

HERE COME THE {mil•len•ni•als}

noun: The next generation of employees.

1. Talented. Tech-savvy. Overprotected. Outspoken.
2. Children of the baby boomers.
3. Want a workplace full of open communication and collaboration.

* You may have noticed a new type of employee entering the work force. Optimistic and respectful, these workers go directly to the vice president of human resources to share a great idea on company policy, and then can't understand why they are reprimanded for not following the chain of command. Full of energy and ideas, they want to collaborate on projects, rather than receive a memo outlining what they need to do. Always willing to communicate, they crave feedback but are stunned when their supervisors deliver harsh criticism.

They are called the millennials. They are the children of the baby boomers and your next generation of employees. Born between 1982 and 2000, they are 76 million strong. Those who have jobs already compose the fastest-growing segment of the work force, going from 14 percent to 21 percent over the past four years. That's nearly 32 million workers in the United States. And there are more to come.

Like generation X before them, millennials bring an inimitable skill set and ideology to the workplace. From the time they entered junior high school, most of them have had access to cell phones, personal computers, e-mail, and the Internet. As a result, they communicate quickly and have even developed their own language expressed through emoticons and abbreviations such as LOL ("laugh out loud"), BTW ("by the way"), and SOS ("supervisor over shoulder"). Moreover, technology has altered the way they find information and learn; answers to most questions are only a Google search away.

As teenagers, many millennials experienced firsthand the labor shortage in Minnesota; they could easily replace any part-time job they didn't like with another that paid better. From a social standpoint, their boomer parents have placed a premium on self-esteem and fairness. These parents have been nicknamed the "helicopter generation," hovering over their millennial children to protect and monitor them at every turn. They provide structured activities for their children throughout high school, stay with them their first week of college, and even negotiate internships for them after graduation.

Traditionalists, and even some boomers and gen Xers, are scratching their heads when they encounter millennials at the office. From their perspective, millennials seem coddled and overprotected. They recognize that this generation is smart and talented, but also outspoken and sensitive to criticism. Millennials feel the disconnect, too. Why shouldn't they be able to talk to their boss as a peer? After all, they are doing it with their parents. And why do older colleagues seem to bristle when a millennial speaks her mind at a meeting—something that's encouraged at home?

The millennials' arrival at your company signals the start of a new era in the workplace. Following are five traits and trends that show you where older managers and the millennials might clash, but also where they can click.



by david stillman and lynne lancaster

How Come No One Asked Me?

From being dragged along with parents to Best Buy to choose a computer to being asked to research what car to buy, millennials have become among their parents' most frequently consulted advisors. Burned-out baby boomers have struggled to find time for a vacation—let alone plan one—so why not turn to the kids? Millennials not only had the time when they were growing up, but they were Web savvy enough to find the best deal.

*trait 1



The clash: Millennials are accustomed to freely offering their opinions at the dinner table, but they face a different situation at the boardroom table.

Management knows why a person who has been with the company for six months isn't editing the five-year strategic plan, but millennials are used to being involved in big decisions at home and are surprised (and perhaps offended) when they're not consulted at work. They might conclude that they are working in a place that doesn't value their opinions, or a culture that believes in order to have a good idea, you have to be around for a while. That could lead to higher turnover among millennials who dislike and do not understand a system that places tenure before anything else.

The click: When vacations that used to take weeks to plan were arranged between dinner and bedtime, parents realized that asking a millennial to get the job done was a smart move. Companies may benefit in a similar way, gaining a competitive edge by tapping into millennials' up-to-date ideas, knowledge of cultural trends, and ease of adapting to new technologies. Because millennials have become so comfortable giving input at such an early age, they are ready to initiate ideas. The advantage: Millennials will speak up at a time when other generations are afraid to challenge the way things have always been done.

Advertising agency Campbell Mithun in Minneapolis, for example, invited millennials to determine what would make the most meaningful experience for interns, because the company recognized that doing so would give it a competitive advantage in recruiting employees. The result? A branded internship program called The Lucky 13 that features a mentoring component and two mandatory performance discussions. Campbell Mithun saw its number of internship applicants more than double.

*trait 2

Stop by any T-ball field on a Saturday afternoon, and you may be surprised to find that these days, kids get to swing until they hit the ball. And it wouldn't be right not to let everyone have a turn at bat, so teams no longer switch places after three outs. Chalk one up for boomer parents who did a great job of launching the self-esteem movement with their children. Millennials are as proud of a 10th-place ribbon as they are of getting the gold.

There Are No Winners or Losers

The clash: Boomer parents took to heart the theories in Thomas Harris's 1976 bestseller, *I'm OK, You're OK*. While "everybody is a winner" may work on the T-ball field, it's not always how the game of work is played. There are winners and losers—and yes, someone is keeping score. After the first round of formal reviews with millennials, managers report that they find it useful to keep a box of tissues handy. After all, millennials are not used to hearing much criticism; they were always told that they were better than average.

"Our supervisors come from a generation that did not need a lot of external recognition beyond pay and promotions, so this need to provide a lot of praise may not come naturally," says K. C. Foley, executive vice president of human resources at Campbell Mithun. Managers and supervisors risk writing millennials off as immature rather than trying to understand the true reason behind the tears. What the manager sees as a minor suggestion can leave the millennial feeling paralyzed or lacking a sense of belonging.

The click: Campbell Mithun adapted its performance-review process to be more millennial friendly. Before any review, supervisors ask the employee to complete a self-appraisal. "This way, our supervisors can give recognition and provide specific feedback to millennials, as well as have an easier time reaffirming or expanding on growth areas," Foley says. "There are fewer surprises this way."

Millennials can help on the diversity front as well. Having been told their entire lives that there are no winners or losers, they have adopted the melting-pot theory as their mantra. Millennials grew up with classmates who have same-sex parents and friends who immigrated from countries around the world; this generation was raised to celebrate the differences among us, and therefore will lead the way in redefining diversity for companies.

Anything You Can Do, I Can Do More Of

The last time you walked by a millennial's desk, you probably saw him reading an online newspaper, checking e-mail, updating reports, finishing a project, scheduling an afternoon meeting, and chatting with a friend. The real mystery? How he does it all at the same time while calmly sipping a soy-milk, caramel macchiato.

As offspring of the competitive baby boomers, millennials have always heard that in order to stand out from the crowd, they would have to pack in as much as possible. By the time they entered high school and juggled three after-school sports, tuba lessons, advanced-placement calculus, drama, and volunteer activities at the local nursing home, we recognized that this generation was born to multitask.

*trait 3

The clash: Many millennials find the typical corporate pace to be like a cup of decaf. The challenge for employers isn't solely how to pack the job with enough stimuli to get millennials through the day; they must think about how to repackage and redesign career paths so that these young workers won't leave at the first sign of boredom. Beth Leonard, a baby-boomer partner on the management committee of Minneapolis accounting and consulting firm Lurie Besikoff Lapidus & Company, remembers a different experience when she was a new hire: "We had to work in a narrow practice area and repeat that task several times until we were good at it, without regard to understanding or differentiating skill. Only then would we even be considered to move on to something else."

In the past, employees would stay in a position for a few years before considering a rotation. Now, managers complain that just when they've finally learned the new hire's name, Dustin—or was it Dylan?—is asking when he can move on to something new.

The click: Today at Lurie Besikoff Lapidus, when new employees join the 130-person firm, they work on multiple assignments at the same time in a variety of industries not predicated on their previous experience or job title. "It was hard at first for many of the partners, who always want new hires to have a lot of experience in one specific arena," Leonard says. "But when we saw our job-acceptance rate go to the 90th percentile, we all got on board."

Ecolab in St. Paul has also acknowledged the value of multitasking millennials. "We've started numerous special-project teams on top of the regular workloads," says Kris Taylor, director of community and public relations at Ecolab. "Where some may be overwhelmed to sign up for one more project on their to-do list, we found that millennials jumped at the opportunity to get involved in a special project and were more engaged and excited because they were asked to participate."

Embracing millennials' ability to multitask will be essential as companies fight for survival in the war for talent. The National Commission for Employment Policy estimates that the worker shortage will grow to 5.3 million by 2010 and to 14 million by 2020.

Go Team Go!

By high school graduation, most millennials have had classes in how to negotiate, resolve conflict, and build teams. In college classes, they've been more likely to receive group assignments than their predecessors were. Millennials believe that there is safety and comfort in numbers. We now have a generation that likes to move in packs, think in packs, and even work in packs.

*trait 4

The clash: It wasn't too long ago when generation Xers were the new kids on the block, and they made it clear from day one that they wanted to work at their own pace and in their own space. So millennials' collaborative approach can seem exhausting—and downright annoying—to independent Xers. Where boomers and generation Xers want an office with a door, millennials want a work space with no walls.

The click: Safco Products, an office furniture and products company based in New Hope, considered the millennials in its office redesign. Safco removed all but a few offices and instead created work pods, or "bullpens," where four to five employees share a larger workspace.

"At first we had some resistance, especially from other generations who felt they had worked hard to earn their door," says Pam Lafontaine, Safco's director of marketing. But managers soon noticed that this new office setting improved the workplace. "Everyone feels more connected and in touch with what is going on, and the result is that we feel more like a cohesive team," Lafontaine says.

Safco adapted what it learned from the redesign into

its products. "Our work in designing office solutions, such as mobile filing and storage products that can be set up and reconfigured on a whim, not only encourages more collaboration, flexibility, and teamwork, but they have become our most popular line of products," Lafontaine says.

When Medtronic broke ground on a new facility in Mounds View in late 2005, it had the millennials in mind. "We knew this next generation wanted more collaborative workspace, so we are designing it to be as flexible as possible to accommodate both project

teams and functional teams," says Jim Driessen, a facility manager at Medtronic. "We have even included what we call clubhouses, where work groups create a space to work on a project for as long as it takes. When the project is complete, so is the workspace."

Millennials aren't the only ones who benefit from these office-space trends. After all, if you ask most successful CEOs their secret, they will tell you that it takes a good team. Ask them what gets in the way of creating that team, and they will say personal motives, competitiveness, and internal politics. Millennials' push to collaborate breaks down these barriers.



Let's All Talk About It

Boomer parents have instilled in their children self-esteem and the importance of open communication. Millennials weren't grounded and sent to their rooms. Instead, parents and children sat at the dinner table, discussed the offensive actions, and together chose the appropriate punishment. As a result, millennials are comfortable sharing their feelings and are rarely afraid to speak their minds in the office.

*trait 5

The clash: While millennials' parents may be comfortable hearing their children's opinions, the boss may not be. Millennials are challenging the chain of command, speaking their mind to all levels of management.

Millennials also want constant feedback on their performance. This communicative generation will not settle for a direct supervisor's opinion; they will also seek input from the CEO, peers, clients, the mail clerk, and the summer intern.

Another surprise: Many em-

ployers are starting to learn just how involved Mom and Dad are in millennials' lives, as parents weigh in on career decisions that previous generations didn't care to discuss with family.

The click: Even though millennials are speaking up, they generally are doing so with respect. In most surveys that have asked millennials whom they admire most, their parents top the list. This generation has grown up thinking of an older generation as heroes. All this free-

dom of communication has groomed millennials to be open to mentoring.

John Rash, an adjunct instructor at the University of Minnesota's School of Journalism and Mass Communications, sees these trends in the classroom. "Millennial students are much more comfortable challenging the instructor than students of prior generations," he says. "Some may view this as threatening, but I find it drives a more dynamic dialogue that focuses on the whole learning process. This collaborative way of looking at the world should serve millennials well as they begin to negotiate the next stages in their personal and professional lives."

Millennials know that their generation is unique, but they don't want to work in a world of "us versus them." They believe that open communication is nec-

essary to get critical jobs done. With tragedies such as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina hitting so close to home, millennials feel that they are living in an increasingly unstable world. As a result, they don't want to waste time analyzing who is right or who is wrong. Rather than sweat the small stuff, they want to roll up their sleeves and figure out how all the generations can work together. **TCB**

Generational experts David Stillman and Lynne Lancaster (info@generations.com) are co-authors of When Generations Collide: Who They Are. Why They Clash. How to Solve the Generational Puzzle at Work. Their company, BridgeWorks, delivers keynote speeches and workshops, trainer certification, and corporate entertainment on generational gaps in today's workplace and marketplace.