



RELOCATING Millennials

The unique challenges of this generation

BY SARAH WILLIAMS, RWA

The Millennial generation is often a controversial one. In fact, according to the Pew Research Center, some of us do not even like being called a Millennial. Born between 1981 and 1996, we are uniquely and significantly bifurcated even within our own generation. Half of Millennials can remember a time before the internet and cell phones existed, while the other half can't imagine life without Instagram.

The rapid rise of the internet, in my opinion, is the most polarizing and defining technological development of our generation. It has changed the way we live our lives, the way we grow up and the way we interact with others; it also plays a part in the controversy concerning our generation. Intrigued by the continuous debate surrounding Millennials, I sought to explore this generation's unique relocation challenges.

In the Right of Way Industry

Psychologist Jean Twenge conducted surveys on Millennials as part of the research for her book, "Generation Me" (2006). These surveys indicated that while Millennials display positive character traits such as confidence and tolerance, some can also be more entitled and narcissistic than their peers of preceding generations. But do these issues have effects within the right of way world?

The subject of relocating Millennials was not an easy one to research. There are not many in the generation who are in a position of eligibility for relocation benefits, and most projects do not encounter them in groups large enough to draw conclusions from. Despite this, I was able to communicate with several relocation experts who shared their experience



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of dealing with Millennials. Their understandings and opinions expressed commonalities across several different projects.

Obstacles

I spoke with David Richman from Autotemp, who recently completed a project for a university in San Francisco. While this experience is certainly not descriptive of all Millennials, it is important to note that this project did involve the relocation of 65 upper-class, Millennial-dominated households.

The first issue he encountered with these specific displacees was their unique communication style. In contrast to other generations, these particular Millennial displacees actively avoided in-person meetings and requested information be disseminated via email or text. This made life especially difficult for David as he experienced a steady stream of text messages with questions about the relocation process, which would have been easier to explain at an in-person meeting.

As this was urban, high-density university housing, the dwellings often had several, unrelated occupants per unit. This meant additional meetings and the added complexity of working with multiple tenants to reach an agreement on how to split the benefits. Of course, this occasionally led to hostility between the displacees.

This group also utilized the internet to research the relocation process and Federal regulations, which they were quick to quote. David indicated this response was atypical of displacees of other generations. David's relocation team noted that these specific displacees often acted as if they knew more than the relocation agents. Additionally, their lifelong connection to the internet and awareness of data privacy concerns made them hesitant to complete the W-9 forms necessary for payment.

Continuing their avoidance of in-person meetings, the displacees also refused or disregarded the necessary decent, safe and sanitary inspections. Fifteen households moved upon receiving their Notice of Eligibility, preferring either not to reveal their information or to be bothered with the perceived hassle of the process.

David's overall conclusions from the project found that higher education levels and higher income resulted in more demands. This set of displacees appeared less appreciative of the benefits they received (even though many of them used the funds as down payments for home purchases) and communication/information sharing was difficult.

Notable Distinctions

Following David's interview, I reached out to several more relocation experts to see if their experiences coincided with David's or if his affluent, urban subset was more of an anomaly. Interestingly, Fred Bonner's research at Rutgers University finds that most of the traits attached to the Millennial moniker are mainly applicable to "affluent, white teenagers raised in the suburbs," whereas other Millennial ethnicities and socioeconomic classes do not tend to display the same traits.

I connected with another right of way agent who relocated mostly affluent (but suburban) Millennials. His experience indicated that this particular subset of our generation expected more from the relocation process and agents, and they were more reliant upon the relocation team for guidance compared to others. He also indicated that they strongly preferred to keep within close distance of their friends and workplace.

In Summary

When it comes to the right of way relocation process, it seems certain subsets of Millennials can present more of a challenge for the relocation agent. As I finished writing this article, I was left with the feeling that some of us may be exactly as entitled as our lust for avocado toast might suggest we are. However, we are also a highly intelligent and resourceful bunch. According to Forbes Magazine, we are the most highly educated generation thus far. It seems that having the collective knowledge of mankind at our fingertips has certainly shaped the way we interact with the world and the demands we make when presented with an inconvenience. ☹️



Sarah Williams, RWA, joined the IRWA in 2016 and currently serves as Chapter 27 Treasurer, Newsletter Editor, Young Professionals Committee Leader, Website maintainer, Education Co-Chair and is a Region 1 Co-Chair of the Young Professionals Committee. In 2018, she was awarded the Young Professional of the Year at the Region level, Member of the Year for Chapter 27 and took home Newsletter of the Year at the Region level. Sarah has 15 years of experience in residential Real Estate and Right of Way. She is currently a Right of Way Agent for Interwest Consulting Group.