

Five Millennial Myths

Written by Bob Snyder
16. April 2012

Jennifer J. Deal's **Five Millennial Myths** is subtitled: Forget what you think you know about your Gen Y employees.

That part was easy: I didn't know much.

The conventional wisdom, apparently, is that "...everyone under the age of 30 is needy and narcissistic. They want the corner office and a company car, but they aren't truly committed to their organization. They don't take kindly to criticism, but can be easily won over with the next hot gadget."

Deal asks: "Can companies afford to put their trust in these types of characterizations?"

For the past 12 years, she studied the so-called generation gap through empirical research, and found the stereotypes of millennials in the workplace as inconsistent at best and destructive at worst. With data collected from more than 13,000 participants in for-profit, nonprofit, and government organizations, Deal identifies five key myths that companies believe about their younger employees.



Myth #1: Millennials don't want to be told what to do.

The reality: Wrong! Their research shows (unexpectedly, she admits) that millennials currently in the workforce are more willing to defer to authority than either baby boomers or Gen Xers.

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Millennials are more likely to thrive if they know the ingredients for success in the workplace, starting with the basics. For example, although it may seem obvious to an older manager, millennials may appreciate being told what time they are expected to arrive at the office, and precisely how quickly they should turn around a project (beyond just “ASAP”).

Myth #2: Millennials lack organizational loyalty. They aren’t committed to their company, and will change jobs when offered a small increase in salary.

The reality: Their research shows that millennial employees have about the same level of organizational commitment as boomers and Gen Xers.

Myth #3: Millennials aren’t interested in their work. Their lack of commitment to an organization is also demonstrated by their lack of interest in their job.

The reality: Their research clearly shows that millennials currently in the workplace are just as intrinsically motivated (“into” their work) as are boomers and Gen Xers.

Deal says, “It isn’t that millennials aren’t motivated; it’s that they’re not motivated to do boring work. And boomers weren’t any more motivated by that kind of work when they were younger. If you want to motivate millennials, it’s a good idea to give them work they will actually enjoy and find meaningful. Most people understand that it’s not all going to be fascinating, but a reasonable portion of it should be, or why not find a new job?”

Myth #4: Millennials are motivated by perks and high pay. They are interested only in material rewards, and organizations will go bankrupt trying to satisfy the millennials’ desires.

The reality: They found no relationship between a person’s generation and whether he or she is motivated by perks and high pay. In other words, millennials are about as motivated as boomers and Gen Xers by perks and money.

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Myth #5: Millennials want more work–life balance. They want to spend lots of time outside the office, whereas boomers and Gen Xers are workaholics.

The reality: This myth is actually marginally accurate. Millennials are interested in work–life balance, but not much more than Gen Xers are. I

“Executives can best manage a multigenerational workplace if they understand and address the reality of what their younger employees think and what really motivates them,” says Deal. “The key is to separate myth from fact, and focus on creating an organizational culture that supports all employees regardless of when they were born.”

*Jennifer J. Deal is a senior research scientist at the Center for Creative Leadership in San Diego, Calif., and the author of **Retiring the Generation Gap** (Jossey-Bass/Wiley, 2007).*

Go [Retiring the Generation Gap](#)