

S P E A K E A S Y



**IT BEGINS WITH DIALOGUE**  
SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES  
ABOUT MILLENNIAL  
STEREOTYPES

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# SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES ABOUT MILLENNIAL STEREOTYPES **BEGINS WITH DIALOGUE**



If you did an internet search for the word “millennial” right now you would be inundated with a string of research and opinion pieces that claim to hold expertise on the subject. By now we’ve all heard the “*top three ways to attract millennials to your company*” more than we ever cared to. So much so that the common list of stereotypes (entitlement, laziness,

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tech-savviness, flightiness, etc.) have begun to feel like accurate descriptors of this population. In fact, many companies and colleges have used that research to craft their recruitment policies as well as their learning and development programs in hopes of better aligning their company with millennial values.<sup>1</sup>

**If we take a step back and reflect on the validity of most thought leadership about millennials, we would see that most opinions align with the publishing organization's or company's mission – directly impacting the perspective given.**<sup>2</sup> This may explain why some

articles claim that millennials are the laziest generation<sup>3</sup> while others claim that they are hardworking.<sup>4</sup> It is important to understand an author's motivation for writing an article before accepting an opinion as fact.

If we truly understood the harmful effects of widespread generalizations we would avoid furthering



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stereotypes surrounding age.<sup>5</sup> Stereotypes are a breeding ground for polarization between millennials and members of other generations.<sup>5</sup> Seasoned professionals concerned with the success of a company feel skeptical about new colleagues that are labeled “flighty” or “entitled” while young professionals enter the workplace feeling like they already have one strike against them. All in all, broad labeling and stereotyping results in division that negatively impacts company morale and the ability of colleagues to work together as a team<sup>5</sup>.



**The first step to mending this division is dialogue. To discuss objectively and gain a more balanced perspective, we should understand why we stereotype.**

Why have we dedicated so much thought leadership to Millennials.? Well to start, they are the largest American generation in recent

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history and are **projected to comprise 75% of the global workforce by 2025<sup>5</sup>**.

Previously viewed as dependents, many companies must suddenly wrestle with understanding this generation as a dominant population in the labor force. It seems as if the realization hit everyone at the same moment.

Suddenly companies are feeling the need to get to know this mysterious, new generation on a large-scale. The problem is that most of the observations published about them have been very general and often authored by members of more senior generations.

**For companies to truly maximize the millennials within their organization it is important to understand the nuances of the young professional.**



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## NUANCES IN AGE

A good example of the non-monolithic nature of millennials can be seen in the wide range of ages that make up the generation. Millennials' are characterized as adults born from 1983-1999 and range from ages 18 to 34.<sup>6</sup>

**That large spread in age eliminates the ability to associate the same habits and beliefs across all of Generation Y.** On average 43.3 % of thirty- four year olds are managers of their jobs<sup>7</sup> while 36.2% 18-24 are attending colleges or universities.<sup>8</sup> When articles use the broad term "millennial" to describe young professionals they are often referring to 22-25 year olds who have spent less than three years in the workplace. This tendency to focus on the youngest, less experienced millennials is the root of many of the false stereotypes. The older Millennials are nearing their mid-thirties and many have stable families, jobs and mature professional existences. It is critical that companies refrain from widespread generalizations as millennials represent one of the most diverse groups in American history.<sup>6</sup>

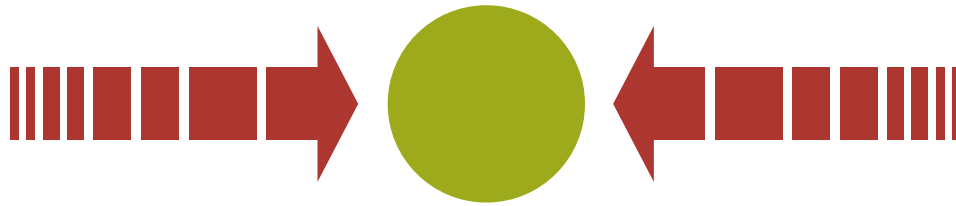
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## CONTEXT

We constantly see reports on millennial proficiency with technology, ability to collaborate well, and tendency to be naturally creative.<sup>6</sup> While all of these characteristics could be applied generally to Generation Y, a more specific but less talked about characteristic of early adulthood is the opportunity for development. Fluid intelligence – defined as the mind's information processing system<sup>9</sup> – peaks during the late 20s creating a tremendous opportunity for companies to develop millennials. Activities that utilize fluid intelligence include learning, problem solving, and pattern recognition – all integral parts of adapting to a new environment.<sup>9</sup> In that way, millennials are great resources for out of the box thinking. **Paired with older coworkers who have more experience they could become a great asset on a team that needs new, innovative perspectives.** There's no guarantee that a millennial employee will be tech savvy or creative, but with adequate development opportunities those chances dramatically increase.

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## THE POWER OF THE INDIVIDUAL

It is important that all generations within a workplace strive to see the world from the perspective of their colleagues. After all, your view of someone is directly tied to how open you are to learning something new from them.

**Being willing to shift your perspective - realizing that your experiences are directly related to how you handle situations and respond to problems - will reduce unresolved conflict based in generational stereotyping.<sup>5</sup>** As a human resource professional the goal of creating an environment that is a great work space for all rests with the ability to drive openness throughout your organization.

1 <http://blog.hrcloud.com/6-millennial-retention-strategies-to-adopt-in-2015>

2 <http://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Millennial-Muddle-How/48772>

3 <http://nextshark.com/im-a-millennial-and-this-is-why-we-are-the-laziest-generation-ever>

4 <http://thetab.com/us/2016/05/27/research-supports-millennials-not-lazt-8770>

5 <http://acedemic.oup.com/workar/article/3/2/200/2623833/The-Effects-of-Stereotype-Activation-on>

6 <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1437/millennials-profile>

7 <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/data-analysis-documentaion/federal-employment-reports/reports-publications/federalworkforceoverview.pdf>

8 <http://www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/index.php?measure=104>

9 <http://study.com/academy/lesson/two-types-of-intelligence-fluid-and-crystallized-intelligence.html>

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