



**RECRUITING AND RETAINING YOUNG TALENT:**  
why it needs to be your  
priority now

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# why it needs to be your priority now

Attracting new graduates and other young talent is essential for any organization that needs to stay current, keep expenses in line, and replace older staff as they leave the workforce. But far too many businesses struggle to attract and retain young workers. Government agencies, in particular, are finding it difficult to hire young employees—just 7 percent of federal workers are thirty years old or under, compared to 36 percent of the workforce overall.<sup>1</sup>

Hiring employees under 30 (often referred to as millennials) helps your organization acquire new skillsets, keep employee expenses down, and stay on top of important new technologies. But attracting younger workers to your company requires a different approach to recruiting. Here's what you need to know about hiring and keeping these talented employees.

### **Millennials give your organization a creative advantage**

Employees under thirty often bring a “beginner’s mind” to new situations. They’re not afraid to ask why. Because they haven’t been told how, or how not, to do things, they are open to novel ideas and new ways of thinking. And when given the opportunity, they’ll question the status quo and help your organization see things from a new perspective. It’s a mindset that can be a strategic advantage to organizations with strong cultures and traditions. Better still, they come without a lot of career baggage, so they easily learn to fit your culture.

### **Younger workers have a solid grasp on technology and teams**

Whether it’s the newest programming language or recent developments in social media, younger employees are on top of the latest trends. Millennials are not afraid to test or learn new technologies. They’re two and a half times more likely to be early adopters of

technology than older workers.<sup>2</sup> What’s more, integration and collaboration is built into everything they do. Today’s graduates are more willing and able to work together as groups to accomplish their goals—a survey of recent graduates reported that they were 33% more likely than other generations to say they wanted to work in teams.<sup>3</sup>

### **Hiring millennials can save your organization money**

It goes without saying that younger employees are almost always less expensive. You can hire two or three junior people for the same amount as one senior staff member. That means as much as three times the output for the same amount of money.

### **Managing millennials, it’s easier than you think**

Like more experienced workers, those under thirty want to work for an organization they are proud of. They value security, though not at the expense of work/life balance. And they want to be stretched and challenged by the projects they work on. But there are differences between younger and older workers. When recruiting and hiring younger talent, employers need to show that they understand millennials’ priorities are different.

### **Money is important, but it’s not most important**

While salary will always be a consideration in choosing a job, young workers place more importance on other priorities. In a recent survey, millennials were asked what things they wanted most from the company they work for. Somewhat surprisingly, compensation was only fourth on the list—after things like people and culture fit, career potential and work/life balance.<sup>4</sup>

That’s not to say you can go cheap and hire the best people. You can’t. Younger employees won’t stay in a job where they feel undervalued. But if you help them see how working for your organization grows their career, salary becomes less important compared to other considerations.

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### **Give young workers an opportunity to make an impact**

Millennials place a priority on social causes and having a sense of purpose. They want to make a difference. In a recent report, 55% of millennials said they were influenced to take a job after discussing the social causes a business supported during the interview.<sup>5</sup> While talking with potential young hires, help them understand how their daily contribution impacts the goals of your organization. Even more important, make sure your organization has a higher purpose, is involved in social causes and is making a difference in the world.

Younger workers also find purpose through connections with coworkers. They are interested in building networks with smart, successful people and in learning from them. You can facilitate this by assigning them to work on projects where they can make those connections.

### **Help younger workers grow with meaningful assignments**

Although millennials are often criticized for not wanting to “pay their dues,” this isn’t exactly right. It’s true they want to do work that has an immediate impact. But they’re not necessarily looking for quick promotion through the ranks. They want interesting work that advances their careers, so give them a variety of assignments to gain a wide range of lateral experience. They don’t need to be promoted “up” to feel like their careers are moving forward, but they do need to feel like they’re growing and making a valuable contribution.

Another way to help younger workers feel as if their careers are moving in the right direction is to provide them with additional learning opportunities. Many organizations offer book groups and brown bag lunch

series on company time, aimed at helping staff learn new skills and grow their networks. Others offer access to online training or provide memberships to professional associations. Companies are paid back in full as employees put their new skills to use at work.

### **Younger workers want flexibility and work/life balance**

Millennials also want work/life balance and enough leisure time to spend with friends and family. In fact, 44% of millennials reported they would take a pay cut and 65% would pass on a promotion if it helps them better manage the demands between work and personal time.<sup>6</sup> Forward-thinking organizations can attract more millennials by tailoring work schedules to fit their employees’ lifestyles.

Younger employees will put in the hours—often more than forty a week—but they want the flexibility to work when and where it fits their schedule. Thanks to advances in technology, they can easily work anywhere, any time. Some organizations offer unlimited vacation policies, giving employees the freedom to take off all the time they need, as long as they coordinate with their teams and get their work done. You may not need to go to that extreme, but making schedules more flexible is a major driver for keeping millennials happy at work.

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### **Forget micromanagement, new graduates want feedback**

Many employers shy away from young workers because they worry inexperienced employees need more training and oversight. While this is partly true—new employees will need some training—millennials don't need to be micromanaged. As a group, they are capable, eager employees.

Rather than oversight, they want mentoring. They crave feedback and input on how to improve their skills and contributions at work. Millennials say they want informal feedback from their managers—50% more often than older employees.<sup>7</sup> Annual reviews simply aren't enough. Real-time feedback on their work and how they can improve is better than end-of-year reviews. Engaging young employees with constructive feedback during weekly one-on-one meetings is a key to keeping them happy and engaged in their work. It's an opportunity for employees to voice concerns and talk about needs, and for managers to offer praise and suggestions for improvement. Most importantly, it's a chance for both to assess personal goals, contributions, and ensure everyone is meeting expectations.

### **HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY RECRUIT YOUNGER WORKERS**

Now that you have an idea what today's graduates want from their work and careers, here's how to effectively recruit them to join your organization.

#### **The very best way to recruit: referrals from other millennials**

Career fairs, job boards and traditional recruiting tools have their place in any job search, but the best way

to find younger job seekers is to ask your existing employees to refer their contacts. The young people already working for you know other high-caliber candidates who have the skills you are looking for. Before spending money on more traditional headhunting approaches, ask the millennials working for you today to refer a few qualified candidates.

### **Look beyond traditional recruiting tools**

The way younger workers look for and find jobs is radically different from how their parents did it. Today's job hunters are on Facebook and Twitter. Recruiters can target mobile ads to reach out to directly to potential employees who are interested in and use their products and services. Interviews are conducted via video on Skype or Google chat. Openings are found at virtual career fairs, or listed on specialized job boards and Craigslist.

In addition to traditional resumes, younger candidates use LinkedIn and About.me profiles, or personal websites and blogs to share their accomplishments and skills. Even with all of the new tools available to you, make sure you connect with these potential employees during in-person interviews. They want to get to know you as much as you need to get to know them.

### **Give them a way to show off their creativity**

Young workers crave creative work. Many of them start their own businesses because they don't believe they'll have the opportunity for creative work at another organization. So why not give them the opportunity to show off their thinking when they interview? Have them walk you through school projects or their portfolio of recent work. By doing so, you'll send a message that you'll value their ideas after they accept a position.

### **Provide benefits that appeal to younger workers**

Like older workers, millennials need traditional benefits like healthcare and a 401(k) plan. But forward-thinking companies also offer benefits tailored to what younger workers want from their careers—flexible schedules, telecommuting, sabbaticals, and tuition re-imbursement or student loan forgiveness. Many emerging tech companies offer free lunches, paid time for projects unrelated to their work, and workspaces designed to foster collaboration.

Other organizations give access to paid career development. Offering benefits that appeal to younger workers pays dividends during the recruiting process.

### **YOUNG EMPLOYEES WILL HELP YOUR ORGANIZATION SUCCEED**

Even in a slack job market, competition for the best new graduates is steep, especially for workers with in-demand degrees in programming, computer sciences and information technology. 72% of companies surveyed by the Society for Human Resources Management reported it was “somewhat” or “very difficult” to hire high-tech workers<sup>8</sup>—mostly because there aren’t enough of them to fill the available opportunities. It takes new thinking to attract young, skilled workers.

Millennials are quick to learn, eager to make a difference, and looking for opportunities to prove themselves. But attracting and retaining younger workers requires a new approach to recruiting. And organizations willing to challenge old hiring practices will see their efforts pay off in a big way.

By offering the benefits, opportunities for teamwork, mentoring, training and meaningful work that millennials seek, you can find the young workers you need. But these changes won’t just benefit the new graduates you hire—they’ll help your entire organization grow and accomplish its goals into the future.

#### **Sources**

<sup>1</sup> “U.S. Struggles to Draw Young, Savvy Staff”, *The Wall Street Journal*, Fachel Feintzeig, June 10, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> *The Millennial Generation Research Review*, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> “The Millennials: A new generation of employees, a new set of engagement policies”, *Ivey Business Journal*, Sept/Oct 2011 and “Millennial Generation Attitudes about Work and the Insurance Industry”, *The Institutes*.

<sup>4</sup> *Harvard Business Review*, “How Companies Can Attract the Best College Talent,” Sanjeev Agrawal, March 17, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> *Inspiring the Next Generation Workforce, The 2014 Millennial Impact Study*, The Case Foundation.

<sup>6</sup> *Global Generations Survey*, Ernst and Young, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> *Workforce 20/20 (Survey of 5,200 employees in 26 countries)*, Oxford Economics and Successfactors, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> “The Hiring of 2015 College Graduates”, *Society for Human Resource Management*, 2105.

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