



## Tapping into the Nonprofit Next Generation

### *Pitfalls and Best Practices for Engaging Millennials at Your Organization*

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Move over, baby boomers. Millennials are officially the largest generation in U.S. history. There were 92 million Americans born between 1980 and 2000, according to 2015 census data. In a class so large, it's difficult to make broad generalities about work ethic and perspectives. But given that millennials will make up 75 percent of the workforce by 2025, there's little debate that organizations that can harness the talent and skills of this generation will be better positioned for future success.

The nonprofit organization sector is in fact uniquely suited to hire and retain top talent among the millennial generation. In a recent survey, six in 10 millennials said an employer's "sense of purpose" played a role in why they chose their current position. And they place a high value on the impact they can have in their careers – 84 percent said "knowing I am helping to make a positive difference in the world is more important to me than professional recognition," according to research from Bentley University. Nonprofits have these aspirations baked into their business. That's an advantage.

But while employees may place impact over recognition, they still have high expectations when it comes to their work environment. Only 30 percent of the respondents surveyed by Bentley were willing to work in an unpleasant work environment to achieve career success. They want the employer to have a sense of purpose, but they expect a nice place to work, too.

The key for nonprofits is to communicate the benefits of their work while fostering an environment that matches what millennials want on the job. We've seen it work at nonprofit organizations of all sizes in many different fields. Here are five things nonprofit leaders should keep in mind to bring millennials on board.

#### 1. Culture Counts

The nonprofits that can best connect their organization's outward mission with their internal culture and daily work environment will be the most effective at wooing millennials – and motivating them to do their best work. That starts with keeping employees engaged with the impact your

organization is making. Just as you do with donors and other external audiences, share updates on the work you're doing and its impact with employees and internal stakeholders. Just make sure it's honest and candid. Employees, especially millennials, will dismiss reports that seem forced or phony.

Organizations should also look to update their operations and work space to accommodate a millennial mindset. To many younger workers, traditional cubicles are seen as stuffy and isolating. That doesn't necessarily mean they expect bean bag chairs and ping pong tables, but there can be a balance. Look to create a more open layout with unassigned seating. Areas primed for collaboration will foster the teamwork and creative working sessions employees crave.

When it comes to updating operations, consider this stat: half of millennials today play video games. An even greater percentage grew up playing video games and are used to gamification in everything from workplace training to physical fitness. Younger employees see competition as a frequent part of collaboration and look for the built-in rules and structure that gamification offers. You can't turn your whole office into a game, but a Best Idea Competition with bragging rights for "Genius of the Week" may spark a better brainstorm than a traditional whiteboard session.

#### 2. Flexibility and Accountability Aren't Mutually Exclusive

Part of the culture shift many organizations struggle with as millennials occupy a larger section of the workforce is the waning dominance of the 9-5 workday. Millennials expect to be able to take time off when they need it (even if it's just a personal day). But they don't mind answering an email or two on that day off or later in the evening. If a big project means everyone works late, millennials may be less likely to complain.

Nonprofits must embrace this more flexible approach without sacrificing accountability. Millennials may expect a little more leeway in how they complete an assignment, and they may even do better work because of that freedom to follow a creative idea or rethink an approach. But that flexibility

shouldn't extend to missed deadlines or shoddy work. It's up to an organization's leaders to make sure a looser structure doesn't impact accountability or results.

### 3. Create Clear Goals and Roles

One way to set an expectation of accountability is to establish clear goals and roles for employees as soon as they join your organization. Again, nonprofits have a unique opportunity on this front to tie workplace expectations to the greater mission and impact of your work. That stereotype that millennials are constantly job hopping is a myth. They are eager to grow their careers at a single organization, and they appreciate mentors and structure that present a path forward.

A big part of creating that culture of flexibility and accountability is empowering younger workers to take ownership of their work and the effect it has on the outside world. That starts with a clear understanding of what role they will play and what your organization expects from them.

### 4. Be Generous with Benefits

Nonprofits often struggle to compete with the corporate world when it comes to salary – that's not a new challenge exclusive to millennial workers. Nonprofit organizations often try to fill this gap by offering plentiful benefits packages. The most revolutionary examples include unlimited vacation and mental health days. These can be effective, provided organizations have successfully built a culture of accountability. But the approach doesn't have to be so extreme – millennials still appreciate traditional benefits like generous health care coverage and retirement savings matches. These perks, combined with the meaningful work and a path for career growth, may often be enough to lure top millennial talent away from the corporate world.

Nonprofits should also consider incentives that don't only benefit the employee. Many organizations allow employees to take time off for volunteer work, or even sponsor organization-wide volunteer days to make an impact locally. These kinds of "days on" are more common in the for-profit world, but present a unique opportunity for nonprofits to draw one more connection between the work employees are doing and the greater good.

### 5. Cool Tech is Enticing

There's no doubt millennials, like everyone else, are wowed by cool technology. But it's important to remember that, more than any other generation, millennials have grown up assuming near-constant updates to technology will make

their lives easier. To them, the workplace is no exception. They expect technology like apps that calculate and compile expenses or make telecommuting easier. And if it doesn't exist yet, they assume it will be created before too long.

Most nonprofits need to be thoughtful when it comes to technology upgrades – budget limitations demand that. But finding ways to embrace new technology, without sacrificing security or privacy, can show your organization is ready to adapt to new opportunities – and they just may improve productivity.

### Fundraising Strategies from the Inside Out

Nonprofit organizations that understand what motivates millennials won't just have a leg up inside the workplace, they'll also have a fundraising advantage. Studies show that about half of millennials donate to a cause on a monthly basis, but based on their own criteria and expectations. As millennials dominate the workforce, they're quickly becoming affluent members of society and leading decision makers at companies and organizations.

This growing influence is clearly taking place in the not-for-profit world as well. Nonprofit organizations that can successfully onboard millennial employees and help them transition to leadership roles will be better suited to attract this growing donor class. That starts with creating a workplace and culture that resonates with millennials. Focusing on impact, flexibility, gamification, and utilization of cutting edge tech are all crucial elements to effectively reaching younger generations and incorporating them into the organization.

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