

## 5 Musts to Attract Mission-Motivated Millennials



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**Resource Type:** Risk eNews

**Topic:** HR Risk and Employment Practices, Organizational Culture

While traveling last week an infographic in the Dec 2018/Jan 2019 issue of *Fast Company* caught my eye. Titled “Millennials in the Corner Office, Gen Y Bosses Tell Us How They Lead,” Yasmin Gagne has compiled the results from a survey on millennial leaders conducted by *Fast Company*, Inc., and the career-development site Muse. If the opening lines of the piece—which remind us that “older” millennials turn 40 in 2020—wasn’t attention grabbing enough, the survey stats that followed should pique your interest more:

- Relationships in the workplace matter to millennials: 35% said they “relate to older employees as equals,” and 38% said they “want to learn from older workers.”
- Millennial bosses are champions of transparency: 51% said that companies should practice “active transparency, making all financial information available to employees.”
- A learning mindset trumps other traits: “Is eager to learn” topped the list of traits that are extremely important to millennials who hire. Compared to the trait of learning, only 32% of the millennial bosses cited “has relevant skills” as an extremely important trait for new hires.
- Millennial managers face challenges working with their millennial peers: 19% say their peers require too much attention or feedback; 27% said they take constructive feedback personally; and 20% prefer managing Gen Xers over other colleagues.

### **Banish Stereotypes About Generational Differences**

A tangible takeaway from generational-based surveys is a reminder of the downside risks of buying into stereotypes about any generation of workers, including millennials. Generations are hard to define. If you were born between 1982-84 do you feel more Gen X or millennial? If you’re over 40 chances are you’ve been on both sides of a generational gambit. A cultural generation is a specious definition to begin with. The only agreed-upon generation defined by the demographers of the census bureau is Boomers (1946-1964). Culturally, some of these folks were responsible for the DIY ethic of Gen Xers (with typical birth years ranging from the early 1960s to the early 1980s), and for building the technology companies (Apple, Microsoft, Amazon) that powered the culture of millennials. It’s easy to see why generational boundaries serve as shorthand, in place of a more nuanced narrative. To a large extent the media draws these boundaries to fill catch phrases and satisfy short attention spans. Some of the most common but damaging and unproductive stereotypes we still hear include:

- *You can’t teach an old dog new tricks*: we wrote about this unfortunate expression in [“Unravel Risk Myths and Mysteries”](#) and reminded readers that believing that any colleague is too old, too inexperienced or even too stubborn to learn is dangerous to effective risk management.
- *Millennials are entitled*: This is why they are also job hoppers. We could go on . . . but that would validate what we argue against. We can all agree that millennials get a bad rap.

## Five Musts

After reading the *Fast Company* piece about motivated millennial leaders, it occurred to me that nonprofit organizations can and should do more to attract and make the mission connection with potential millennial hires. Our five NRMC suggestions are:

1. **Make learning new skills a must for all staff:** “Opportunities to learn and grow” top the list of priorities for employees from all generations. Willingness to learn is admirable in anyone. We need to do more to convey that to prospective and current staff. Here’s how:
  - Include professional development goals and activities as an expectation in position descriptions.
  - Ask what your direct reports are learning (and how) in your weekly or bi-weekly check-in conversations.
  - Make certain you’re including an assessment about meeting professional development goals and targets in your performance review process.
2. **Model the commitment to learn:** Your professional development requirements won’t mean much if your team isn’t privy to your personal commitment to learn. Talk about your learning goals, the ways you’re learning and enthusiastically share your “ah ha” learning moments.
3. **Keep it real:** When it comes to selling prospective new hires on your mission use titles that accurately reflect the job, and position descriptions that describe real roles, responsibilities and opportunities. Nothing inspires disillusionment faster than the realization that you were bamboozled—led to believe that your job would be nonstop exposure to high-profile donors, heroic service, and plentiful praise. An [article featured on indeed.com](#) recommends sticking to the three R’s when drafting job descriptions: Responsibilities, Requirements and Rewards.
4. **Remind yourself that it’s a job, not a tattoo.** A job at your nonprofit—no matter how meaningful your mission—is a job, not a lifetime commitment. Look for ways that you might be sending the wrong signals to your staff, such as through off-hand comments about commitment, by withholding job perks and benefits until after an employee reaches a 5 year anniversary, or running down staff members who left after shorter stints with the organization.
5. **Sync what you do with what you say.** An informative [2018 Millennial Survey](#) from Deloitte revealed that only 48% of survey takers believes their corporations behaved ethically, a lower number than prior surveys. If you were to ask your team the same question, what result would you expect? A common concern revealed in employee engagement questions is a disconnect between a nonprofit’s stated values and the way it treats employees. There should be no difference between the two. If there is, ask employees how to bring your practices in line with what you preach.

While these tips were crafted with millennial hires in mind, we believe they are risk-aware tips that apply to your wider pool of potential staff.

It’s time to revise “millennial” as a moniker of youth culture. Whatever you thought a millennial was, it now means an older person. Yes, millennials are aging. Most young people, and certainly all demographers, consider 40 middle aged.

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