

CHIP ESPINOZA  
MICK UKLEJA



# Managing the Millennials

Discover the  
**Core Competencies** for  
**Managing Today's Workforce**



WILEY

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Second Edition

CHIP ESPINOZA  
MICK UKLEJA

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We would like to dedicate *Managing the Millennials: Discover the Core Competencies for Managing Today's Workforce 2e* to Craig Rusch. Craig played the lead role in the research design for the first edition. It was a great day for all of us when Wiley desired to publish our work. But the best memories we have of Craig are traveling the country doing face-to-face interviews. He would beam after we each compared interview notes and enthusiastically shout two phrases over and over—*psychological validity* and *theoretical saturation*! He left us too early, but his work lives on. Thanks, Craig.

## FOREWORD

—Gabrielle Jackson Bosché

Author, *5 Millennial Myths: The Handbook for Managing and  
Motivating Millennials*

Can't we just skip Millennials and start hiring the next generation?

Admit it, the thought has crossed your mind. And guess what? You're not alone! I am asked this question nearly every time I get on stage to speak about Millennials and leadership.

Today's Millennials are painted as entertainment-addicted, entitled twenty-somethings who can't look up from their smartphone to shake your hand.

Millennials aren't the first generation of youth to get a bad rap. If stereotypes were true, every Gen Xer was a grunge kid. Every Baby Boomer was a useless hippie. Every traditionalist was a good-for-nothing greaser.

Generations are not created in a vacuum. They are the imperfect production of parents, pop culture, and politics. Millennials were born into an economic boom and graduated into a major bust. We were raised on the Internet. We live in a world where knowledge is borderless and information platforms keep facts fluid.

Today's managers look at this generation with amusement and confusion. To them, we are terrifying, strange, and inspiring.

A quick Google search on Millennials and your browser is flooded with headlines:

"Millennials expect a raise and promotion in year one." "Here come the Millennials . . . are you ready for their ego?" "Expecting loyalty from Gen Y may be expecting too much."

The critics have it wrong.

When I look out at my generation, I don't see selfish, lazy, and flaky kids. I see individuals passionate about justice, committed to making a difference, and ready to be taken seriously.

Millennials refuse to accept the status quo. We want careers that crisscross industries. We trust leaders with raw authenticity. We crave experiences that last more than moments. Our favorite verbs are *disrupt*, *dream*, *digitize*, and *sustain*.

I graduated from college in 2009. It was the height of the recession and well-paying jobs were hard (i.e., impossible) to come by. But by some luck, I had found one. I would be working in a political consulting firm, preparing for a statewide election in California.

It was my first day on the job. Four weeks prior, I was walking across the graduation stage. That day I was walking into the rest of my life.

Looking behind me, I saw the faces of my parents cheering me on. I could feel the support of my professors, and the pressure to make them proud.

I put one foot in front of the other as I passed through huge glass doors and into my destiny.

The receptionist greeted me in the lobby and asked me to follow her to my office. *I have an office? My friends are still taking fancy coffee orders and I have my own office!* Before I could decide on a color scheme for my new workspace, the receptionist stopped in front of a closed door and pointed. "There you go! Let me know if you need anything."

I looked at the door with anticipation. This was it. I cracked the door and pushed. Before I could rush into my magnificent working quarters, I was hit like a wave with the overwhelming stench of bleach detergent.

There it was. My office. Formerly a cleaning closet, it was now my very own productivity center. Once the fumes subsided, I sat down and made myself at home. I had no idea what I would be doing or what I would be working on, but in that moment, I had made it.

Work was not what I had expected. Office hours were long. Project assignments were complicated. The culture was foreign and boring. Six months later, my manager noticed my mood had changed. He pulled me into his office and did something incredible. He said, "Gabrielle, I know that you probably aren't doing the work you thought you would be doing. I'm sure it isn't as fun or as exciting as you were anticipating." I tried to not agree with him. *Was I getting fired?*

He continued, "But I just wanted to say, thank you. When you serve your clients better, it helps all of us serve our clients too. So, thanks."

That was it. It took 60 seconds to change my understanding of management forever. *Managing the Millennials* will have a similar impact on anyone who reads it.

Chip and Mick have investigated the motivational forces that drive Millennial performance. They have conducted primary research to collect firsthand data on how Millennials communicate. They have developed profound resources for leaders of every industry to create a more generationally inclusive environment.

I want to applaud you for picking this book up. It is the first step to a journey of creating awesomeness at work. Organizations that apply the contents of this book are excelling in their industry, while businesses that refuse to embrace it are being left in the dust.

The only place there is a generation gap is in our heads. Working with corporate management teams has taught me that every employee wants what Millennials want: fulfillment, recognition, appreciation, and compensation.

This book will provide you with incredible insight into managing the next generation. But more than just managing Millennials, this book will fundamentally change how you lead and relate to others.

Get ready to have your mind and your influence rocked. Get ready to finally understand the Millennials.

# I N T R O D U C T I O N

## CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH A DIFFERENT KIND

Raise your hand if you have ever had an encounter at work with a younger employee that left you completely puzzled. Relax. You are not alone!

There are currently four generations at work (Builders, Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials), and three of the generations have been playing nice together for well over a decade. Therefore, our attention will focus on where most of the angst lies—between the new kids on the block (Millennials) and the other age cohorts.

We are constantly amazed at how the topic of “Managing the Millennials” resonates with people. Standing in line for a latte, on a plane, or at a cocktail party, when we talk about our research, it creates a buzz. Although interested in hearing about our findings, people are even more eager to tell their own story. Odds are that if you bought this book, you have your own story. You have lived it, and you have experienced the tension.

A few years ago, we began to notice a growing frustration among managers and business leaders with integrating younger workers into their organizations. Activities that in the past had been relatively straightforward—like recruiting, retaining, and rewarding—now seemed more challenging than ever; and we were

not the only ones who noticed. Newspapers, journals, magazines, niche publications, *60 Minutes*, and even movies have captured the phenomena of the Millennial in the workplace. The stories portrayed reactions that ranged from amazement to incredulity to outrage. These reactions are the result of values and behaviors exhibited by Millennial employees, which cause them to appear distinctly different from their vocational forerunners and which are undermining norms that have supported the workplace for decades.

This book is the result of a two-year study to find out how managers can be successful with their Millennial employees in the face of these challenges. We wanted to “get inside” the relational dynamics. Our objective was to identify behaviors and traits exhibited by Millennials that managers deemed problematic. We interviewed hundreds of managers and employees in a variety of work environments. Data from the interviews were used to build a model, which we explain in the following chapters. The model illustrates the different values held by each generation. It also shows how behaviors exhibited by the holders of those values are often misperceived, and how those misperceptions in turn lead to intergenerational tension. We explain why generations have differing values and how such values manifest through behaviors and interactions that create tension in the workplace.

Specifically, we identify nine points of tension that result from clashing value systems in a cross-generational management context and nine competencies required to mitigate each counterproductive disconnect. We have committed a chapter to each of the competencies. Each chapter describes the tension, potential disconnect, and the competency that leads to generational rapport. Our mission is not just to describe the conflict. We go beyond that to provide tools for resolving the tension that inhibits the success of both managers and Millennials.

If you are a reader of management literature, then you are familiar with many of the managerial leader practices in the following pages. Some practices are familiar while others are novel, but all have received respect in academic and practitioner

literatures. However, concepts and models are only helpful if you know where and how to apply them. The value of our work is to help you identify the areas that can undermine your success as a manager and what to do about these areas. Most of the managers who have attended our workshops have commented that *Managing the Millennials* is useful for managing all ages. We agree. As it happens, the solutions that we share include best practices that can be applied in many relational settings. However, there is special urgency in the multigenerational context, and especially so with Millennial employees.

Demographers William Strauss and Neil Howe reference the Harry Potter series as an excellent illustration for the differences between Millennials and their predecessors (Builders, Baby Boomers, and Gen X). Harry Potter and his friends are smart, overachieving, innovative, and self-possessed, doing their best to operate within the rules set forth for them, while practicing their calling of saving the world as need arises—they represent Millennials. The individualistic, judgmental, egotistical teachers at Hogwarts responsible for shaping the young wizards characterize the Baby Boomer generation. Characters like Hagrid, though not in power but always around to help, epitomize Generation X—a group sandwiched between two powerful and dominant generations.

Unlike any other generation before them, Millennials are the first generation that can access information without an authority figure. They are wizards with technology, visionaries with high expectations; armed with knowledge or the know-how to access it, they proclaim themselves as ready. Ready for any challenge, ready for more responsibility, and, as John Mayer sings, “Waiting on the world to change.” They perceive themselves to be “in waiting,” held back by well-meaning elders whose best years have come and gone. Millennials respect their elders for what they have done but relegate their future utility to the role of mentor, career counselor, and cheerleader.

At the core of the Millennial phenomenon is that they do not have the same need or know-how to build relationships with

their managers or authority figures. Previous generations had to take initiative to relationally connect in order to gain information and access. It is a natural arrangement that has played itself out for generations. Things are different now. The rules have changed. A Millennial with a smartphone can usurp the authority of a decorated professor in her own classroom. Builders, Baby Boomers, and Gen X cannot help but sense the shift and ask themselves, “Why don’t they ever come and ask me questions?” We suggest that either they do not think they need to or they do not know how. The dichotomy is that they desperately want mentors or career advocates. That leads us to believe that most Millennials just do not know how to relate to someone who is in authority that is not already perceived to be “for” them. Since *Managing the Millennials* was first published, we have discovered that the Millennial phenomenon is observed and experienced throughout the world. We will address the international picture in the next chapter.

The other side of the coin is that managers do not recall the experience of their superiors reaching out to them. It is a behavior they do not remember being modeled to them. They know why and how to reach upward but do not feel the need to reach downward or they just do not know how. And for good reason, traditional managerial leader training programs focus on how managers can get subordinates to do what she or he wants them to do. One of the first questions that surfaces from an audience is, “How can you help me change them [the Millennials]?”

Although we devote a great deal of attention to the values, attitudes, and behaviors of Millennial employees, our story is not about them. The lead character in our story is the manager—the person responsible for the productivity of, development of, and knowledge transfer to the emerging workforce. In the chapters that follow, we characterize how the managers in our study experience Millennials on the job. The managers and leaders we worked with expressed both admiration and frustration. We preserved their expressions unedited in order to illustrate both the barriers to and opportunities for adaptation, engagement, and communication.

Because the manager's expressions are unedited, we have chosen to omit their names in an effort to provide anonymity. You notice that we do not use company names. Companies are often used to promote and legitimize managerial concepts. Our work is legitimized by the everyday experiences of managers. This book challenges both how you think about management and how you manage. Those who are willing to adapt will reap great benefits both personally and professionally.

Understandably, many managers are reluctant to take on the added burden of learning and practicing a new set of skills required to be adaptive to the challenges presented by Millennial employees. One of the more frequent refrains we heard from managers who were reluctant to accept this burden was, "They [Millennials] just need to grow up—just like any other generation."

The most important question in this book can only be answered by you—are you willing to adapt? When it comes to managing Millennials, it is our belief that the people with the most maturity will have to adapt first. We are saying that you are the key to your own success, your organization's success, and ultimately the success of the Millennials.

As a point of clarification, we acknowledge that managing and leading are two different functions, but because they are often performed by the same person, we use the terms interchangeably.

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