



HOW TO TRAIN AND DEVELOP MILLENNIALS EMPLOYEES IN THE LEGAL SECTOR

Millennials (or Generation Y), generally accepted as those born between 1981-1996 (although some definitions do vary)...

...are known as the first generation who work to live, rather than live to work. But as 2020 marks the first time in history that millennials will make up the majority of the workforce, what does this mean for those whose job it is to manage them?

Recruiting, training and developing millennials is different from any other generation due to their ideals, their drives and their aspirations. In this report, I will share with you some of the hot topics that surround millennials in the legal workplace, how they thrive, what challenges they face, their limitations and how best to manage this dominant section of the current working landscape.

What Sets Millennials Apart?

First of all, let's take a look at what it means to be a millennial. While it would be impossible to try and stereotype an entire generation, there are recurring themes that we see time and again from the millennial culture in the legal workplace which cannot be ignored.

As Simon Sinek acutely points out in his interesting YouTube video; there are forces beyond the millennial generation's control which shaped the way they grew up and stayed with them as they transitioned into the world of work.

As the first generation to grow up surrounded by technology in their formative years, millennials have turned towards the instant hit of dopamine that social acceptance via online media provides. They are used to the things they want happening fast, and this means that they are more likely to crave approval, to be impatient, and be continually looking for what's next.

This generation grew up witnessing their parents in secure 'jobs for life', and then found themselves in the world of work for the first time around the financial crisis of 2008. As of 2016, millennials had around 34% less wealth than they would have had if the financial crash had not happened.

Millennials are getting married less, having fewer children and have very low levels of homeownership. The latter can be attributed to high house prices, but the marriage and childbirth stats tell another story. Millennials have seen how quickly the economy and job market can decline and how disastrous this can be in terms of raising a family and paying off a mortgage.

A lot of the negative stereotypes that are used to describe millennials have been proven to be untrue. Older generations call them lazy and entitled. Still, while they might indeed expect things to simply happen for them - due to being raised in an age where technology meant that you can have almost anything you want at the press of a button - this does not mean they are averse to working hard; it comes down to a matter of management.

Manage your millennials correctly, and you will realise just how much this generation has to offer.

Managing millennials is not an impossible task. While they are sometimes better known for their less than desirable characteristics (think social media obsessed, 'snowflakes'), millennials often have more desire to learn and grow, are not driven by money but rather a desire to 'do well', and are welcoming of honest and open conversations in the workplace.

All of these can be great positives for your legal organisation when they are managed effectively.

Millennial Myths: Debunked

You might have heard some of the following stereotypes about millennials. Let's go through the facts behind some of these millennial generalisations and why they aren't necessarily true.

1. **[MYTH]** They are self-obsessed. The 'selfie' generation who check their Facebook, Twitter and Instagram constantly.

[FACT] A study by the University of California in 2008 found that there was no rise in the levels of narcissism in students between 1979-2007.

2. **[MYTH]** They hate to be told what to do. Even new millennial employees think they know everything from the word go. A youth spent Googling their problems has led them to believe they (via Google) have all the answers.

[FACT] Millennials are the 'empowered generation'. While they might have a less inherent respect for traditional authority, they are adept at learning things on their own. In the past year, 70% of millennials have learned a new skill or information about a subject they are interested in via YouTube.

3. **[MYTH]** They are work-shy. They want to be promoted within the first six months, but they don't really want to work hard for it.

[FACT] Millennials are defined by the phrase 'work smarter, not harder'. They have grown up in a world where technology is always making things easier and faster. It is in their nature to look for shortcuts and ways to streamline processes.

4. **[MYTH]** Millennials want constant praise for the smallest achievements.

[FACT] A recent IBM study found that only 29% of millennials were looking for praise for their achievements in the workplace.

Yes, there are differences between millennials and those from earlier generations, but with 74% of millennials reporting that they want to do a job where they feel like their work matters – this generation has the potential to add real value to your legal firm. The key is in knowing how to recruit, train and develop the best millennial talent, which we will cover in the following sections.



Recruiting Millennials

Put a job advert online or on a job board, and chances are the majority of the applicants will be millennials. The language you use in your job advert will be a considerable factor in determining what kind of applicants you will receive.

In recent years there has been an upsurge in ‘trendy’ unconventional language used to attract the cutting edge of millennial talent, with ‘superheroes’ and ‘ninjas’ being invited to apply for positions that in reality are admin assistant roles.

As The Economist points out – “Candidates must sometimes wonder whether they are applying for a 9-5 role or becoming part of the “Avengers” franchise”.

We are currently amid the lowest rate of unemployment for 40 years, and legal businesses are finding it harder than ever to find suitable candidates for their vacancies; especially millennial talent, who are more likely to have the leading-edge skills needed to carry your business forward – it can be tempting to try too hard to attract the best candidates.

But millennials are now being turned off by this inflated language – they can see through it as a thinly veiled attempt to make mundane tasks sound interesting. As mentioned previously, millennials love transparency and honesty, so speak to them in a language that is plain and simple - no superheroes or ninjas.

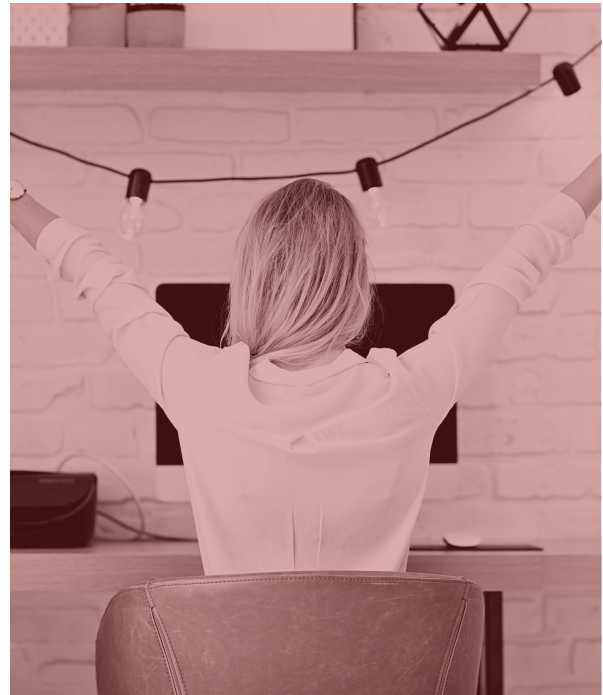
As millennials are generally more laid back than their predecessors, they don’t respond well to stuffy and ‘outdated’ language in business-speak – they want to do a job that they care about, and that lets them have a good work-life balance.

What millennials are looking for from a job advert is the offer of a secure job in a company that aligns with their values, and where there is scope for growth and development.

Tips for Recruiting Millennials

Be honest about the job duties, career progression prospects and the company.

- Don't use convoluted language to describe regular tasks.
- Highlight opportunities for work-life balance, e.g. early finish on certain days, flexi-time, work from home options (if applicable).
- Show off your company culture (more on this later) – millennials love a relaxed, forward-thinking and self-aware working environment. Think fewer table-tennis tables and bean bags and more collaborative working practices, health and wellbeing awareness and relaxed dress codes.
- Other job perks to highlight - health insurance, cycle to work schemes, (non-compulsory) staff lunch events.



Training Millennials

Once you've recruited, next you will need to know which methods of training are most effective for this generation. Millennials are sometimes bestowed with the title of 'job-hoppers' and can be seen as disloyal to their employer. While it is true that people of working age are changing jobs more often these days, it is not necessarily because they are disloyal – it is for a number of other reasons.

Instability in the economy and the rapid growth, and decline, of specific sectors, has meant that people, in general, are changing jobs far more than they have done in the past – not just millennials.

An employer eyeing their millennial employees with caution, believing them to be secretly applying for other jobs on their lunch breaks, does not a trustworthy relationship make. Doubting that their millennial employees will still be with the company in a year leads to a reluctance to put in place long-term training plans.

But in adopting the mindset that your millennial employees are not 'worth' training and developing because they're a flight risk can be potentially damaging to your entire legal firm. Invest in your millennial employee's training, and you invest in the future of your business.

Teamwork

The phrase teamwork conjures up the image of a group on a team-building awayday awkwardly trying to untie a human knot made up of themselves – I'm not talking about this.

Possibly due to their exposure to a fast-paced and ever-changing world, millennials are more open to collaborative working, trying new ideas and quickly rejecting those that don't work. Millennials want to be included in discussions about not only their development but the development of the company. They want to know how they fit into the bigger picture and how they can make a positive difference, no matter how small.

Millennials are sometimes ascribed with the trait of rejecting authority; of not respecting traditional systems and regulations.

But in reality, millennials are rejecting of the idea of a tradition for tradition's sake; they want to know that their efforts and opinions are valued and appreciated in a world where they have seen the damage caused by being told to blindly respect one's superiors, with the 2008 financial crash.

Tips for recruiting millennials:

- Have long-term plans for the training of your millennial workforce and share these regularly with them. They want to know how they will be trained over the coming months and years.
- Create a culture of communication in your company. Have open-door sessions where all members of staff can come and share their thoughts and ideas.
- Training sessions should be broken down into bite-sized chunks with regular recaps. Millennials want to be able to see how the thing they have just been working on fits into the bigger picture – long rambling training sessions that seem to not apply to them directly will make them turn off.
- Online or e-learning platforms should be utilised where possible. Millennials much prefer hopping onto their laptop or phone to complete a course rather than a traditional whiteboard and note-taking session.

Developing Millennials

The characteristic of the millennial is their need for urgency, meaning that they are always thinking about the future. They want to learn and get better, and they want to do it fast.

If you would typically enter an employee onto a training program after being with the company for two years, consider discussing with your millennial staff if they would be happier to be entered after a year.

Managers from the baby-boomer and Gen X generations developed in working environments where getting your head down and getting on with the job you were given was typically the norm: questioning the way things work was generally not the done thing.

While this quality of inquisitiveness can be viewed as disruptive by some – in reality, it has many benefits. Albert Einstein himself said that the definition of insanity is 'doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results'

Allow your millennial employees the freedom to question the status quo; the best ideas often happen when a different approach is adopted. Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat and Tik Tok, the current new kid on the social media block, are all multibillion-pound companies, and millennials created them within the last 15 years.

An eagerness to develop quickly should not be viewed as a bad thing – embrace your millennials’ appetite for fast development as a positive. Just remember to manage their expectations, and if it will take them two years, or more, to get the promotion, they are pressing for in their first six months – communicate this to them.

Tips for recruiting millennials:

- It is a myth that millennials enjoy job-hopping; quite often it is done out of necessity. 67% of millennials state that loyalty to their employer is important to them, so let them know that a loyal, two-way relationship is possible for the longterm benefit of both of you.
- Likewise, after living through 2008, millennials are very aware of saving for the future when their career allows it. Providing them with a good pension plan will give them a reason to stay and develop with your company.
- Partner your millennial employees up with a coach or a mentor within your company. Seeing a successful version of themselves in the future through a mentor is a great way to make younger employees feel developed

Company Culture

As mentioned earlier, the term company culture was a buzzword that has developed into invaluable workplace practice.

While there isn’t one precise definition to denote company culture, it generally comprises the ethos, practices, values and support network of a company and the team that they employ. Why is company culture so important to millennials?

The world today is vastly different from 30 years ago when baby boomers ruled the workplace. Their generation was one of hierarchy, jobs for life and a ‘live to work’ mentality. It was quite common for a school leaver to enter into a company knowing that they would walk through the doors of that organisation every working day of their life until they retired.

But while the UK job market was much less volatile in the past, the company culture of boomer-time has revealed itself to be somewhat problematic, as millennials strive to create a workplace where harassment has no place, where transparency is demanded from everyone from the CEO to the part-time admin assistant, and where every employee is made to feel valued.

An example of a good company culture is a company where there is an emphasis on staff wellbeing, where realistic goals are worked towards collaboratively, and where positivity is encouraged. In short, where the staff genuinely feel valued and respected, which results in them feeling positive about coming to work.

Creating a good company culture in your legal firm is not about simply pleasing millennials; there is data which shows that businesses with better cultures enjoy higher productivity and better results. The University of Warwick's study highlighted that happier workers are more productive by 12%.

Generation Z

Just as millennials have replaced boomers, soon there will be a new generation working their way through the ranks as Gen Z, who were born between the mid 1990s to early 2000s, come of workplace age: some of your youngest employees will already likely be from this generation.

While millennials are known as the first tech-savvy generation, Gen Z is even more so, being referred to as true 'digital natives'. They are also more absorbed in technology and living life 'offline' which appeals to some millennials is, to Gen Z, inconceivable.

This generation is even more independent, pragmatic and desiring of authenticity than millennials.

As this Forbes article points out, the way to make your workplace ready is to focus on 'digital fitness' – that is, how digitally enabled your business is. Outdated technology won't cut it if your business is to grow and adapt to a changing workforce.

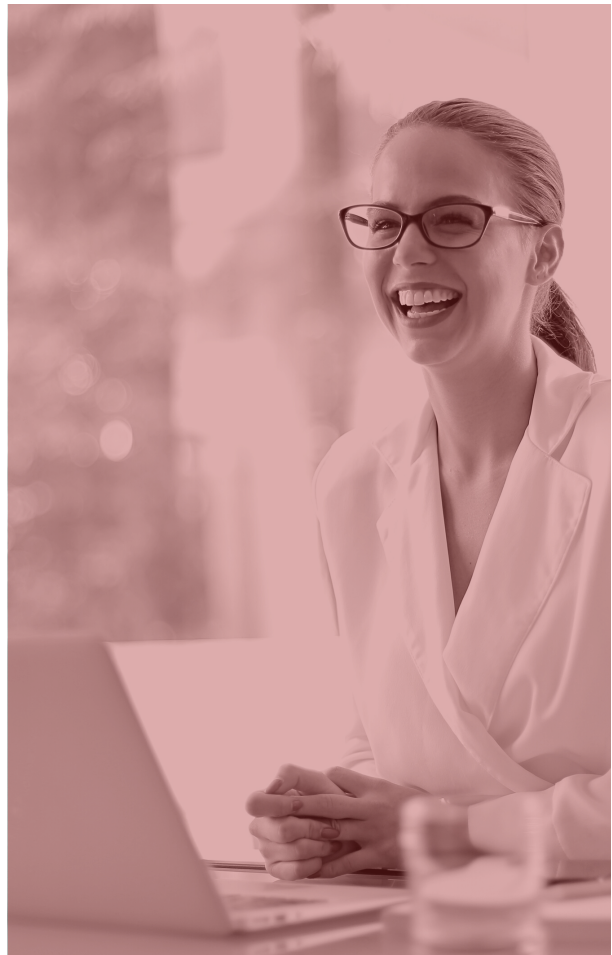
Just as the boomer generation had to adapt to accept millennial ideals in the workplace, soon it will be reshaped again.

While the oldest of this generation are still only in their early twenties, it will be some time before their impact is felt in the workplace; but their independence, love of entrepreneurship and tendency towards competitive working styles are set to make a significant impact on the world of work.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

It is important to remember that no generation can be defined by a set of characteristics, as each individual has a unique set of values and experiences which shape them. However, there are common themes we as legal recruiters see crop up when we are recruiting millennial workers for legal jobs.

Is it true that your millennial employees spend more minutes per day on social media than their boomer counterparts? Not always, but generally, yes.



Are your millennial employees more likely to have had more jobs in their ten years of working than older employees who have been in the world of work for 25 years? Again – not necessarily but in general, they probably have.

Will your millennial employees thrive in a place of work where they are included in the planning of the future of your business in a way that their ideas are respected and considered? Almost certainly.

Clichés don't help anyone, but understanding that your millennial employees will generally respond better to the managing styles outlined in this article than if you were to expect them to have the same values as employees from a different generation, will help you to get the best out of them.

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