INTRODUCTION

"They're lazy," bemoans the head of a Pacific Northwest design firm, receiving nods of agreement from a roomful of similar leaders representing firms across North America. "They don't want to pay their dues," says another. "When its quitting time, they are out the door wanting to play. How am I supposed to run a business with people who have no concern for building a career?"

"I ask them to take on an out-of-town assignment for five weeks and they look at me like I'm crazy!" complains a design firm manager based in Ontario in his thick Canadian accent. "Don't they realize it's their #@!%& job? I had to do this all the time when I was their age!"

The "they" these design firm principals are referring to is the new generation of young professionals graduating from institutions of higher education with freshly minted architectural and engineering degrees. Over the past decade, I have traveled across North America leading business training sessions to hundreds of design firm professionals. From CEOs to CFOs, division managers to project managers, nothing quite puts a fire in their eyes as a discussion of the latest generation entering today's workforce.

With those words, I opened the introduction to my first book on Millennials nine years ago. At the time, no one in the A/E industry, or any industry was talking about the Millennial Generation. Today, it is one of the hottest topics in any form of media outlet. In spite of the attention, I'm surprised in some circles how little the attitudes towards this generation have changed.

A few years before I wrote *Winning With Millennials,* the first edition of this book, some design firms refused to hire Millennials, preferring to require some level of previous work (and life) experience. In fact, after first releasing the original book, the issue of Millennials went off the front

burner for A/E firm leaders as we headed into a deep and extended recession, which greatly impacted our industry. As A/E firms in North America shed about 250,000 jobs during the recession—which represented over 20 percent of the total workforce—no one was hiring employees, much less Millennials. However, in my recent travels, I no longer hear this refrain. The demands of the marketplace—combined with a rapidly growing inability to hire experienced professionals and the need to replace retiring boomers—have made hiring new graduates a necessity even in firms that are only trying to maintain current staffing levels.

So, who are these so-called "Millennials"? What makes them tick? Are they really as bad as what we hear? Is there any hope for our design industry moving forward? And most importantly, why is this important to you?

Because I firmly believe the firms that successfully embrace Millennials will have a growing competitive advantage over the firms that fail in this arena. The past nine years has only served to further solidify this belief and I watch it play out in firm after firm.

Twenty years ago, the firm, in which I am a principal and part owner gave me the opportunity to build a team from scratch to serve a new market opportunity, a challenge I had been looking for. Knowing the biggest key to future success was directly dependent on the quality of the team's members, I decided to pursue the best young college interns and new grads, as well as the best seasoned professionals I could find. However, as the team began to grow, I quickly found more success with the younger team members.

In retrospect, there were two problems I encountered with more experienced professionals. First, even 20 years ago, firms worked very hard to hold onto their best talent. As a result, the more experienced candidates who were looking for work often did not have the qualities that would drive the success of our venture. Second, typically, more experienced team members are set in their ways and not open to change. In contrast, younger architects and engineers are more open

to trying different approaches (they actually thrive on it) and are certainly more open to working on their weak points. In addition, I have found within this group some of the most talented, motivated, and energetic young professionals you can imagine. For me, they make coming to work every day a joy.

I remember having a conversation years ago, as I was just beginning to build the team, with a partner from another division in our firm about the best methods to grow your team. He was convinced hiring young professionals was the wrong approach and I was making a mistake. To him, hiring more experienced professionals was a better approach. I seriously considered his argument, but something in my gut said it was wrong so I stuck to my guns. I'm sure glad I did!

Today, the team has grown from serving one new market to eight, is involved in the company's work overseas, has had turnover rates much lower than industry averages, has become the preferred service provider for many of our clients, has created a relatively low stress, fun work environment (it's definitely not a sweatshop), and consistently produces financial returns in line with the top 10 percent of A/E firms. And because of the Millennials on our team, the future looks very bright. Most importantly, at least to my wife and I, my stress level is as low as it has ever been! I'm having a great time and even had time to research and write this book. Still, today, my team has one of the lowest average age of any division in the company. Millennials, who we will learn started graduating from college at the end of the last century, have dominated my teams from their early days.

As I have listened to design firm leaders across the country complain about today's generation, I have also met a growing handful of company leaders who are recognizing their value and harnessing their energy. As a result, their firms are growing faster than the industry as a whole, while also experiencing stellar financial returns on their investment. Many of these firms are highlighted in Chapter 9. On some of these I have been blessed to see my original book on

Millennials have a significant impact. That has been a very rewarding experience for me personally.

The purpose of this book is NOT to lay out a plan to change Millennials into a Boomer or Gen Xer. I doubt that is even an achievable goal. Also, this is not meant to be an indictment of any kind regarding the parents of Millennials and their parenting methods. Each generation faces new challenges to parenting based on the conditions of the world at that time. It's difficult for one generation, who understands how they learned work ethic, morals, beliefs, and skills, etc., to transfer how another generation could learn these same things in a different environment. For instance, people who lived through the Great Depression learned much from their experience and it shaped a lot of their beliefs. In talking to them, I sometimes get a sense of disbelief that anyone who did not grow up in those difficult times lacked certain qualities needed to lead. Yet, somehow, our country has continued to survive and thrive.

Instead, the purpose of this book is to develop a clear picture of how the generation now entering the workforce thinks, acts, and lives, as well as to explore some of the environmental issues that shaped their thinking. Most importantly, I'm going to provide you with practical strategies to attract the best and brightest Millennials to your design firms, create a culture that will be desirable to them over the short- and long-term, and propose ways to keep them motivated, productive, and fully engaged.

I also want to address how the past nine years has impacted the Millennial Generation. The core of their generation came out of college during a long recession. This has impacted their thinking to some degree. In addition, none can remember a time when the United States was not at war in some foreign land. This external environment has shaped their thinking.

As previously mentioned, I am a design firm principal, born just as the Boomer Generation was ending and Generation X began. As such, I can relate somewhat to

both. This book, *Lattes, Puppies, and Unlimited Vacation: Attracting, Retaining, and Empowering Millennial Design Firm Professionals,* is written specifically to members of these two generations, and the ones before, who want to understand not only how the latest arrivals to our firms think, work, and act, but more importantly, how they can attract, retain, and empower this generation of design firm professionals.

And finally, I cannot stress enough how important is that firms successfully embrace Millennials. As said before, these firms will have a competitive advantage over the firms that fail to do so. In fact, failing firms will eventually run out of talent and go out of business. I'm confident, however, if you strategically embrace this generation you will find the experience both rewarding and enjoyable, as I have.

As I have traveled North America teaching about the Millennial Generation, I'm often asked what the generation that follows Millennials will be like. Currently, they are called Generation Z. However, I suspect that name will change as they themselves figure out what they want to be called. As I write, the earliest of that generation is coming into their Senior year in High School. So, they will soon be entering our firms as interns and coop students.

In answer to the question I always make two promises you can take to the bank:

First, they will be nothing like the Millennial Generation. No successive generation is. Most often they move to the opposite side of the spectrum from their predecessors on most issues.

Second, they will drive Millennials nuts! I have always known I would be old the day I heard a Millennial lamenting the 'kids these days.' Well, it is soon coming.