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Millennials and Safety

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Years ago when I was quite young, I remember my elders discussing how the youth of that time was a mess and society was going to come to an end when they were in charge of things. Well, fast forward to today, and we hear and say much the same thing about the millennials.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics, millennials represent 36% of the U.S. workforce and will represent 75% by the year 2025.

There are countless news stories out there focusing on their values, their work ethic and their knowledge of technology. While defining a generation is important, the workforce needs to stop focusing on their differences and instead embrace and adapt to their unique characteristics just as has been done with prior generations.

Members of the millennial generation (born between 1980 and 1995), understand the reason for safety. This generation is incredibly sensitive to personal safety. This heightened sensitivity is a response to the way they experienced violence during their formative, or teen, years. Baby boomers (born between 1946-1964) and gen-Xers (born between 1965-1979) have seen their fair share of violence, but the millennial generation has experienced it especially close to home. The Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, mass shootings at Virginia Tech and Columbine, and natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina have contributed to the creation of a generation with great concern for personal safety.

Millennials rank “personal safety” as a top workplace issue. According to a recent American Psychological Association survey, they rank it higher than any other generation as a stress factor in the workplace. As young professionals, they look for processes, documentation and recruitment language as evidence of a commitment to workplace safety.

Here are a couple ways employers can help young adults feel safe and secure at work:

1. **Make training and security measures accessible**

Millennials can access information about a company’s history, workforce, product and location at the touch of keypad. If information about safety and security is not readily apparent, they may feel insecure about working there.

2. **Promote personal safety**

Millennials often ask prospective employers about worksite security, evacuation plans and required safety training. It’s advisable to have answers to these questions and evidence to back it readily available. Don’t shy away from having this on your company’s career page. Top candidates will appreciate a mention of safety, and when they become employees, a safe work environment will give them a sense of pride.

Different mindsets

- Baby Boomers entered their work careers when OSHA and EPA were being formed. The group mindset of boomers places heavy emphasis on regulatory compliance for safety program management. Millennials grew up with the Internet. Millennials Google best safety practices.



- Boomers entered their work career when 30-year retirements were expected. Millennials expect many job hops for income or career growth, and they will transport their 401K to different employers.
- Boomers often blend work with life activities – they value helping fellow coworkers. Millennials separate work from their personal life – helping others is not a top priority.
- Boomers buy the products they make. Millennials buy whatever product they believe offers the best quality and price.

Now let's explore deeper how generational mindsets may influence workplace safety programs.

Building a culture for millennials

- **Step 1:** Understand them: Millennials are different from those who have come before them. Don't assume they are clueless, their circumstances are probably much different from yours. They grew up surrounded by technology and in an era of instant answers. In the workplace, they may ask questions and interact with senior personnel in ways you do not expect.

Longevity with an organization is different for this generation. Millennials will gladly take six months off to go hike the Appalachian Trail or volunteer overseas. Look for ways to make the most of time you have together.

- **Step 2:** Spell everything out: Assume nothing. Review your expectations with them before they start on the job. If you expect a certain set of behaviors, you will need to make it clear what they are.
- **Step 3:** Use praise often: Millennials expect feedback with praise – whether merited or not. To get the most out of Millennials, you need to learn how to give feedback more often. Don't try to patronize them. They can see through it with x-ray vision.

Do not provide feedback solely on the fly. Make time to have a structured one-on-one with them. It will ultimately benefit them and the organization as well. The result? There have been no further anonymous complaints to OSHA. The combination of actions appears to meet a key objective in enhancing trust, and perhaps building better loyalty, among the entire workforce. Are these actions the new norm expected by millennials?

Editor's Note:

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In order to ensure the contents of the newsletter are helpful and important to you, please feel free to send comments, suggestions and feedback to:

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Resources:

- **OS&H magazine - Training and the Millennial Generation** October 6, 2014
- **Millennials rank personal safety as top workplace issues** By Hannah Ubl November 5, 2013
- **Do millennials fit into your culture? Different values challenge old-school thinking** August 26, 2015 [Dan Markiewicz, MS, CIH, CSP, CHMM](#)

