

DATA-DRIVEN, A/E STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

## 5 WAYS TO FIND, KEEP, AND ENGAGE MILLENNIAL DESIGN FIRM PROFESSIONALS

Millennials will make up 75 percent of the workplace by 2025, and design firms must target these smart, creative, technical professionals—now.

“This war for talent we’re now seeing is at such a vicious level, and it’s only going to grow,” says Tim Griffin, P.E., MBA, LEED AP, author of *Lattes, Puppies, and Unlimited Vacation: Attracting, Retraining, and Empowering Millennial Design Firm Professionals*. “That need for good people is going to be our biggest challenge moving forward, much more so than finding projects. It’s a different way of thinking for our industry.”

### HOW TO CRACK THE MILLENNIAL CODE?

Griffin and Josh Miles, author of *Bold Brand 2.0: How to Leverage Brand Strategy to Reposition, Differentiate, and Market Your Professional Services Firm*, opened up about how to attract, keep, and engage millennials.

“It’s not about satisfying or coddling a difficult generation, or bending rules to make people happy,” says Miles. “The bottom line is this is good for business.”

**1. Uniquely position your firm.** The problem with advertising that you have the best people isn’t that the statement is inaccurate, it’s that your competitors are saying the same thing. “Younger generations want to get behind the thing you believe in,” says Miles, “even something as basic as, ‘We want to be profitable.’ As long as the firm is transparent about what its goals are, they can get excited.”

**2. Appraise your culture.** Do you conduct rigid interviews with predictable questions? Do you reward performance and not sacrifice, which is easier to measure—using overtime—but is a poor indicator of a job well done? Do you have fun? “Don’t take yourself too seriously,” says Griffin, “but take your work seriously.”

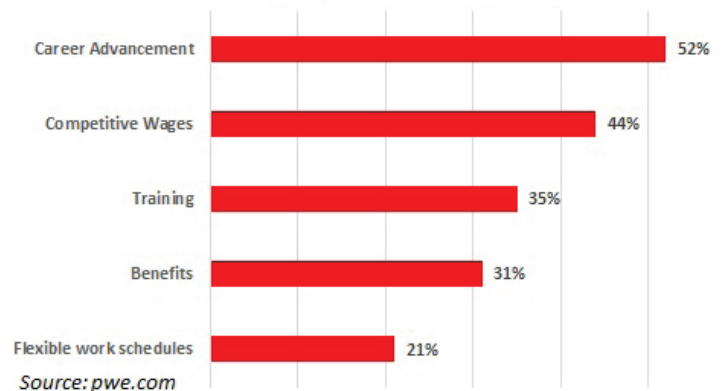
**3. Be visual.** Pair together human resources and marketing departments to show prospective employees what it would be like to work at your firm. Post videos and photos on social media and your website of corporate events and daily happenings. “Then they can see faces and hear voices and see real-life interactions,” Miles says.

**4. Offer out-of-the-box incentives.** Everyone will talk about salaries and sign-on bonuses, but Griffin discovered another way to get superstars on his team when two candidates wanted to spend three months scootering across the country for the summer after college graduation. “If we offer the job in May and it doesn’t start until September 1 ... it costs us nothing,” he says. When the new hires showed up after their trip, “they were ready to go and they added tremendous value to the firm.”

**5. Share information.** Millennials grew up in the Information Age, and they’re curious. Let them know generally how the firm is doing, and pay for a group to go out for lunch or drinks to talk about how they might address pain points. ■

You can get your own copies of these authors books. *Lattes, Puppies, and Unlimited Vacation: Attracting, Retraining, and Empowering Millennial Design Firm Professionals* <https://store.psmj.com/lattes-puppies-and-unlimited-vacation/> *Bold Brand 2.0: How to Leverage Brand Strategy to Reposition, Differentiate, and Market Your Professional Services Firm* <https://store.psmj.com/bold-brand-2-0/>

### What Attracts Millennials



## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

“One Goal, Two Perspectives to Find, Keep, and Engage Millennials Design Firm Professionals” podcast attendees got to ask Tim Griffin, author of *Lattes, Puppies, and Unlimited Vacation: Attracting, Retraining, and Empowering Millennial Design Firm Professionals* some questions:

**Q: You discuss the confidence bordering on cockiness of Millennials, but that the good ones really do want to take on responsibility. How are you handling the internal and/or external education process (that typically comes from experience) to help younger employees understand what they don't know—specifically our industry has some very specific risk or safety issues that they need to consider?**

**A:** Couple of thoughts. First, the assistant role works well in this in that you can load them up with work that takes work off your plate, but you are there to monitor their performance. Second, have two-to-three-year experience folks managing interns and new graduates. Shows them how frustrating that process can be.

**Q: When focusing on performance, if you allow for flexible schedules, how are you navigating project teams being able to coordinate appropriately amongst the staff while each team member may be pursuing a different in-office schedule?**

**A:** Two ways. First, leverage technology. Other industries are ahead of us in using teams not only on different schedules but different time zones. Second, use core hours. For example, in our office our core hours are nine to three. Get your time in when you want, but be there between nine and three.

**Q: Where do you limit the information you give to Millennials?**

**A:** The best way I have seen to show performance indicators to Millennials we have used is a stoplight system. Team leaders will show key indicators, usually profit, backlog, OT, etc., and then show green, yellow, and red for each. So, for profit, the definition is usually >20 percent is green, between 10 and 20 percent is yellow, and < 10 percent is red. So, not showing the numbers but giving a clear indication if we are healthy, concerned, and what the future looks like. Results have been very positive. They can relax and focus on the job, versus worrying about their job, when everything is green, and they can jump in and help when we are in warning zones.

**Q: What can Millennials do to get leadership to adopt this mind-set?**

**A:** Get them materials like my book that communicate these issues in terms they understand. Also, lay out the demographics of your current firm. They may be surprised to find how many Millennials they already have. Then develop a five to 10 year projection based on retirement ages. This should help demonstrate the reason they need Millennials in a BIG way. ■

## BY THE NUMBERS

### 36%

Education means a lot to Millennials. According to the Pew Research Center, 35 percent of women and 29 percent of men who are age 21 to 36 hold a bachelor's degree. This is the most educated a generation has ever been. (See graph on page one.)

### 57%

Most Millennials are single. Fifty-seven percent have never been married, says Pew Research Center. They represent the largest group of people in the population who are not married.

### 53%

Despite not being married, 53 percent of Millennial households already have children. In fact, one-in-four Millennials are now parents, reports MillennialMarketing.com. Millennials believe that parenthood is a partnership. Sixty-four percent of dads and 50 percent of moms believe they have equal responsibility for child care.

### 56%

Only 56 percent of Millennials identify as white and are more likely to be racial or ethnic minorities than previous generations, says Pew Research Center. A whopping 88 percent live in metro areas.

### 6 LESSONS TO SHARE WITH YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Millennial architects and engineers don't always hit the ground running once they land that first job. For these young professionals Larry Cahill, CPEA, author of *"Can I Borrow Your Watch? A Beginner's Guide to Succeeding in a Professional Consulting Organization"* offers some suggestions for those unfamiliar with—and perhaps nervous about—workplace expectations. His advice:

#### QUESTION & ANSWERS

"Hey Young Professionals—the Best Advice for Engineers is Not on YouTube" podcast attendees got to ask Larry Cahill, CPEA, some questions.

**Q: How will young engineers deal with project managers that have poor "management skills"?**

A: The best approach is open communication with the PM, not with his or her boss. Make sure they are clear about scope, schedule, and budget. What do you want, when do you want it, and how many hours do I have to complete the task?

**Q: What is the best way to direct a career path towards project management? How can I become a project manager if the firm favors another engineering discipline other than mine?**

A: Project Management is a generic skill set; which applies across all disciplines. Learn these skill sets. There are many resources. Explore internal and external PM training courses.

**Q: What activities or experiences strengthen bonds with team members you want to coach or empower.**

A: One of my regrets is not paying enough attention to my star performers, sidetracked by the whiners and poor performers. If I had to do it over again, I would take the stars out to lunch on a regular basis, advocate more forcefully for their promotions and bonuses (even spot bonuses when warranted), make sure that they get the plum assignments, and provide many opportunities for professional development. I would also take their career planning very seriously during the annual performance review process.

**1. Be a pest.** If your new employer doesn't schedule a lunch with colleagues for new hires, be sure to start conversations with co-workers and bosses that showcase your experience and capabilities. If there isn't a project already with your name on it, volunteer to help put together a proposal, or do research for an existing project.

**2. Understand billability.** "It's the king of all metrics," says Cahill. "Billing hours to clients is how firms make money." That likely will mean working more than 40 hours a week. Eventually, the firm will expect you to meet sales targets because "if you don't sell the work, you can't do the work."

**3. Know what's in the contract.** Cahill admits to being burned a number of times by small print. It's important that project managers develop a task plan based not just on the proposal, but on the purchase order or any other agreement with fine details.

**4. Close out projects.** When all is said and done, be sure that status is reflected in the organization's financial management system to protect the client from accidental future charges.

**5. Meet paperwork deadlines.** Delays cost the firm time and money. "People will get really angry with you over time if your time sheets and expense reports get bounced back," says Cahill. "Do them on time and do them right."

**6. Get involved.** Look for networking and professional development opportunities. Go to conferences, write articles—anything to become a subject matter expert that will give you more experience and exposure. ■

*For more information on Can I Borrow Your Watch? A Beginner's Guide to Succeeding in a Professional Consulting Organization, go to: <https://store.psmj.com/can-i-borrow-your-watch/>*

*To learn more, listen to the PSMJ Podcast, "Hey Young Professionals00the Best Advice For Engineers is Not on YouTube" : <https://soundcloud.com/user-465659173/hey-young-professionals-the-best-advice-for-engineers-is-not-on-youtube>*