



The Power of MILLENNIAL ALIGNMENT

Instead of complaining about the newest generation, organizations should be listening and learning from them.

BY ANNE ZENDER

Employers can't afford to overlook the Millennial generation and the lessons they have to teach. That was the message from Association Media & Publishing annual meeting speaker, Jamie Notter, founding partner of WorkXO and author of *When Millennials Take Over: Preparing for the Ridiculously Optimistic Future of Business*. Millennials are important, he said, because there are so many of them, and "they are shining a light on what the future of business is going to look like."

"We're constantly saying they don't get it, they are inappropriate, they are not paying their dues," he says. "We need to stop the freaking out, and we need to start being curious about them."

Notter, who has been studying Millennials for a decade or more, said he found that organizations that were “doing amazing things” were better aligned with the Millennial generation approach. “These organizations are light years ahead of everyone else and have higher levels of engagement,” he said.

According to Notter, the organizations had four things in common: They were digital, clear, fluid, and fast.

In being “digital,” they embraced technology and social media. Technology should be customized for customers and employees. For example, the American Society for Surgery of the Hand designed its workspace and culture around the needs of employees, not management. This has led to higher levels of engagement and more accomplishment.

“Clear” means being transparent and sharing information as a strategic activity to improve the quality of decision-making. One organization posts project management tasks and responsibilities up on the office walls so that everyone can see how things are going. People are allowed to make their own decisions without status updates or email. “In a complex world, you can’t know who needs to



know ahead of time, so you make it visible, and the end result is better work and more customers,” Notter said.

Regarding “fluid,” organizations need hierarchy, but it should not be too rigid. One healthcare organization puts this to work by allowing people who know the most about the needs of the patient make the decisions about care—not the people in the hierarchy.

“Fast” means being able to leap ahead. One company came up with a plan for a new product line in three days, using the staff to do their own research and development. This mode of working requires employers to give up traditional management control and replace it with something they have trust in.

To maximize the wisdom of Millennials, employers should be working to build these four qualities into their culture, Notter concludes. Millennials place a great deal of value on organizational culture; they feel it is “as or more important than pay and benefits,” he says.

Organizations don’t have to be perfect in all of these areas, but they should be moving in that direction. “You have to be able to manage this inside your culture and be intentional about it,” he said. “Build digital, clear, fluid and fast into your culture...and use what Millennials are teaching us.”

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