Second-wave Millennials
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An introduction to Second-wave Millennials
and learning the best ways to manage them

Coaching
Millennials

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Introducing the Second-wave Millennials

Just as you were starting to figure out how to manage Millennials in the workplace, a major generational shift is underway. Coming to a workplace near you: Second-wave Millennials.

Who are Second-wave Millennials?

Second-wave Millennials are young professionals that are entering the workplace right now. They were born between 1993-2004. First-wave Millennials are already in the workplace—they were born between 1982 and 1993, and the oldest are 35. Common sense tells us that a 35-year old has differing traits and preferences compared to a 21-year old, but what are those differences and how can they all be Millennials?

Explaining Generational Waves—It's About the Parents

Every generation has a first wave (older cohort) and a second wave (younger cohort). Each wave has slightly different traits because they were raised by the parents of two different generations. Older Millennials are First-wavers (as of 2017, ages 25 to 35), and were raised by Baby Boomer parents. Younger Millennials, coming into the workplace now, are Second-wave Millennials (ages 13 to 24) and were raised by Generation X parents.

Marketers often mistakenly call Second-wave Millennials "Generation Z" in the hopes of selling more products, but generational experts agree that the length of a generation is between 18-22 years, so the oldest "Gen Z" hasn't even reached puberty yet, and the youngest hasn't been born. Young professionals entering the workplace today are Second-wave Millennials, not "Gen Z."

All Millennials Are the Same, Except When They're Not

As an entire generation, Millennials have broad traits and behaviors that are enduring and unique regardless of the generation that raised them. For example, Millennials tend to be high achievers, prefer collaboration over conflict, are motivated by purpose and mission more than money, are community and civic-minded, and tend to be risk-averse. Of course, they are the first digital natives, exhibiting a kinship with technology as an extension of their very being that sets them apart from older generations.

But within these traits there are subtle differences based on how Boomers raised them compared to how Gen-Xers raised them. These subtleties are apparent in behavioral shifts in the workplace — and managers should take note.

Differences Between First-wave and Second-wave Millennials

The first thing you notice about Second-wave Millennials is that their ability to communicate effectively face-to-face is compromised, largely due to their increasing dependence on digital technology, and lack of basic communication skill development offered in schools. College curriculums today rely on Blackboard and other electronic communication tools, driving students deeper into the digital world, and away from face-to-face interaction. Extensive research in this area has shown that technology has had a negative effect on both quality and quantity of face-to-face communication.

A Kaiser Family Foundation study found that young people spend an average of 8 hours a day on media (smart phones, tablets, computer monitors and TV)—far more than any other activity other than sleep. One study found that the presence of a mobile device interferes with human relationships, having negative effects on closeness, connection, and conversation quality.

Effective Communications Training

While a First-wave Millennial may nod her head in agreement to anything you say (even if they disagree 'cause they don't like conflict), a Second-wave Millennial will give you a blank stare and look like a deer in the headlights. Second-wave Millennials are far less likely to be ready for prime time in the business world than First-wave Millennials and will need help with both oral and written communication skills for the business world.

One manager told me that a recently hired Millennial employee wrote a poorly written, informal email to clients about an important upcoming marketing event for the clients. The lesson here was clear— not only should managers be crystal clear about expectations of a task, including timelines, proofing requirements, etc., but that these young employees need to be taught how to write a proper email to clients. Companies are now in the uncomfortable position of remediating basic communication skills that were never taught in school.

Second-wave Millennials could benefit from developing their interpersonal communication skills in order to create more effective work relationships. The training and development should include learning about eye contact, posture, voice volume, and pace, which are all important elements of oral communication. For written communication, essential competencies like word choice, grammar, selection of venue and format, and sentence fluency could direct these new hires to better performance levels in the workplace.

Real-World Problem Solving Abilities

Another challenge Second-wave Millennials have is with problem solving and critical thinking in the workplace. There is a bit of irony here, because no one is better at getting to the next level in Pokémon Go, or figuring out how to drop a 50-story building into an imaginary city while playing Minecraft. Problem solving in video games have gotten more complex, and second-wave Millennials are masters at solving problem in that context. But the second life of video games is not the first life of the workplace. Managers have told me over the last year that these key skills are missing in their new hires.

Critical thinking and problem solving at work require the abilities to identify the problem, prioritize the issue, research alternatives, apply the appropriate knowledge, implement a solution, and finally, evaluate the results.

In the workplace, this is all done in the context of dealing with real live people, which is different than a video game avatar.

Learning to be a Team Player

Finally, because Second-wave Millennials tend to have less self-awareness about their role as a team member in an organization's setting, navigating their way as part of a team is often perplexing to them. Teamwork is not new to Second-wave Millennials, in fact their generation has been indoctrinated from an

early age to collaborate in teams (think, Barney the Dinosaur). In school, they frequently participated in group discussions and team projects, but projects had strict guidelines and parameters and participants were not confronted with navigating the messy real-world reality of personalities and competing interests. Teamwork was done in the sanitized bubble of an academic setting. The real world is different, and workplaces are anything but sanitized bubbles, but are more like a petri dish of fuzzy bacteria.

Can you teach teamwork? I think the answer is yes. The key skills that should be developed here are: listening and valuing teammate's viewpoints, fulfilling team role duties, adjusting for unforeseen circumstances, participating in consensus-building, and finally participating in group presentations. The good news here is that Second-wave Millennials are hard-wired to want to be a team member; it is just a matter of teaching them how in the real world.

There's Help

Second-wave Millennials, despite these challenges in the workplace, can be developed into incredibly valuable, committed, and loyal employees. Make the investment in them!

CoachingMillennials has been working with a group of curriculum designers to create six training modules specifically for the Second-wave Millennials. Our signature program is called "Developing Your Emerging Professionals: Gaining the 4 Skills Required for Workplace Success." The workshop covers key skills such as self-awareness, communication, collaboration, and problem solving. Email me directly if you'd like more information on this workshop: warren@coachingmillennials.com, or call (703) 559-9130.