CONNECTING WITH THREE GENERATIONAL SEGMENTS IN THE WORKFORCE

A survey comparing Early Millennials, Late Millennials & Generation Z
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### Final Takeaways

### Methodology
If you came here to read a report, we hate to disappoint you.

“MOVE OVER MILLENNIALS, HERE COMES GENERATION Z”

REPORT, WE HATE TO DISAPPOINT YOU.

First, because we think “Gen Z” is a misnomer, though we’ll use it throughout most of this report for simplicity and clarity. Second, because we discovered that the best way to uncover unique qualities about this generation is in comparison to Millennials, their giant, scrutinized, and stereotyped older generational sibling. What we’ve known from years of secondary research is that Millennials themselves require a segmentation because Early Millennials aren’t like Late Millennials, and this quantitative data showcased that truth.

When researching young people, we knew that a clear line doesn’t always delineate life stage from generation, and our findings take that into consideration because life stage and generations are not mutually exclusive. FIGURE 1 At the writing of this report, the youngest Gen Edgers in this survey are 16 years old, applying for their driver’s license, and the eldest at 20 may be in the midst of learning the nuances of their first full-time job or completing their college degrees. For the Recessionists, or Late Millennials (born 1988-1995), the oldest are 28 and the youngest are 21 years old, and they are breaking into the workforce or starting families of their own. Early Millennials (born 1980-1987) are between 29 and 36 years old, starting or growing their family, and settling into their careers as leaders or soon-to-be leaders. See more details about our methodology on page 55.

If you came here to learn fascinating insights about the youngest generation, Generation Edge, you came to the right place. We’ll uncover just how different they are from Millennials. What are their hesitations about the workplace? What do they expect once they get there? And what are they envisioning for the future of work? These are the questions we set out to answer.

If you came here because you’re fatigued by the media’s portrayal of Millennials, you came to the right place. We know that all Millennials aren’t the same, and while we could segment the generation numerous times, our findings pointed to a division created around the Recession. Get ready to understand just how different Early Millennials are from Recessionist Millennials. To reach all of the above findings, we worked with Chris Desjardins, Ph.D., an independent statistical consultant, so you could say that we were in good quantitative company. Then we donned our BridgeWorks lenses to analyze the data and conduct focus groups and interviews. The results may surprise you, or at least challenge your current state of mind. You will leave this report with new insight on Generation Z and actionable takeaways to connect, engage, and motivate across the young generations as a whole. If you want to know more, feel free to shoot us a line, give us a ring, or send us a ping.

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If you aim to understand, motivate, and engage each generation in the workplace, then exploring what makes a generational cohort is a perfect first step. Rooted in sociology, generational theory focuses on understanding what the world was like during people’s teen, or formative, years and how that impacts the masses in adulthood. We use this context of the times that individuals grew up in to understand each generation’s—or as it were in this report, generational segments’—behaviors, attitudes, and motivations in the workplace.

Early Millennials grew up with the message of “there is no ‘I’ in team” in school and still value the power of the team over the individual. They were social media pioneers in their teen years using chat rooms, screen-names, and Facebook for the first time to build networks and friends.

Fire up your Dell or Gateway and listen for the grating yet oh-so-comforting screech of the dial-up modem—Early Millennials experienced the arduous process of getting on the web. This generation played Oregon Trail on their classroom’s first candy-colored iMac G3, tapped away on their Palm Pilots as teens, and signed up for Facebook when it was still .edu exclusive. They learned the meaning of “a/s/l” in chat rooms at the age of 10 and hoped that the other end was typing the truth. (A/s/l stands for age/sex/locat-ion.) Early Millennials experienced their formative years through a technological upgrade cycle and witnessed the evolution of tech advances unfold before them. It should come as no surprise that, now, they’re always looking forward to the next update, iteration, or edition of everything in their work lives.

Early Millennials were in the midst of their formative years when, it seemed, domestic and international violence made headlines all too frequently. They witnessed the deadliest high school shooting in US history, Columbine, and can remember teachers pausing class, wheeling in the TV, and watching live as the Twin Towers collapsed. The country was not impervious to foreign attacks, school was no longer a safe place—where could this generation turn? Parents, teachers, and counselors urged Early Millennials to express themselves and be themselves; the world was, after all, increasingly temporal. A generation who had once seen the world through rose-tinted glasses began to realize the danger that waited right outside their front doors. Luckily, they had a long list of adults and authority figures to discuss it with.

Early Millennials were the recipients of many a trophy. They didn’t ask for them, and they’re not proud of them presently. Though they aren’t pleased about it now, they were raised in the self-esteem movement that taught them how to be proud in process and results. They learned that having the right attitude, collaborating in a healthy way, and simply working very hard were worthy of celebration. As leaders, this doesn’t make them the lazy generation that so many stereotype them as. Instead it makes them optimistic and positive leaders, ready to celebrate and support their teams at all times.
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Recessionist Millennials felt very non-Millennial in our research, and the main reason is because they were comparing themselves to people in their early 30s—Early Millennials—who are different! We’ve labeled this younger segment of Millennials as Recessionists. It doesn’t take mental Olympics to understand why this name has been chosen. This segment of Millennials was strongly shaped by the Great Recession, as they were in the crux of their formative years when it affected millions of Americans. Whether real- ized or not, in both our survey and our focus groups, this rose to the top of influential factors, shaping how they think and how they work.

It feels, upon seeing daily media headlines, that student debt is synonymous with Millennials—and Recessionists specifically. This segment was entering, attending, and leaving college as the Great Recession (approximately 2007–2009) hit full force. Many left the bubble of optimism and security that was college, only to find themselves back on their parents’ couches unemployed, drowning in student debt, feeling down and out. Others saw their parents lose their jobs or the neighbors lose their homes before they reached their junior year in high school. For many, pivotal “adult” events (getting married, buying a house, starting a family) were, and still are, simply not financially viable, so this segment is left in a murky “adultescence.” In reaction, Recessionist Millennials became quite realistic, yet got a bad rap for being lazy and entitled.

Recessionists experienced 9/11 in their formative years as well, but the ensuing Global War on Terrorism (GWoT) expanded their perception (and fear) of an increasingly globalized world. As troops were sent overseas and big players like Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein threatened the future of democracy, this segment felt how transient and volatile the world could be. Recessionists are known for their YOLO (you only live once) mentality and may have been influenced by exposure to global happenings at a young age or the increased exposure to and existence of random acts of homeland violence, like movie theater shootings, school shootings, and violence against people of color.

Wait, what? Yes, you read that correctly. It is hard to find a cultural moment more joked and mused about by Recessionist Millennials than Pluto’s demotion to a dwarf planet. Though laughable and seemingly granular, Pluto represents more than just Millennial hysterics—it represents the retraction of a “fact” taught to them by trusted adults and institutions. If what they learned in school couldn’t be certain and enduring, what else could or would fall through? This stretched beyond the celestial into nearly every other walk of life—a reliable WiFi signal meant that they could find answers and truths to anything, anywhere via Wikipedia, Google, and the like. Recessionists, by nature of their debunked education and consistent slew of digital truths and non-truths, became a generation that questions on the regular. Though the loss of Pluto isn’t the sole cause, it held important implications for the education system and how Recessionists viewed authority figures less as authority and more as a filter for information.
This generation has grown up with social media from the get-go, and technology has only gotten more technologically advanced throughout this generation’s formative years. They see it as second nature, and with the abundance of social platforms available, Edgers are redefining digital and IRL (in real life) communication. They FaceTime, Snapchat, Instagram, and speak in emoji-only sentences—in essence, they’re cultivating a completely new visual language (in real life) communication. They know how to get their message across both visually and digitally can solve the conundrum of tone and intent getting lost in online communication. We think that’s pretty cool.

Throughout this report, we use Gen Z and Gen Edge interchangeably. Many ask us: why do you call them Gen Edge? This is a valid question as so many other names are out there and gaining in popularity. Gen Z, iGen, and Homeland Generation don’t capture the true essence and being of everything that they stand for. Because Gen Z is our most popular and most recognized, we see the value in adopting it; however, we think doing so does a disservice to this young generation—collectively. From a young age, they’ve learned to cope, manage, and move on as best they can.

They have an edge. They've developed a resilience from a young age out of necessity. Watching scary events unfold during passing time at school is different than generations past who watched these events unfold one after another throughout their formative years. Instances of police brutality and every day violence litter their social media feeds regularly; they are bombarded with news and images of domestic and international attacks—traumatic events occurred and continue to occur.”

This is the last generation of Caucasian majority in the US, and that truth affects how they think and act. They embrace all forms of diversity and expect the inclusion of it in all walks of life, especially at work. This may be one of the most powerful traits of this generation—every monumental stride in diversity awareness, rights, and inclusion influences this generation now. For some, it makes a conversation on trigger warnings critical, especially for leaders at work.

Regardless of where you fall on the political spectrum, it’s hard to deny the impact that the Obama family has had on this generation. The Obamas have built a legislative legacy as the first African American POTUS and FLOTUS. And for many Edgers, the Obamas were the first presidential family they can remember, setting a huge precedent for diversity, democracy, and leadership in America. President Obama has had a prolific run in the White House, but his and Michelle’s civic work is rivaled only by their cultural presence. Each has become a pop culture icon in their own right, appearing on late night talk shows, promoting physical fitness with Michelle’s “Let’s Move” campaign that greatly impacted the classroom, and adding humor and personality to an often austere profession. Edgers, in turn, expect more than just political prowess from those in office—they expect to see a personal side as well. And that expectation can be drawn to others in positions in authority.

If you aim to understand, motivate, and engage each generation in the workplace, then exploring what makes a generational cohort is a perfect first step. Rooted in sociology, generational theory focuses on understanding what the world was like during people’s formative, years and how that impacts the manners in adulthood. We use this context of the times that individuals grew up in to understand each generation’s—or as if were in this report, generational segments’—behaviors, attitudes, and motivations in the workplace.

**The Obama Saga**

Gen Edgers have experienced violence as no generation has before; it has become a condition of their lives, no longer isolated incidents. Sandy Hook, the Boston Marathon Bombing, Pulse Nightclub shooting, ISIS attacks—traumatic events occurred and continue to occur one after another throughout their formative years. Instances of police brutality and every day violence litter their social media feeds regularly; they are bombarded with news and images of domestic and international occurrences in real time. As a result, this generation has developed an “edge” from an early age and sees the world through a realistic and pragmatic lens. Some Gen Edgers have become desensitized and assimilated to violence, others demand and act in the name of change, equality, and inclusion. At work, they will expect an environment that prioritizes inclusion and diversity.

**Like, Swipe, Double Tap**

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**GWoT, Part III**

“Theirs is unprecedented. He is the oldest man to take office and the only POTUS to take office with no political or military experience. His presidency will surely have an impact on the masses in adulthood. We don’t know how the election of Donald Trump will yet impact this generation and, again, without any bias towards one side or another, one thing is true—his election is unprecedented. He is the oldest man to take office and the only POTUS to take office with no political or military experience. His presidency will surely have an impact on this generation. Stay tuned.”

**TRAITS**

- CONNECTED
- DIVERSE
- RESILIENT
- KEY
- IPHONE
- NETFLIX
- MINECRAFT
- TAYLOR
- SWIFT
- YOUTUBE

**TRAITS AScribed By Our PARTICIPants**

- Tech-Advanced
- Self-Absorbed
- Courageous
- Fair
- Seal Of The President Of The United States

**Read on for their defining conditions.**
1980–87 '92 '91 '90 '89 '88 '93 '94 '95 '96 '97 '98 '99 2000 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06

Twitter founded
Hurricane Katrina
YouTube founded
Arnold Schwarzenegger elected governor of California
Operation Iraqi Freedom begins
MySpace launched
Saddam Hussein captured
Darfur Genocide
Space Shuttle Columbia disaster
Indian Ocean tsunami
Dept. of Homeland Security formed
American Idol airs
No Child Left Behind Act
Invasion of Afghanistan
Anthrax scare
Enron bankruptcy
9/11 attacks
Invasion of Afghanistan
Anthrax scare
Arctic ice melting
Dot-com bubble bursts
George W. Bush elected
Hubble Telescope launched
Human Genome Project begins
Y2K
Columbine school shooting
Napster founded
Great Recession begins
First case of Ebola
First iPhone released
Netflix streaming service begins
Virginia Tech shooting
Avatar premieres
Tea Party movement begins
Barack Obama elected
WikiLeaks posts classified military documents
BP Oil spill
Assad regime begins chemical weapons tests
Tsunami devastates Japan
Occupy Wall Street begins
Operation Iraqi Freedom ends
Osama bin Laden killed
SnapChat created

1988–1995 '96 '97 '98 '99 2000 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06

Twitter founded
Hurricane Katrina
YouTube founded
Arnold Schwarzenegger elected governor of California
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Osama bin Laden killed
SnapChat created

Birth years
Early Millennials
1988–95
Recessionist Millennials
1988–92
Generation Edgers
1978–87
Early childhood
1970–77
Formative Years
1945–77

EVENTS & CONDITIONS TIMELINE
For over a decade, companies have worked to understand what young professionals expect from their work environment. What do they expect from their leaders? And how is that different than generations past? The reality is that young professionals today, Millennials and Gen Z, share opinions more than they oppose. For example, over half of all segments said they would give up a well-paid job for better work-life balance, yet the extent to which each segment aligns with this is different. When thinking about leadership, the majority of all segments want a boss who is encouraging first and honest second. While similarities abound, understanding the nuanced differences between Early Millennials, Recessionists, and Gen Edgers will set leaders, and the organizations they work for, up for success.
Kids often have a vague mental image of firefighters and doctors when asked about their future professional success, but for adults in the workforce, what exactly does that image look like? BridgeWorks asked participants to choose which of the following factors of success was most important to them: financial, work-life balance, autonomy, or societal impact. While each segment valued work-life balance, they also had other major motivators. Among all responses, Early Millennials consistently chose answers correlated with autonomy, whether that translated to owning their own company, choosing the hours they work, or having input over the work they do in the company. As a generation, this segment is in a life-stage where having control over their professional lives is of utmost importance. Whether that is having flexibility over their hours, picking the projects they take on, or owning their own company, creating an autonomous work life is something they strive for. Early Millennials chose themes that identified with autonomy significantly more than Recessionists and Gen Edgers. While choosing the hours to work may be something that every generation desires, Early Millennials reported in both quantitative and qualitative results that choosing their own hours caters to their life of being “always on,” whereas Recessionists and Gen Edgers valued this less. They would rather get all their work done and then go home to not think about work.

"Success can be measured in many ways, in both personal and professional spheres. For the purpose of this report, BridgeWorks is using the word "success" as a form of professional accomplishment."
Recessionists did not consistently correlate with any particular definition of success. That being said, they did show a loose pattern in responses on financial success and security. Whether it was having the ability to spend freely without hesitation, save and invest, or pay off their debts, they chose these themes more often than any other segment. Having entered the workforce as the Great Recession hit full swing, Recessionists are still finding their feet in the workforce while paying off heaps of student debt. Financial stability is likely a goal not yet attained, and they may only have a rough idea of when they can achieve it.

FIGURE 2 When Gen Z was asked what professional success meant to them, they consistently chose options connected to societal impact. To them, making a difference at work and working for a company that gives back or that takes a stand on social issues they are interested in were more indicative of success than autonomy and financial stability. This comes as no surprise as Edgers have witnessed and actively engaged with a striking number of social justice movements for change—LGBTQ rights, women’s rights and gender inclusion, and fighting against racial injustice. Working for an organization that aligns with their social compass is important and could be, or most likely will be, the deciding factor when Gen Edgers choose their career and the company they work for.

Since Gen Edgers are still in their formative years, it is possible that life-stage could play a bigger role in their responses than the Millennial segments. Research has found that all generations in their youth aspired to make an impact on the world around them. Yet there is no denying that Gen Edgers have engaged and fought for social movements that affect them presently. They have been able to learn about past social inequities more than any other generation, and this has given them heightened awareness to social issues.
FIGURE 2 > WHAT DOES PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS MEAN TO YOU?

**Early Millennials**
**AUTONOMY**
- Choosing the hours I work
- Having input over my work
- Owning my own company

**Recessionist Millennials**
**FINANCIAL STABILITY**
- Spending freely without hesitation
- Making enough money to pay off debts
- Able to save and invest

**Gen Edgers**
**SOCIETAL IMPACT**
- Making a difference at work
- Working for a company that gives back to the community
- Working for a company that takes a stand on issues I’m interested in
Debt, debt, more debt; you’ve heard it all before, probably a few hundred times. Millennials have seen their share of financial hardship, and Gen Edgers, though still young, are beginning to understand the financial strain of college or have witnessed their older siblings and parents struggle with loans. While Recessionists may align most with financial stability, that doesn’t mean Early Millennials and Gen Edgers view it as a low priority. To all segments, the question may be at what cost is financial stability achieved? All segments in both quantitative and qualitative research expressed their desire for a well-balanced life and financial stability. But what about financial freedom? Do long hours with high pay take precedence over flexible hours and stable pay?

Recessionists and Gen Zers still prioritized work-life balance over a well-paid job, but not as strongly as Early Millennials. Sixty-three percent of Recessionists and 58% of Gen Edgers said they would give up a well-paid job for work-life balance. These segments have witnessed first-hand how quickly the economy can shift, and as a result, creating experiences and memories often goes further than the dollar ever could; time is a valuable currency. At the same time, they may value it less than Early Millennials either because of life stage or because they grew up with Gen X parents who role-modeled balance (vs. the long hours of working Boomer parents). The younger segments learned what a working life should look like—balanced and as financially stable as possible.
I don’t know if I could put a price on balance. I recently had an offer that was a 30% increase of my salary, but I didn’t accept it... it’s just hard to put a numerical value on balance.

-Early Millennial
Leadership saw a significant shift when Millennials entered the workplace and the tried and true methods for leading Xers and Boomers began to fall flat. The young generation of disruptors simply expected the workplace to work differently because of the world they grew up in, so leaders learned (and are still learning) how to approach them in new ways. Sure, most younger generations may prefer to text their boss than pick up the phone, but when it comes to how they’re led, each segment looks for something different.

FIGURE 4 When asked what they value in a leader, Gen Edgers and Recessionists were significantly more likely to value a leader who encourages them rather than pushes them, with half of Recessionists and slightly more than half of Generation Edgers agreeing with this sentiment. Though Early Millennials also say an encouraging leader is important, it was significantly lower than Gen Zers and Recessionists. This may reflect that these younger segments view leaders as coaches and mentors who drive through positivity.

Early Millennials, on the other hand, were significantly more likely to value a boss who pushes them. This could reflect the reality that Early Millennials are feeling confident and secure in their positions, so having leaders who push them will help their career climb, which ultimately allows them the professional autonomy they so desire. They also likely want an authority figure to push them and give challenges so they can prove themselves, busting stereotypes about their generation in the process. Though Early Millennials are stereotyped as a generation needing trophies for trying, the numbers tell a different story.
FIGURE 4 > WHAT DO YOU VALUE MOST FROM A LEADER/BOSS?

- **They encourage me**: 
  - Early Millennials: 41%
  - Recessionist Millennials: 50%
  - Gen Edgers: 54%

- **They are honest with me**: 
  - Early Millennials: 24%
  - Recessionist Millennials: 26%
  - Gen Edgers: 26%

- **They push me**: 
  - Early Millennials: 24%
  - Recessionist Millennials: 14%
  - Gen Edgers: 10%

- **They relate to me**: 
  - Early Millennials: 10%
  - Recessionist Millennials: 8%
  - Gen Edgers: 7%

- **Other**: 
  - Early Millennials: 2%
  - Recessionist Millennials: 2%
  - Gen Edgers: 2%
FIGURE 5  Our survey found that Early Millennials were more likely to choose responses that correlated with collaboration than Recessionists or Gen Edgers. Early Millennials were most apt to strongly agree with these statements: "I believe working together is the best way to solve problems", "I need the group to approve my work in order to feel confident", and "I am more productive when I am working with someone."

This finding doesn’t mean that Recessionists and Gen Edgers aren’t collaborative; they just weren’t as likely to choose responses connected to collaboration. On the flip side, they did not choose responses correlating with strong independence either. A possible source of this conundrum is technology, which simultaneously makes it easier to connect and easier to detach. With increasingly popular collaboration tools like Slack, FaceTime, and Google Docs, working collabo-dependently is easy, and focus tools like headphones turn open-office environments into personal workspaces without losing human interaction. "Alone together” might be an accurate phrase to describe Recessionist and Gen Edge work styles. You may see this when a group of younger workers sit in a room or space together, working independently but together with a whiteboard wall at hand, just in case, for an impromptu brainstorm led by their Early Millennial manager.
Sometimes [collaboration] is good, but sometimes I know what I want to do, and other people get in the way. Let’s just do our own things, but in the same room.

- Gen Edger
Robust diversity & inclusion programs or initiatives are going to be critical in attracting and engaging Generation Z, especially with their expectation to make a societal impact at work.

Work-life balance isn’t going away any time soon, but Early Millennials are more keen on the loose definition that work-life integration offers.

Early Millennials are, by far, the most collaborative segment of young professionals. As leaders, collaborative methods define their approach.

Recessionists are aptly named. Financial stability will be a key driving force for them at work. Get ready to motivate via financial incentives while remembering that it may not work as well for Early Millennials.
“Disruption” is a word often associated with the youngest generations. It implies the unique work styles and ethics all Millennials and Gen Zers bring to the professional world. They fearlessly present revolutionary ideas, change processes, and seek new ways of doing things. Though they put up a confident and courageous front in the workplace, behind that confidence are quiet questions, “Is this the right job for me?” “Is this what I thought it would be?” “Can I really make it in this career I’ve chosen?” Perhaps you have been one of those people who has both celebrated the ease with which younger people use technology and pondered if it does more harm than good. Millennials do the same. How does technology influence and affect Millennial and Gen Edge communication? Do these segments worry more about making money or enjoying their jobs? Realizing each segment’s hesitations about work will help organizations retain top talent and better manage and guide employees, so they can realize their full potential and give as much as they can to their organization.
“Millennials are too connected to their devices.”
“Why can’t they form full sentences?”
“What is the point of emojis? Use words!”

There is no doubt that when it comes to communication, the youngest generations are stereotyped as poor communicators who are too reliant on their phones to look their managers in the face. Technology has certainly transformed how the youngest generations think, work, and communicate, but it hasn’t made them inept at in-person communication. Rather than drive people apart (as technology differences are wont to do), we drove to understand how comfortable and how unsure each segment is with technology and communication.

**FIGURE 6** Participants were asked to choose what form of communication was (or will be) most challenging for them at work. Across all segments, in-person communication was the top response, but Gen Edge was significantly more likely to say so. Almost three in four (74%) Gen Edgers say they will struggle with communicating in person. Two in three (65%) Recessionists and just half (50%) of all Early Millennials say the same.

**FIGURE 7** Not every segment felt confident in calling themselves “tech-savvy”, either.

**FIGURE 8** When it came to other forms of communication, Early Millennials were more likely than their younger counterparts to choose email and instant messaging as a form of communication they struggle with. In fact, they were over three times as likely as Gen Z and over twice as likely as Recessionists to say email will be a struggle, and over two times as likely as Edgers and Recessionists to say instant messaging will be a struggle. While email seems like a workplace staple today, Early Millennials witnessed its evolution and know the challenges it can cause. Email, though the most used form of communication at work, is also the most likely method for intent to get lost in translation. Email lacks what in-person, phone, and even IMing and texting can more easily convey—a more candid or informal tone.
If you have fears about Gen Z being incapable of professional communication, calm them with the fact that they fear it too. The world of communication is shifting. Their tech savvy is a gift, and they see it as that too. Their generation grew up with Facetime. Video conferencing comes naturally, and they'll likely favor it over phone calls. With global companies and the rise of webinars, this will be a gift. Also, unlike Early Millennials and some Recessionists, Gen Z always had visual tools (Facetime, Instagram, emojis) to communicate the meaning behind their words. This gives them a leg up in bridging the communication divide when so much intent gets lost in translation. They innately know how to make their tone and intent clear (as long as employers accept a happy face emoji over an exclamation point).
I think technology is a really good thing because a lot of people with social anxiety can rely on texting, and they don’t have to rely on answering the phone or terrible things like that…

-Gen Edger

“YES”

Early Millennials 40%
Recessionist Millennials 65%
Gen Edgers 71%
FIGURE 8  WHAT FORM OF COMMUNICATION WILL/DOES YOUR GENERATION STRUGGLE WITH MOST?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of Communication</th>
<th>Early Millennials</th>
<th>Recessionist Millennials*</th>
<th>Gen Edgers*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In person</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instant message</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text message</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Totals come to 99% due to rounding.
Though finding meaning in their work is important to Millennials, it cannot pay the bills or buy a craft beer. As each segment—specifically Early Millennials at this moment—enters a life-stage involving families and mortgages, finances become increasingly top of mind. What other concerns do Millennials and Edgers have about work?

If [a recession] happens again, we don’t want our jobs taken away. We want people to think, ‘Well they’re irreplaceable they can’t lose their job.’ I feel like with our generation, a lot of them want to go above and beyond, just to ensure that we don’t have our jobs taken away once we get them.

—Gen Edger

FIGURE 9 When asked what worries them most about the workplace, all segments chose financial instability as their top concern. Each has uniquely experienced the economic turmoil associated with the Great Recession. Early Millennials were young professionals and had just entered the work world when it shifted to one that only hired people with 5 years of experience. Recessionists entered college right after watching neighbors lose their homes. Millennials had to find a job in a jobless market, carrying student debt, and boomeranging back to Mom and Dad’s house until the housing market recovered. As preteens, Gen Edgers watched their neighbors and maybe even their own family members lose jobs and houses, and they welcomed their older Millennial siblings back home after college. Since all segments chose financial instability as their top concern, we focused on each segment’s second-ranked concern.
Work-life balance was the second largest concern for Early Millennials and Recessionists, with lack of career growth as number three for both of them. Take note that while these may be a top concern, they aren’t the drivers of their entire decisions. When we pressed each segment in focus groups, they were filled with questions. “Yeah, but is it worth it?” “I’d love to have a job where I make a lot of money, but… is it worth it if I don’t have a good balance? If I never get to travel? If I’m only working? If I don’t have good friendships? If I have to move every few years?” Furthermore, Early Millennials have been stereotyped as a generation that has no loyalty and job hops. Many who leave their organizations do so for a specific reason—they’re not getting developed as employees or as leaders, so it makes sense that career growth is in their top three responses.

Gen Edgers chose “not enjoying your job” as their second concern, an option not in the top three concerns for Early Millennials or Recessionists. As the oldest Gen Edgers are now in college, they have not yet experienced the workforce in its entirety and may not yet know what priorities will arise as they shift from school to work. They have also seen their Gen X parents trying to balance work and life while enduring economic hardships and, now, hitting the gray ceiling. Work, from an Edgers’ perspective, should be more than just a means to an end. And if it is, they’re not going to work overtime just because it’s expected. “Mandatory overtime” will be overtly antiquated to them.

The Price of Losing the Extra Appendage

All generations have a close bond with their technology because it’s a necessity to get through every day.

**FIGURE 10** We wanted to know just how precious technology is to the younger generations, so we asked, “What would be worth giving up your phone for 6 months?” By and large, both Millennials and Gen Edge have the travel bug more than any generation, but 44% of Gen Edgers would cut off technology to travel the world. Interestingly, there are the same amount of tech addicts in each generation as 13-14% of respondent across all segments said they’d never give up technology.
**Figure 9** What are you most worried about in the workplace?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Millennials</th>
<th>Recessionist Millennials</th>
<th>Gen Edgers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Financial instability</td>
<td>1. Financial instability</td>
<td>1. Financial instability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Not getting along with peers</td>
<td>5. Not getting along with peers</td>
<td>5. Not doing work that matters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What would be worth giving up your phone for 6 months?*

- Travel the world with all expenses paid for six months: 44% (Gen Edgers), 34% (Early Millennials), 28% (Recessionist Millennials)
- Have my dream house: 28% (Gen Edgers), 21% (Early Millennials), 15% (Recessionist Millennials)
- Be guaranteed my dream job: 28% (Gen Edgers), 21% (Early Millennials), 15% (Recessionist Millennials)
- Predict the future: 14% (Gen Edgers), 14% (Early Millennials), 13% (Recessionist Millennials)
- I would never give up technology: 7% (Gen Edgers), 5% (Early Millennials), 6% (Recessionist Millennials)

*Participants were asked to rank responses.
Young professionals are self-aware of their shortcomings. Gen Z is aware that face-to-face communication will be a challenge, so prepare to have trainings and orientations especially geared towards building soft skills.

Lack of career growth and lack of balance are top reasons that Early Millennials and Recessionists will leave an organization. Build a culture of authenticity and creative career development in order to retain top talent.

Gen Edge is particularly concerned about not having their dream job and not enjoying their job. Your recruiting conversations need to touch on why they will enjoy the job beyond the finances.
Times are a-changin’, as rock legend Bob Dylan once sang. And as they do, successful companies will embrace how new generations shape the ever-evolving workforce. Early Millennials, Recessionists, and Gen Z will soon comprise the majority of the workforce, bringing their own set of ideals, ideas, and expectations around loyalty, career pathing, and motivation. As Millennials continue building their careers and Gen Edgers begin theirs, we thought it important to explore how each generation is preparing for their futures, so you can best prepare to manage, lead, and engage with them.
Early Millennials, the generation pigeon-holed as never staying in one job for very long, should be pigeon-holed no more. To those we surveyed, 11+ years was the next logical plan to stay with a company after 4–7 years. Over a quarter of Early Millennials chose 11+ years as their second choice, with 8–10 years not being far behind. Many of this segment are entering a new stage in life, whether you want to call it “adulting”, settling down, or a changing life course. Early Millennials are seeing more value in staying with a company for a longer amount of time. Many may be tired of changing jobs and ready to progress with one organization, or maybe they are in need of a stable job to pay off debts.

BridgeWorks asked each segment to identify how long they believed they would stay with one organization. **FIGURE 11** All segments responded with 4–7 years as their first answer, with 34% of Early Millennials and Gen Zers and 35% of Recessionists choosing this response. This makes sense for these segments. Numerous sources in the media cite the necessity of changing jobs to refresh their resume, continue learning new skills, and stay relevant. While 4–7 years is only a blip on the radar for other generations, it is a good chunk of dedicated time for the youngest generations; however, differences in each segment’s second choice show a distinct generational difference in the loyalty game.
Recessionists went in the opposite direction. For their second choice, 32% of them answered that 0–3 years is how long they plan to stay working at one company. That is the highest response rate of any segment; both Gen Edge and Early Millennials picked this as their last choice! This younger Millennial cohort was entering the workforce as the Great Recession hit full force, or soon thereafter. In their teens and early 20s, they saw a workforce that reflected tough times, including layoffs, job losses for those who had remained loyal to a company their entire working lives, and an entire population of youth taking unpaid internships because they didn’t have the five years of experience necessary for an entry-level job. As a result, Recessionists view job-hopping as more stable than sticking with one organization. Additionally, we can’t ignore the factor of their life-stage. Fresh out of college or early in their careers is a time of unknowns, so 0–3 years is a practical length of time to either make ends meet or test a first professional job.

Almost as many Gen Zers chose 11+ years as their second choice as they did 4–7 years; this is the highest response rate for 11+ years in our study. For a cohort viewed as logical and pragmatic, Edgers may view company loyalty with an "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" mentality. If they have found a stable position that allows them to live and work how they want, why change that? Finding a new job may come down to a change in life-stage, or these stats could change when their masses surge into the workforce. Many employers may assume that with each ensuing generation, the idea of loyalty will just erode more and more, but that is not the case. Gen Edgers will likely surprise employers when they seek leaders and employers who embrace their respect for company loyalty.
How long do you plan to stay working for one company?

**FIGURE 11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Early Millennials</th>
<th>Recessionist Millennials*</th>
<th>Gen Edgers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3 years</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-7 years</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-10 years</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td></td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11+ years</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Total comes to 99% due to rounding.*
The youngest generations are building their careers with differing mentalities around what a career will mean to them and their employer. **FIGURE 12** BridgeWorks asked each segment to choose what they believe work is or will be. Each segment was least likely to say that their work is or will be an investment in the organization they work for, echoing the sentiment that each segment defines loyalty differently than generations before—loyalty is not to an institution or organization. Our qualitative respondents paired loyalty with their manager or their colleagues.

...**An Investment in my Future Career**
Early Millennials were significantly less likely than other segments to say that their work is or will be an investment in their future career. Why? Because they’re already IN their careers! They’re managing, leading, and stepping up while Recessionists and Gen Zers are still in building mode.

...**A Reflection of my Identity vs. Something I Do to Pay the Bills**
**FIGURE 13** Of the three segments, Recessionists were significantly less likely to say that work is or will be a reflection of their identity. Both Early Millennials and Gen Edgers were more responsive to this statement—44% and 45% chose this sentiment, respectively. In that sense, some feel that they are the antithesis to laziness, because when you care so strongly about work, you put every effort forward to ensure that you’re giving it (and your identity) your all.
Conversely, Recessionists were most likely to say that their work is or will be something they do to pay the bills. While the exact reason for the lower numbers was not specifically measured in this study, we sought answers in our focus groups.

After seeing the impact of the Recession in the crux of their formative years, Recessionists don’t have good reason to give so much of themselves that they burn themselves out, get overworked, or are solely career-focused. To them, it makes more sense to have a good job where they focus and work hard during the day, so that they can then go home and think only about their personal lives. This pattern of working is similar to Gen Xers, many of whom raised the youngest Millennials. They have seen adults lose some form of identity when they lose their careers, and most Recessionists don’t see this as a logical choice for themselves.

“If we’re treated like a commodity, then, to me, my company is a commodity. And if I have a better opportunity that comes along, I’m going to take it. For example right now, my company decided to cut our 401K match because they had a bad stock quarter. They don’t care about me, so why should I care about them?”

—Early Millennial
Choose the statement that you identify with when it comes to thinking about your work in the future.

**Early Millennials**
- My work is a reflection of my identity: 44%
- My work is something I do to pay the bills: 25%
- My work is an investment in my future career: 16%
- My work is an investment in the organization I work for: 14%

**Recessionist Millennials**
- My work is a reflection of my identity: 29%
- My work is something I do to pay the bills: 32%
- My work is an investment in my future career: 28%
- My work is an investment in the organization I work for: 11%

**Gen Edgers**
- My work is a reflection of my identity: 45%
- My work is something I do to pay the bills: 16%
- My work is an investment in my future career: 33%
- My work is an investment in the organization I work for: 6%
It’s not that I don’t care about my job, I just know what can happen if you dedicate your whole life to work—the rewards are minimal and you never know when you might lose something. Who wants to look back and regret?

- Recessionist Millennial
Being a “leader” can be a lofty term to understand in the workplace, especially to the youngest generations. For these cohorts, leadership is not so much associated with title, hierarchy, or number of direct reports, but the ability to influence and create meaningful work. BridgeWorks asked each segment to respond true or false to the following statement, “I am confident that I would be a leader within five years at my workplace.” Over half of all segments said true.

**FIGURE 14** Early Millennials in particular, were significantly more likely to respond positively than any other segment. In fact, 73% of Early Millennials said true, compared to only 60% of Recessionists and 63% of Generation Edge. The oldest Millennials are in their mid-30s, so of course they naturally see themselves as leaders; however, unlike generations past where paying your dues was the only way to get promoted, the youngest generations feel that results produced, not hours worked, will lead to corporate climbing. It’s the ongoing debate of leaders—do you reward seniority or meritocracy?

Recessionists were the least likely to see themselves as leaders, which can be attributed to multiple factors: they have enough work savvy (more than Gen Edgers) to know what it takes to be a leader, they’re hesitant to make the sacrifices those in leadership roles have currently made, or they’re planning to leave organizations and enter newer ones at the same level. Ultimately, Recessionists have less optimism than Early Millennials, and maybe even Generation Edgers, in what the future is going to look like for them in their respective organizations.
I am confident that I would be a leader within **FIVE YEARS** at my workplace.

**FIGURE 14**

- Early Millennials: 73%
- Recessionist Millennials: 60%
- Gen Edgers: 63%
Employers need to change the conversation around loyalty. If the masses of young generations expect to stick around for 4–7 years, build loyalty during that time with rotational programs, creative (even disruptive) career pathing, and alumni programs.

A large portion of Generation Z plans to stick around in companies longer than Millennials. Build their trust and loyalty now by not stereotyping.

Recessionists may work to live, not live to work like the segments on either side of them. Create a productive environment to make that work for them.

Young professionals see themselves as leaders in the very near future. Do you?
When it comes to diversity in the workplace, gender diversity is rising to the top of many organizations’ list of priorities. Traditional gender roles have changed drastically across the generations, and they continue to change as Recessionists and Gen Zers populate the workforce. From equal pay to female leadership to maternity leave, viewing gender through a generational lens can help navigate a diversity lens that may otherwise be sensitive to discuss. If you’re looking to recruit and retain the best of the youngest generations, they’ll have expectations around all lenses of diversity, but here, we are just focusing on gender diversity.
Hestitations & Expectations

FIGURE 15 BridgeWorks asked participants if they think their gender identity* is or will be an obstacle in their career path. While overall the majority of all segments indicated no, there were differences between the male and female genders of each segment, with the largest gender gap occurring with Gen Z.

Among Early Millennials who identified as male or female, females felt significantly more conscious of their gender identity impacting their career (40%) versus males who said the same (28%). Interestingly, Recessionist men (48%) were more concerned about their identity being an issue compared to the other segments. This is especially important to pay attention to as industries in the STEM fields fight to recruit and retain more women, but according to these findings, Gen Edge doesn’t think it will be any more seamless than it was for generations past.

Leaning into Female Leadership

When each segment was asked if they would like to see more female leaders in the workforce, an overwhelming majority of each segment responded positively. FIGURE 16 Seventy-eight percent of Early Millennials, 86% of Recessionists, and 90% of Generation Edgers responded positively. Females of each segment were also significantly more likely to say they’d like to see more female leaders than their male counterparts.

Gen Edgers in particular were significantly more likely to say they would like to see more female leaders in the workforce, with 90% of respondents agreeing with the statement. Gen Edgers are growing up in a time of immense social change, and gender is no exception. Female leadership, equal pay, and an expanded definition of gender has influenced this generation’s opinion of gender inclusion in the workplace.

The Confidence Gap

The confidence gap between men and women in the workplace has been a topic of research and discussion over the past few years. Despite Sheryl Sandberg’s Lean In campaign and advertising that aims to empower women, females in the workplace still show less confidence in their skills and leadership ability.

The good news is that gap seems to narrow as the generations go on. FIGURE 17 For all segments, males are much more likely to expect to be leaders. FIGURE 18 Older Millennials were most likely to show a confidence gap. As the generations get younger, the difference between male and female segments from each generation got smaller. Gen Edgers’ expectations of being a leader had only a 6% difference, while Early Millennials were over three times that number.

*Respondents could declare themselves male, female, or other with a write-in. See methodology for more information.
FIGURE 15  WILL YOUR GENDER IDENTITY BE AN OBSTACLE IN YOUR CAREER PATH?

“YES”

Early Millennial
Females
40%

Early Millennial
Males
28%

Recessionist
Millennial
Females
38%

Recessionist
Millennial
Males
43%

Gen Edge
Females
50%

Gen Edge
Males
16%
FIGURE 16  “I WOULD LIKE TO SEE MORE FEMALE LEADERS IN THE WORKFORCE.”

“YES”

78% EARLY MILLENNIALS

86% RECESSIONIST MILLENNIALS

90% GEN EDGERS
“I am confident that I will be a leader within 5 years at work.”

59% of all females

75% of all males

“TRUE”
FIGURE 18  “I AM CONFIDENT THAT I WILL BE A LEADER WITHIN 5 YEARS AT WORK.”

“TRUE”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Early Millennials</th>
<th>Recessionist Millennials</th>
<th>Gen Edgers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The struggle of gender diversity and inclusion certainly didn’t begin with Millennials or Gen Z. Traditionalist women embarked on the long journey for women’s rights, and each generation has progressed those ideals. Thanks to the years of progress made by generations past, the youngest generations grew up during a time that emphasized girl power, female empowerment, and gender equality. We’ve come far, but there is still much farther to go, especially for women of color.

These numbers are too striking to ignore. Layering lenses of diversity only adds to the challenges that organizations face in diversity and inclusion, and we aim to continue this important research in the future.
Before we embarked on conducting a quantitative survey, we already had qualitative evidence that Millennials are different. Stand up and say, “You’re a Millennial!” to a group full of people born between 1980 and 1995, and they may not take it kindly. In fact, chances are they’ll balk and say, “Umm... no I’m not.” From this research, we know:

**Early Millennials**
- More collaborative
- Define success as autonomy
- More optimistic and idealistic

**Recessionists**
- Define success by financial stability
- Less prone to define their lives by their work
- Not in a place to stay with a company for a long period of time

As leaders, Early Millennials are collaborative, democratic, and idealistic. As young employees, they sought work-life integration in which they couldchoose their hours and their place to work, and they valued breaks throughout the day for a walk, a coffee, or a quick cat video watch. Once those Millennials become managers, they may realize just how difficult it is to manage those qualities. Or, if they manage Recessionists, they may have to adapt to their younger counterparts’ different values and motivations. Instead of a lunch outing, Recessionists may prefer it catered in. Instead of regular check-ins and brainstorming, Recessionists may prefer absolute structure.
Gen Edge Wants to Change the World, Perhaps with Tech

Much like every generation in their youth, Gen Edgers are fired up to make the world a better place. While other generations learned about strife and disease in school, but had to wait for a higher education to do anything about it, Gen Z learns about those same things, then goes online to do something about it. Using YouTube and Google as their professors, they are creating solutions to global, national, and local problems. If they aren’t already doing that, they at least know that technology empowers them with the possibility. Similarly, they’ll use technology to fight for the inclusive world that they want to live in. With these platforms, they won’t be silent.

The Great Recession’s Great Impact

The media seems to largely ignore the impacts of the Great Recession on the Millennial generation. Chances are, you can speak to any Millennial and they’ll tell you a tale that goes something like, “When I was young, I was told that if I worked hard and followed my passion, great things would happen in my life. Then I grew up and discovered that was all a lie!” The time at which a segment experience the Great Depression has shaped them differently. Early Millennials, most of whom graduated into a pre-recession economy are more optimistic and collaborative. Recessionists, most of whom entered and left college in a post-recession economy, are more realistic and financially-conscious. Generation Edge is showing financial savvy right now; we’ll see how that manifests in them as adults.
Across all segments, gender gaps are clear: they want to see more leaders in the work environment, they foresee obstacles because of their gender identity, and fewer women see themselves as leaders than men. While progress has been a constant in Gen Edgers’ lives, the finding that they are the most concerned about gender being an obstacle and are the biggest gender gap in confidence of future leadership tells a different story about gender progress. Perhaps they’re highly attuned to it. Whatever the matter, it’s critical that work be done by leaders and managers on not only the generation gap, but also every other lens of diversity.
“We give the story behind the statistics,” is one of many mottos at BridgeWorks. In this report, our methodology was to:

1. Find the statistics with an extensive quantitative study, and
2. Find the story via focus groups and interviews.

To gather insight into some of the statistics presented within this report, we’ve conducted individual interviews and focus groups. As the basis of our study was steeped in finding more about the up and coming workforce, Gen Z, we have conducted more focus groups and individual interviews with them. We applied our knowledge from studying Millennials for over a decade to fill in any gaps in the survey.

The scope of the quantitative survey recruited through Lightspeed GMI included:
BridgeWorks has been bridging generational gaps in the workplace and marketplace since 1998. We are a team of generational junkies who eat, breathe, and sleep the generations topic. We recognize the importance of social history and how it has impacted the way generations of people understand the world around them, how they work, and who they are in the workplace. For years, we have worked with top companies around the world to bridge gaps via our research, writing, consulting efforts, and established presence in the keynote speaking world.