

Member's Quarterly

Winter 2018 Edition

Feature

Engaging the Millennials

It's more than just meaningful work

It doesn't seem to matter which part of the world I visit, a hot business topic is engaging the Millennials. Just recently in Singapore, I participated in a panel discussion on the topic. There were various points of view presented and the overall tone was that the Millennials (i.e., aged 18–35) were problematic or at least a bit of a pain.

Our Spark Engagement Model explains engagement in ways that demystify it. There are various definitions of engagement but more or less they all come down to employees making an emotional commitment to their organization.

In our Spark Engagement world, we know that passionate engagement emerges when two important drivers converge: Meaning and Progress. When we see our work as highly meaningful and we have a significant sense of progress, passion emerges!

High MEANING + High PROGRESS = PASSIONATE ENGAGEMENT!

Regarding Millennials, we question what is meaningful to them and what do they consider to be signs of progress? Once we understand their drivers of meaning and progress, we will understand their drivers of engagement.

What are the main sources of meaning for Millennials?

Millennials are often called the purpose-driven generation. It has often been thought that Millennials tend to choose a meaningful work experience over a paycheck. In fact, a recent study with LinkedIn members shows that this isn't exactly accurate. Sure, Millennials desire meaningful work but they also have other motivational drivers.

They're young, therefore establishing their career and income are important. Many are looking for partners and thinking about a family. Aligned to these results, a recent PWC study found that training & development and flexible working hours were highly valued, followed by financial rewards.

Yes, Millennials want their work to mean something. They want to contribute but they are also trying to find their groove at work and in life. However, inspire them with a sense of purpose and they are likely to be three times more productive, according to a 2015 article published in the Harvard Business Review. All of us want to know that our work matters and that we are making an impact. Feeling irrelevant does not make for a fulfilling work experience!

Millennials are seeking to establish themselves in life. We can support them by creating a meaningful work culture that inspires them and supports them in achieving what is most meaningful to them, while giving the organization a big boost in productivity.

What are the main signals of progress for Millennials?

Passion begins with meaningful work but it doesn't end there. Our research clearly shows that there's also a deep desire for progress. Millennials are no different. They want to experience progress in their current work but also in their career. In fact, the same PWC study concluded that "Career progression is the top priority for millennials who expect to rise rapidly through the organization. 52% said this was the main attraction in an employer, coming ahead of competitive salaries in second place (44%)."



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But what does career progress look like? Baby Boomers will likely think of a formal promotion. Moving up the corporate ladder is often synonymous with career progress. Career progress is much more nuanced than this, however. Career progress can take many forms.

It is more helpful to think of career progress as a gradual incline that takes effort but is also enjoyable to ascend. This is because as you journey, you see the results of your effort. Seeing results as we advance motivates and enables perseverance. For some, results will take the form of learning something new or developing a new skill. Others will see broadening their area of responsibility as advancement. For some, leading a project provides the signal of progress that tells them they are aligning with their career aspirations. Still others look to financial rewards as a signal that their work is appreciated and valued, positioning them for new opportunities. And, a surprising number find meaningful feedback an important day-to-day signal of progress, assuring them that they are on track with both work and career.

Think of an incline (not a corporate ladder) marked with many signals of progress. Create opportunities to provide signals of progress and often. Share the burden as well. Help them see progress that might not be visible to them. Help them understand the impact of their work. Support them in finding signals of progress in the everyday. Millennials like the pace of progress to feel fast so learning to see and celebrate progress at very regular intervals is critical to engaging Millennials.

A final word: Although progress is critical, Millennials must also know that ultimately the incline will lead you to something meaningful, making all of your time and effort worthwhile. This is the value of aspirational goals, corporate vision and mission statements. They take our numerous efforts and make them add up to something important.

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