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Best Practices: Managing Millennials & The Emerging Workforce

The Upcoming Workforce

Field organizations looking towards the future of hiring and building long-term teams should have a focus on Millennials, or those workers who were born between 1977-2000. Not only has this age group taken over the majority of the American workforce in 2015, it is changing the workplace environment with expectations of high job turnover, operational transparency, and non-traditional work schedules. According to a Bureau of Labor Statistics study, over half of the participants, who are hiring managers, said they found it "difficult to find and retain Millennials."

Hiring and retaining Millennials will be a challenge across all organizations, but there is good news for field organizations. Some of the traits Millennials are known for such as being "open to change, adaptable, and creative" make them great candidates for field jobs.
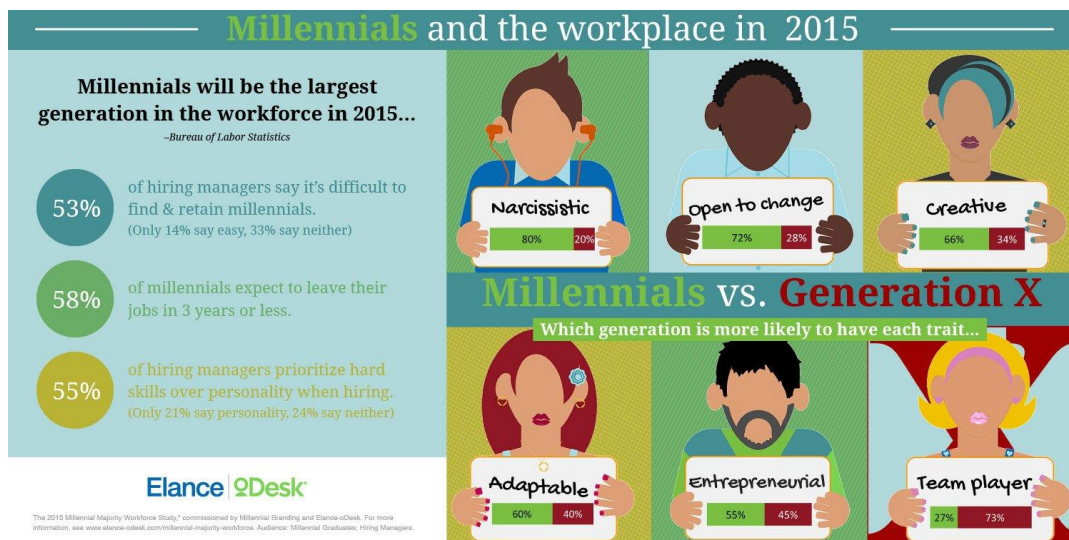

Image Source: http://www.elance-odesk.com/millennial-majority-workforce

This guide will walk managers of field organizations through best practices for attracting the Millennial workforce using their interests and expectations. Additionally, managers will be offered advice on how to retain Millennial workers in field organizations once they've been hired.

Attracting Millennials

The shift in 2015 to Millennials being the workforce majority means that hiring managers need to be more in tune with what kinds of employment opportunities this generation is looking for. Three of the most important employment categories that Millennials are concerned with are company differentiators, leadership characteristics, and technology. Learn more about each below.

Technology

"Gen X is tech savvy, while Gen Y is tech dependent."

-Rowan Trollope, Senior Vice President at Cisco.

Since Millennials have been surrounded by technology for the majority of their lives, the age group sees it as being not only an integral part of their lives, but also of their work. Technology simplifies activities, and Millennials expect that if there is a software tool or mobile app that will ease the responsibilities of their job, they should have access to it. In fact, 23 percent of millennial workers will use whatever application or device they think will maximize productivity, regardless of organizational policy. While some field team managers may see this trend as a challenge, there are three strategies that they can employ to work with Millennials on the issue.

The first is to have some amount of technology solutions available to workers from the beginning. This is especially true for field organizations that may have workers performing tasks like product orders, audits, or customer surveys. Unlike the GenX group before them, Millennials will expect access to a tool that allows them to complete these activities on their mobile phone or tablet. In order to attract Millennials to field positions, managers should be explicit about what technology they make available which makes the job more efficient and productive. This could be a potential selling point for a prospective Millennial worker, who could be deciding between your organization and another one that is less technologically sophisticated.

Second, in regards to attracting Millennials via technology, managers can also make it clear that employees will have a say in technology-related decisions the organization makes. Millennials want to be involved in management decisions, and most believe they are capable of this skill by their late 20s. By involving your young employees in decisions regarding new hardware, software, or overall technology policies they will feel valued and included. By telling a prospective hire that your field organization has technology solutions and is open to their feedback on those systems, you can attract more tech-involved Millennials to your team.

Third, field organizations should recognize that Millennials do not only want technology at work, they will be keeping up with the latest technology solutions available to them. Attracting Millennials to your organization means you will have to continuously learn about new technologies. To attract Millennials to field work, managers should remember to have technology available at the onset, listen to suggestions young workers have regarding it, and continuously be seeking out newer and better technologies to enhance the job.

Company Differentiators

Another key way to attract Millennials to the workplace is through offering company differentiators, or perks that appeal to the Millennial mindset. Here are some accommodations that field businesses can offer to attract younger employees today:

- Access to superiors: Millennials want to know the top boss, and be able to collaborate with that person.

- Social Activities: Ice cream socials or Friday night happy hours are things employers can set up to make Millennials feel connected to their co-workers.

- Free Lunch: An increasing number of Millennial-oriented workplaces are offering lunch on the company.

- Subsidized Fitness Programs: Millennials want their employer to be involved in their work-life balance, which includes helping them foot the gym bill.

- Flexible Schedules: Flexibility is so important to Millennials that studies show some would take it over a raise or promotion.

Leadership Characteristics

As important as it is for an organization to be attractive to the Millennial workforce, it is equally important that they have the right leadership in place to retain those young workers. Roberta Matuson, business consultant and regular contributor to Forbes, echoed this sentiment when she cited a study that identified the top characteristics Millennials want in leaders.

- (39%) Strategic Thinkers
- (37%) Inspirational
- (34%) Personable

This is an important statistic to keep in mind during both the hiring and engagement processes, because these type of leaders not only attract Millennials to a job, but more importantly, keep them around. It is a great segue into learning best practices for Millennial engagement, which will be covered in the next section.

Engaging Millennials

Once field organizations have attracted Millennials to a position, the next goal is to keep them around. Engaging and retaining Millennials is going to be a new challenge for all employers, as "job hopping" becomes a more popular mode of operation. For example, this study published in Forbes found that 91% of Millennials plan to stay at their current job no more than three years. Here are three key characteristics field organizations should offer Millennials in order to engage and retain them.

1. Room to Grow

One of the many unique characteristics that Millennials have is the desire to grow within an organization. While promotions can be an incentive for some Millennials, it is not the only way to encourage personal development. For example, Millennial-saturated organizations like General Assembly (whose workforce is more than 80% Millennials) say that to engage young workers, organizations and their HR departments should provide and reinforce the ability for personal development by providing employees with these two important things:

2. Meaningful Work

"[to] many of the white collar workers of the financial world, like myself...our incomes were often central to how we defined our value and our lives. Fast forward two decades and you notice that Millennials...long to be part of something bigger than themselves"
- Karl Moore, Forbes Contributor

As Moore articulated, the Millennial workforce is redefining the value of a position based on its meaning and purpose above the income it provides. Most business leaders sincerely believe that the product they offer has value and that working to provide that product is a meaningful experience. However, especially in traveling field teams, it is easy for employees to feel at distance between their daily duties and the value of the product they help produce. For that reason, it is important for field organizations to distinguish not only their product, but also their organization as a whole, as having a meaningful impact. Here are two easy ways to do this:

- Charitable Deductions: Organizations should provide employees a platform with which to automatically deduct donations from their paycheck if they choose.

- Volunteer Days: Set aside time for employees to volunteer during work hours, so there is an immediate connection between work and meaningful activities.

A way to strengthen this engagement strategy is by aligning employees' charitable donations or volunteer work with organizations that reinforce the value of the employer's organization. For example, a beverage business may encourage employees to donate to a charity that provides clean water to impoverished areas. That way, the meaningful action is closely associated with the product of their work organization.

3. Decision-Making Ability

This [study](#) found that 26% of Millennial participants would leave a position if it did not offer a chance to be in a management position. Unlike the generations before them, the Millennial workforce expects to advance faster, and value [tangible results](#) over tenure. Field organizations can address this Millennial-specific want by developing a system where there are more opportunities to move up the ladder. For example, instead of having level one reps, their managers, and a CEO a business could have different tiers of rep performance that acknowledge hard work.

However, it can be difficult for some field organizations to continue promoting or giving raises to Millennial workers just to keep them around. What these organizations need to know is why Millennials want advancement. That is, they want to be an active part of the decision-making process, whether that's about scheduling, operational changes, or technology upgrades. Here are three easy ways to make your field team feel included in making decisions:

- In person meeting: Bring reps into the office and gauge how they feel about a change before implementing it; they could point out avoidable inefficiencies that may come from the change.

- Conduct Surveys: Continuous organizational surveys can help managers keep up with changes reps feel need to happen.

- Ask for Advice: This does not need to be systematic like surveys or scheduled meetings, but whenever a manager can ask for a reps' opinion on a decision, they should.

Conclusion

As field organizations enter 2015, there will be a fundamental shift in the workforce: Millennials are now the majority. That means employers will have to take into account what attracts them to positions and what keeps them engaged on the job. By providing them with the unique things they desire such as technology and company perks, organizations can reel in more young workers. Once there, it is critical for organizations to make Millennials feel part of a meaningful community by including them in decision-making processes and allowing opportunities for personal and professional growth.

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