

A NEW AGE OF TALENT



A younger generation brings fresh perspective.
Here's how to recruit, hire, and train them

By Mike Lyon, Contributing Editor

Millennials, Generation Y, Generation Z, Post-Millennials, Plurals: Don't let the naming confuse you. They're all just a younger generation that brings a different perspective to the workplace. We must recruit, hire, and train people from this pool of unique talent.

Because online sales is tech-oriented, it seems like most of the people filling this position belong to the generation born in the '80s and '90s. But it's not just sales that is attracting younger candidates; it's additional sales and support roles, too. I was born in 1979, and I'm starting to feel old at 37 when I talk to new recruits. (They don't even know who Zack Morris is from *Saved by the Bell*. Come on!)

Often, there's a gap between the expectations and realities of working in a digital age with digital natives. What we've noticed is that we need to decode a lot of their statements and feelings on management, leadership, and ownership. Let's look at some land mines you'll want to avoid, and better ways to respond that will help bridge the demographic gap.

1 "So how am I doing? What did you think?"

To many seasoned leaders, this eagerness sounds needy. From executives, I've heard responses such as, "We just want to show them what to do and have them do it. I don't have time to micromanage, and I certainly don't want to constantly shower them with praise!"

You may need to rethink that. The younger generation prefers continual feedback: not instruction, but affirmation that what they're doing is correct and that you're satisfied with the work. (Remember, this is a group of people who, as children, received accolades just for participating.)

Every manager should plan a weekly encounter for coaching and feedback—at least 30 minutes. This generation grew up with structure and having every minute planned: Make sure you provide specific direction and continual interaction. It needn't be face to face. Use FaceTime or a phone call to check in. You may be thinking, "But I see them all the time and we

talk. They're in the office right next to me." Proximity doesn't count. Set up a specific time and have a specific agenda. Don't assume that a casual bump-in at the office is sufficient.

2 "Why can't I work from home?"

This question rubs old-school managers the wrong way. We hear, "They just don't want to work. All they want to do is hang out at home with their dogs or go to Starbucks." I get it. I grew up going to the office with my dad on Sundays so he could catch up with work from the previous six days. Know why? Up until the late '90s—before the advent of cell phones, home computers, and the internet—the office was the only place you *could* work. Many managers have a hangover from the way it used to be, to which I say, "Slow down, take a breath, and hear these younger workers out."

Working 11-hour days used to be a badge of honor, but there was still a shutoff switch at day's end. It wasn't possible or easy to take work home. Now, our sales teams are always on, connected, and often can't separate work from life. We see a higher rate of burnout among younger employees because they're bad at setting boundaries. When they ask if they can work from home, don't freak out. What they're really saying is:

- I'll be on-call for you seven days a week if I can have flexibility with my in-office hours.
- I can do my follow-up and email correspondence from home early in the morning and come in at 10, so I can avoid the traffic-laden 1½-hour commute to the office.
- I'm more productive at my home office, where I have fewer distractions.
- I'll be more refreshed to work on the weekend if I could grab a little time to get some personal stuff done during the week.
- I saw what happened to my workaholic parents. I need a healthy work-life balance, please.

The good news is that a digitally connected workplace lets you track response times, activities, and call-answer rates.

MILLENNIAL MINDSET



WANTS TO
HEAR POSITIVE
FEEDBACK

MORE APT
TO SHARE
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WOULD
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WORKING
FROM HOME
IS DESIRABLE

The physical location matters less if you have the right person in the role and set the right expectations.

3 | “I’m feeling ...”

Our experience is that this one tends to lose many managers. They either respond verbally or they’re thinking, “Suck it up! It’s not about your feelings. This is work, so check those emotions at the door.” I have little sympathy for feelings, too; “Roll up your sleeves and get to work,” is how I was raised. But I’ve learned from coaching sales teams that people’s feelings drive workplace satisfaction and performance. Often you just need to decode the statement at hand and figure out how to take action. If someone says they feel:

Frustrated: Find the root cause.

Stressed: Determine what’s overwhelming them.

Unappreciated: Come up with ways to recognize them. (Commissions aren’t the only option).

Isolated: Include them in meetings and set up specific coaching opportunities.

Discouraged (when leads are down): Run the numbers and talk with them about how they can work the aged database.

Bored: Coach that person on adding activities to generate more business.

4 | “I don’t like to talk on the phone. Texting is easier.”

We can’t argue with that. Texting, messaging, and emailing are usually a more efficient form of communication. They allow you to send and receive on your schedule and make sure you’re editing the conversation before you hit Send. But they don’t ensure the desired result. Often a phone call will help resolve something more quickly. In the internet-driven culture, some of the highest conversions to appointments come from a phone call, not emailing back and forth.

Many managers know that a digital message can’t take the place of a live conversation with another human. Teach conversation skills to digital natives and convince them that, in this high-tech world, there’s ample room for high-touch, too.

Current workplace realities show us that we must attract and groom younger talent. Just because you don’t immediately relate to them doesn’t mean you can’t connect. The younger generation wants mentors, structure, and guidance. They’re coachable, moldable, energetic, and smart. They’re also independent and opinionated. They bring fresh perspective to these roles and can generate amazing results—if we don’t try to make them be just like us. **PB**

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