



## **CATERING TO QUALITY CANDIDATES:**

### **Targeting Gen-Y in Your Recruiting & Hiring**

by

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#### **Who is Gen-Y?**

Baby Boomers are retiring from the workforce at the rate of 10,000 people per day and the business world is faced with replacing highly successful leaders with a new generation. The cost of this transition is high from a variety of perspectives, not the least of which is financial. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), to replace an employee ranges from 50 to 400 percent of their annual salary. Naturally, replacing leaders will drive costs to the highest end of this spectrum.

But costs aside, where are these new leaders who will succeed the Greatest Generation and Baby Boomers? They are the next generations—X and Y. As an executive recruiter who is also a Millennial, I have personal experiences and professional advice that can help you find the leadership you need by better understanding important nuances in recruiting my generation.

Meet the Millennials.

Born from 1982-2000, Millennials are important. According to Bureau of Labor statistics, nearly half the U.S. workforce will soon consist of Generation Y. This generation is the heir apparent to Baby Boomer leaders. But as noted above, this leadership transition presents important challenges.

“One specific challenge currently facing organizations is the task of developing leaders from the newest generation of managers,” reads a 2001 *Emerging Leaders* report from the Center for Creative Leadership. “To understand the challenges of working with this new generation and to effectively harness its skills and talents, organizations should begin with three facts:

- (1) There are fewer managers to choose from and develop among this generation because there are fewer people in this age group than in the generation that preceded it;
- (2) Evolving employment patterns have affected worker attitudes toward employers; and
- (3) The newest generation of managers has a view toward authority that is different from previous generations, which affects its attitude toward leadership.”

Excellent advice from a respected authority. I have some very practical advice to offer as well. But first, it is important that you understand the personal and professional dynamics of this Generation.



## Gen-Y Characteristics

Just as Baby Boomers are famous for their numbers, educational accomplishment, and financial success; Gen-Y is identified by a number of important characteristics that should impact your recruiting, hiring, and managerial strategies. I'll set sociological implications to the side and focus on how personal traits and organizational culture impact effective recruiting of future leaders. As my colleague Aram Lulla advised in his own White Paper on "[Recruiting and Managing Millennials](#)", the key is to find great people, regardless of their age or generation.

So what are the keys to finding great Millennials?

Unlike many in the workforce, Millennials want feedback. They want it informally; they want it frequently; they want specifics; they want praise and constructive criticism; and they want it now.

When interviewing this age group, prepare for questions. They ask a lot of them and often immediately reach out to recruiters, HR personnel, or people in their professional networks to obtain feedback. Were they well received? Do they sync with the company culture? What, if anything, must they do to improve their chances? They're not content with a simple "You did a good job". They want specifics—pros and cons.

Millennials are very goal-oriented, purposeful, and responsible. They want to know what needs to be done and the timeline by which they should follow. Then they want the room to flourish on their own with guidance as needed. They may not work traditional hours. You may get emails or texts late at night or early in the morning. But keep them informed about what is important now and how that relates to the future. If you don't plan to hire them; tell them and let them move on. But if they are on your short list, a steady stream of information will keep them connected and engaged in the process.

Millennials move and they move more often than their older peers. According to an August 14, 2012 article by Jeanne Meister in Forbes, "the average worker today stays at each of his or her jobs for [4.4 years](#), according to the most recent available data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, but the expected tenure of the workforce's youngest employees is about half that...That means they would have 15 – 20 jobs over the course of their working lives!"

Yet they welcome and often seek out mentorship opportunities. They are not content to wait patiently for traditional advancement up the career ladder. They want to move as quickly as their talent—not their age—dictates.

They may feel that "I don't need this place as much as they need me." But don't view their willingness to move in wholly negative terms. Millennials move because they want better opportunities. They want to sincerely believe in their company's culture and they want to have an impact. Moving isn't necessarily about persistent dissatisfaction or the need to continuously drive for higher compensation.



But according to the Pew Research Center, half of Millennials would rather have no job than a job they don't like. If you find the right person from this generation and you deliver the workplace characteristics that are important to them, you are likely to forge a long-term relationship.

## **Boomers vs. Millennials**

It's easy to generalize about the generations but be careful when doing so. There are innumerable exceptions to every stereotype and blindly following them can have disastrous ramifications. No two people are alike, whether they share the same age, gender, race, ethnicity or religion. One size does not fit all 18-35 year-olds. But understanding this generation as a whole—and how they differ from other age groups—is important to smart recruiting.

There are generational differences but they are not ubiquitous. Like me, age does not necessarily dictate working style or loyalty or aspirations. Not all Baby Boomers are workaholics and not every Millennial can manage your Twitter marketing campaign. But understanding these differences can help you effectively recruit top talent, especially if your company's culture is attractive to them.

An important distinction between the two generations is that, unlike their Boomer peers, Gen-Y professionals don't measure their lives by the volume of hours they work. They are no stranger to hard work but they believe passionately in a work/life balance. I find that Millennials bring a highly focused approach to their jobs and work diligently when they're "on the clock", whether working in or out of the office. But they are young, confident, adventurous, and technologically savvy. Work is important. But it's not the totality of their existence. "They live and then work," said Bill Haas. "It means you should arrange their schedule to accommodate their lifestyle."

Boomers are more independent and vertically oriented. Gen-Y professionals prefer flat organizational structures and highly collaborative work processes. Titles and hierarchy are not as important as opportunity and involvement. As a result, they tend to be less loyal to a company but far more interested in meaningful colleague interaction. That dynamic reflects a college experience that emphasized more team projects and fewer individual outputs. Millennials are also far more interested in the societal impact of their work. They have both ambition and aspirations.

"The current employment trend among all working people is toward a belief that the employer looks on the employee as disposable, that a job is not for life, and that the employer feels no obligation to the employee," said an *Emerging Leaders* report from the Center for Creative Leadership. If your organization truly values the people who make it work, then you have a powerful advantage in recruiting Gen-Y.

## **Recruiting Millennials**

But how do you effectively recruit this demographic? Their motivations are different and my clients feel that difference. To be candid, many Human Resources executives are not of this generation and don't always understand their approach. But discussions are few as to how to adapt to changing demographics.



In order to assist you in your recruiting and management efforts, I have developed a set of guidelines to follow as you seek to recruit and retain the very best this generation has to offer. Keep these guidelines in mind as you recruit and retain the leaders who will replace the Baby Boomers walking into retirement at the rate of 10,000/day.

- Begin with a variation on the Golden Rule. Don't treat people the way you want to be treated. Treat them the way they want to be treated. There is a difference and embracing it will pay dividends.
- Recruit differently. Think like a Millennial to recruit a Millennial. You won't find the most highly qualified Gen-Y talent on job boards or from classified ads. They are already gainfully employed. This generation will seek you out directly. They follow companies and their leadership teams on Twitter, seek introductions through Facebook friends and LinkedIn contacts, and they expect to hear back when they reach out. Not understanding this mindset or not having a credible social media presence will put your organization at a decided disadvantage.
- According to the Pew Research Center, Millennials are five times more likely to leave their jobs if they have a poor relationship with their manager. The same holds true in recruiting. If you can't establish a credible relationship when recruiting and interviewing, your candidate will likely look elsewhere.
- A company's reputation is critical to successful recruiting. Boomers may call colleagues, conduct research on [Glass Door](#), or invite someone to lunch or a drink; Millennials will turn to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or even "[sweatworking](#)". Social media gives them unprecedented reach and volume. Mistreat them and it could come back to haunt you in a highly public fashion. The employer/employee relationship has become far more transparent. With employees on your side, social media can be a real asset. Consider your social media presence as an important brand extension for Millennials and develop content accordingly.
- There are certain cultural attributes that tend to be more effective with Millennials. According to a United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund study, *Overcoming Generational Gap in the Workforce*, the following characteristics are attributable to Gen-Y professionals:
  - They thrive in multi-media environment and can learn any time; anywhere
  - They need flexibility
  - They are true team players

"Gen-X and Gen-Y are making today the most significant impact in the workplace," reads the report. "They are empowered, consumer oriented, technologically savvy and they are not afraid to speak up for change in their workplace. Gen-X and Gen-Y's are advocating for a more 'fluid' use of time in their workday. They think, why not work from morning till noon, take off part of the afternoon and then restart again at 5 p.m. and continue to midnight? In their minds and in their 'always on' world, they see this arrangement as perfectly legitimate as long as they get their work done and meet customer expectations."

This generation rarely does things in consecutive fashion. They are concurrent. In the morning, they open their eyes, get out of bed and check their smart phones. At work, they dial into conference calls, conduct online research during the call, verbally support or challenge assumptions, and take notes on



their laptops. In the evening, after dining out with friends, they turn on the TV, grab their tablets, tweet about “Modern Family”, and often post dinner pictures with their companions on Facebook. Their world is a fluid blend of global content.

Based upon my own life experiences, I would add a few more important workplace attributes for those companies seeking Gen-Y professionals:

- The recent decision by Yahoo to largely suspend telecommuting may or may not make long-term sense for the company. But it could have a negative impact on Millennial recruiting, a group that highly values workplace flexibility.
- Gen-Y also values its vacation time. Unlike Baby Boomers who store it like squirrels hoarding nuts, Gen-Y values vacation time and take it.
- There is one Gen-Y stereotype with which I disagree. Compensation is as important to Millennials as it is to any other generation. Millennials have high salary expectations and possess some sense of entitlement to it. (Not surprising since their “helicopter parents” awarded them a trophy for everything in which they’ve participated). But this generation has a solid work ethic and is more than willing to work for it.

Pop culture is replete with discussions of generational characteristics. They are not wholly scientific, accurate for every individual, or a secret roadmap for success. But generational characteristics do matter and for HR executives and hiring managers who’ve made a career out of dealing with people, it’s important that they understand them. They matter in the pursuit of transcendent talent and they matter in managerial excellence.

These guidelines will serve as an important framework in your efforts to recruit the next great generation of talent for your company. By understanding the perspectives of those in a different generation, you empower yourself with the tools to succeed. Do your research. Stay attuned to your audience. Establish and maintain contact (in a variety of forms) throughout the recruiting process and you will find the talent you need to succeed in a new era.

I look forward to your thoughts and/or experiences around recruiting, hiring, and managing Generation Y. Please contact me at [sluther@lucasgroup.com](mailto:sluther@lucasgroup.com).