Christmas-week vacation days*

*with a co-worker and come in to do some important database work before the fiscal year closed. Jim had been grateful. But on the appointed day the gratitude slowly turned into annoyance: Kevin, it seemed, was a no-show.*

*Shortly after 2:00, Jim spotted Kevin settling into his cubicle. He approached Kevin and inquired about his tardiness. He'd been counting on him, Jim explained, and was disappointed in Kevin's cavalier attitude about a project he knew was deadline-critical. Kevin listened quietly. "No worries, Jim," Kevin replied. "I'll be here until I finish up the work. My girlfriend and I had made shopping and lunch plans for today, and I didn't want to break them. I figure, what difference if I do the project from 9 til 6, or from 2 til 11, so long as it gets done. Right?"*

*"Well, I wish I'd known that was your plan," Jim finally muttered, and left Kevin's office to collect his thoughts. What exactly was he so annoyed about? That Kevin hadn't asked his permission to rearrange his work hours for the day, or that Jim hadn't made clear his expectations on that score? That Kevin hadn't followed the rules, or that – despite his brief tenure -- he'd felt empowered to devise a few (not unreasonable) ones of his own?*

Millennials -- the generation born between 1980 and 2000 -- are certainly not wanting for attention. We've all seen an avalanche of books, opinion pieces, surveys and demographic forecasts about this group cross our desks over the past few years. As a management consultant

and executive coach, three statistics about this age cohort grabbed me by the collar: 1) Millennials will make up 50 percent of the American workforce by the year 2020; 2) it costs a company between \$15,000 and \$25,000 to replace each Millennial employee it loses; and 3) the average post-college Millennial will leave her company just 27 months after she arrives (about half the average tenure for all U.S. employees).

Clearly, we need to recognize the unique talents and perspectives Millennials bring to employers. We also need to understand why they join companies, how they want to be treated once they're there, and what makes them *stay*. I recently had the chance to put faces on the data: while facilitating a year-long leadership development program at a fast-growing software company, I met monthly with a group of employees considered "high potential 25-and-unders." It convinced me that strategic acquisition, development, and retention of talented Millennials can help all boats rise. Here's why...

### **People are Millennials' priority.**

While many Baby Boomers considered "workaholic" as a badge of honor, Millennials view work as a necessary means to the lifestyle they desire rather than an end in itself. They place a high priority on time spent with family and friends, and expect the "work-life balance" that will allow them to have it. That means they want flexibility in their work schedules – particularly how and when the work gets done. Not surprisingly, flexibility in work hours has been shown to improve satisfaction, quality of work, and loyalty for *all* employees. But don't view Millennials as slackers: a recent Pew Center study showed 73 percent of American Millennials believe that working hard is the key to getting ahead.

### **Millennials are digital trailblazers.**

The first generation raised with the internet and mobile phones, Millennials don't so much *use* technology as *live* in it. Their 24/7 assimilation of social media and mobile computing means your Millennial employees are as likely to identify opportunities for leveraging technology to meet the goals of your business as to enhance their personal lives. And despite the many hours this group spends communicating with personal contacts through text messages, email, and social media, their workplace transactions are another story: Millennials share Gen X and Boomer preferences for face-to-face meetings with co-workers and managers, with email coming in a distant second for *all three* generational groups.

"I believe a balanced life is essential, and I try to make sure all of our employees know that and live that way. It's crucial to me as a manager that I help ensure that our employees are as successful as our customers and partners."

- Marc Benioff, Chairman and CEO at Salesforce.com

## Millennials want to “do good” in the world.

Millennials’ reputation for self-absorption is contradicted by their high rate of volunteerism and charitable giving. So, too, these young people seek “purpose” in their work lives, and want to work for businesses that share those values. Millennials are motivated to stick with their employer -- and to speak well of their company to friends and family -- based on how much they feel fulfilled by their job, rather than the size of their paychecks.

## Millennials thrive on collaboration and teamwork.

Millennials are social beings. They were exposed early and often to team dynamics in their sports activities and academic group projects throughout their school and college years. They also enjoy collaborating with colleagues in the workplace, and feel they’re likely to give their best work as members of project teams.

## Millennials want to know how they’re doing, and how to do it better.

Millennials want to be continually coached and mentored, not micromanaged. Their inclinations are sound: frequent, informal, and timely feedback from

supervisors has been shown to have a positive impact on business outcomes and employee engagement. Since most of us stay or leave based on our relationships with direct supervisors, frequent dialogue and temperature-taking should be required manager behavior not just with your Millennial employees, but for all workers in your business.

## Millennials want to share their ideas with *all* levels of the organization.

Millennials believe in “meritocracy” over “hierarchy” – they want to know their ideas matter and that they’re heard by top leaders in the organization. Certainly, good managers should help their younger employees understand that “seats at the table” will come as they earn the trust and respect of their colleagues above and beside them. But at the core of Millennials’ expectations is what

“Millennials don’t check their interest in causes at the door; they bring these passions to work.”

- **Derrick Feldmann**,  
President of Achieve; lead  
researcher, *The  
Millennials Impact Report  
2014*.

“We encourage managers to meet with all of their direct reports at least once a week to talk, to give feedback and to get feedback... we need to keep a good, open dialogue with our people and not have them leave the company and make us wonder, ‘Okay, what went wrong?’”

- **Liz Elting**, CEO of  
TransPerfect

every one of your employees should have: a crystal clear understanding of how his/her good work – regardless of job title or years of tenure – is contributing to the strategic goals of the organization.

## Final Thoughts

The most recent Gallup workplace poll reveals that America’s engaged and inspired employees – currently just *one-third* of our total workforce -- “come up with most of the innovative ideas, create most of a company’s new customers, and have the most entrepreneurial energy.” Engaging and inspiring your Millennials – by developing their skills, listening to their ideas, encouraging their energy, confidence and positivity -- will yield a rich pipeline of productive team members, managers, and innovators for your organization’s future. What’s more, those same strong leadership practices will get the best from *all* your employees.



## About the Author:

Carl Hicks consults with and coaches successful executives and business owners who want more. More personal and professional growth. More productivity and profitability. More engaged employees. More quality thinking time. More meaning and happiness. More balance between their Life Style Goals and their Livelihood Goals. Clients range from emerging entrepreneurs to Fortune 100 firms. Carl’s philosophy is reflected in his two latest books: *High Impact Ideas For Your Life* and *Unlock The Growth Potential of Your Organization*.



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“I have never worked for a company that has an upper management team that is so forthcoming and approachable. They are always praising us and you can tell we actually are making a difference in the organization. I love coming to work and doing my job...”

- survey comment from Millennial employee, as reported in Great Rated!'s ranking of the Ten Great Workplaces for Millennials

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