

Is Your Organization “Millennial Friendly”?

A friend recently emailed me and asked if I had a list of suggestions for working with millennials that he could give the development professional at a national organization where he is involved. I had thoughts but no list – until now.

Millennials were born between 1984 and 2000. They are characterized as digital natives, the first generation that grew with computers, the Internet, email, social media, downloading their music and always having a cellphone present. Millennials are “global and mobile” as the saying goes. They appreciate diversity and expect equality. If the generation that precedes them (Generation Xers) talk about work-life balance, millennials are about work-life integration, and they value flexibility.

As I started to put my thoughts to paper, these 18 tips and tricks for nonprofits to be “Millennial Friendly” were born.

1. **Lose the organizational ego.** Millennials support causes, not organizations. Keep your mission front and center, and lose the bureaucracy. For Millennials to be and stay involved, they need to feel the cause is being advanced or helped.
2. **Be experiential.** Millennials value experiences. They don't want to hear about the impact you are having. They want to be part of it, to experience it and touch it first-hand. Engage them through meaningful interactions.
3. **Don't be so “Staff Driven”:** Millennials want to actively participate in the work. Find ways for millennials to do a task or job, not just fundraising.
4. **Be transparent.** Millennials are used to being part of the conversation and in the loop. The old style of making decisions ahead of time and presenting them isn't going to fly. Organizations must show their decision making processes and give a chance for input.
5. **Flatten out.** Millennials have little interest in hierarchies and are not impressed by positions and titles. They believe everyone should have a voice and that the best ideas and strategies should be followed, not because they came from the top.
6. **Collaborate.** Millennials are highly collaborative and want to work together, not in silos.
7. **Embrace technology.** Make important documents and information available in Dropbox, Google Docs or on a private Wiki page.
8. **Be current.** They are used to accessing information using technology 24-7. Millennials follow you online via your website and on social media. You need to keep your website current and keep your calendar up to date. Because most will visit your website on their mobile phone, make sure your site is mobile friendly.
9. **Go virtual.** As digital natives, they are tech-savvy and used to working, talking and meeting virtually. Millennials expect to be able to “be” at your meetings using virtual conferencing such as GoToMeeting, WebEx, Skype etc.
10. **Recognize millennials' offices don't have doors.** Millennials often work in open environments or cubicles and don't have doors they can close to have private conversations. For the most part, they are not the boss or division heads and don't take long lunch hours to have meetings. This means that you are going to be pressed to schedule meetings in the middle of the day or have phone calls during work hours for most.
11. **Be social and connected.** Millennials are social and hyper-connected! Your organization needs to be engaged on social media channels and make them easy to find and access. Organizations often struggle to get their word out. Employ the help of your Millennials to like, post and tweet your information. Give them pictures, videos, impact stories, stats, news and more to share on their social networks! Engage them on social media beyond Facebook. Instagram and Twitter are important channels for this crowd.

12. **Don't necessarily call.** Even though Millennials are the "mobile generation" it doesn't mean they want to *talk* with you on the phone. Texts, messaging or emails are often favorable to phone calls. Ask!
13. **Show and appreciate value.** Provide opportunities for Millennials to meet each other, network, and develop their skills. Even though much will be done online, providing in-person social opportunities and interactions are important. Remember that they are used to learning remotely so short online training will work. Look for opportunities for Millennials to share their talents with your organization.
14. **Make giving easy.** Make sure your website is set up for donations. Share the impact of donations online and provide opportunities for peer-to-peer engagement.
15. **Ask for smaller and repeat gifts.** Consider capitalizing on the trend of asking for donations instead of birthday, wedding or holiday gifts.
16. **Respond in real time.** Millennials are used to instant feedback and require immediate – or at least timely (within 24 hours) responses.
17. **Lose the formal affairs.** They have sophisticated taste in food and spirits, but they don't like stuffy and formal affairs. Millennials prefer casual attire and creative fare.
18. **Innovate.** Millennials are innovators and value change. Being static goes against their grain. They will not stick around if you are not moving forward and innovating.

It is a challenge for organizations full of baby boomers at the helm and in leadership positions to be responsive to this coming of age generation and implement changes to their organizational cultures. The first place to start is by enlisting the help of millennial staff members regardless of their positions. Second, organizations may consider putting together either an ad hoc committee or task force on millennial engagement. Third, board chairs or lay leaders would be wise to make sure millennial voices are heard on governing and advisory boards to help organizations make these shifts.

Your organization can benefit greatly from this unique generation that cares deeply about social change and doing good. Half of the workforce will be comprised of millennials by 2020. Organizations that adopt cultural changes and welcome them early and earnestly have much to gain.

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