

## **Shifts in Calling: An Emphasis on Calling for Millennials**

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*The Millennial generation is identified as a generation that requires constant attention, but still prove to be overachievers in many work situations. The stark contrast in the depiction of this generation has led critics to state that the Millennial generation is restless with no sense of calling. In this article, an analysis of literature is provided in response to the criticism that Millennials have no sense of calling.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Millennial generation has been identified as “high-maintenance, but also overachievers” (Connell, McMinn, & Bell, p. 101). The Millennial generation, the term used to describe those born between 1980 and graduated from high school in the early 2000s, is described as narcissistic and entitled (Howe & Strauss, 2003). Exacerbating this opinion, employers have seen proof that Millennials are restless in employment barely staying in jobs beyond 18 months (Dill, 2014). In fact, this designated generation changes jobs 6.3 times between the ages of 18 and 25 with few Millennials believing their current positions are a part of their future career paths (Jackson, 2014).

Millennial employees have also been found to have characteristics that become lost in the negative stereotypes surrounding the generation. This generation strives for new opportunities, desires challenging work, and measures success through quality of life (Randall, 2010). The Millennial generation has multiple questions about why they have to travel to work when the same work could be performed at home just as easily or why is business dress such a central component of office work policy. Ultimately, this generation does not desire to be in the same job for extended periods of time, and as a result, this leads senior employees and outsiders from this generation to believe that Millennials have no sense of calling.

In terms of Millennials, then the idea of calling would seem a foreign concept. Novak (1996) explained that “Each calling is unique... requires more than desires; it requires talent... reveals its presence by the enjoyment and sense of renewed energies its practice yields us” (pp 23-26). With the influx of negative perceptions, the positive attributes of the Millennial generation have been lost in the array of pessimism toward their lack of purpose or drive.

The purpose of this article is to examine the gaps in the literature where the Millennial generation and Novak’s definition of calling are concerned. Millennials are in fact optimistic, family-oriented, and expect to be financially sound (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2000). Within this article, the calling of the Millennial generation will be analyzed and explain how careers-as-calling (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015) offers insight toward the mislabeling of Millennials and the misidentification of their characteristics and its correlation to a lack of calling.

## **DEFINING CALLING**

When calling first became a focus of assessing for job congruence, approaches were thought to be and analyzed as stemming from a religious based revelation toward purpose (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Seligman, 2002). Dik & Duffy (2012) found between two studies that people now consider callings “a guiding force, a sense of personal fit with a job, and altruistic attitudes that align with a broader sense of meaning and purpose” (p. 9). Calling provides the job seeker or employee with a sense of self at work (Hall & Chandler, 2005). This sense of self in the idea of a calling provides workers with intrinsic motivation based upon their knowledge that the job workers have is the job workers are meant to keep.

The deep sense of purpose that was initially identified with calling was often reserved for clergy or religious affiliations. Today, calling is found to be identified in many altruistic professions such as healthcare, non-profit organizations, and education (Boyatzis et al., 2002; Cheney et al., 2008; Heelas et al., 2004). In identifying with previous generations, calling often meant that individuals were led to make exorbitant amounts of money, work in the legal profession, or take over the family business. Similar to the movement from secular versus sacred discussions of calling (Dawson, 2005), the Millennial generation separates calling from aptitude.

## **MILLENNIAL CHARACTERISTICS**

Twenge (2006) leads the charge that the Millennial generation is a product of the self-esteem movement from the 1960's & 1970's. Her analysis of this generation centralizes on the over inflated egos that resulted from the everyone wins movement. Beyond the ideas of their parents, Millennials have also developed their mannerisms and opinions from the world around them that has included but is not limited to the following: Enron, TYCO, Columbine High School shootings, Desert Storm, Monica Lewinsky, September 11, and the War on Terror (Elam, Stratton, & Gibson, 2007.) These unique points of reference as with previous generations and their iconic moments has also significantly impacted the Millennial generation as individuals and as a workforce generation.

In taking into account the most significant historical events in addition to their parental perspectives' the Millennial generation has a unique set of attributes. Meister & Willyerd (2010) identify this generation as attention sponges, who need constant feedback, want a personally fulfilling life, committed to community service, academic overachievers, and are collaborative. Additionally, this generation is seen to value intelligence (Skiba & Barton, 2006), respect diversity (Gorman, Nelson, & Glassman, 2004), highly optimistic (Monaco & Martin, 2007), and ethnically diverse generation (Feiertag & Berge, 2008).

With the unique qualities present in the Millennial generation as a workforce, evidence should show extremely high job satisfaction and longevity in that this group loves feedback (Shaw & Fairhurst) and appreciates goal-achieving (Donnison, 2010). By being results oriented and wanting to work closely with supervisors, this generation has the potential in the right jobs to thrive on opportunities as a motivated workforce.

## **CAREERS AS CALLING**

Berkelaar & Buzzanell (2015) explain that calling should be enacted through an individual's career selection, which they entitle careers-as-calling. This approach emphasizes the importance a calling has toward motivating and moving a person in the direction of the best career path for the individual. As previously mentioned, the Millennial generation views many of their current jobs as just that, jobs. For careers-as-calling to be implemented, workers must be able to identify the trajectory of their careers (Berg et al., 2010).

The Millennial generation views the entry-level jobs where most of them work now as stepping stones or biding their time until they find their real job. Specifically, 55 percent of respondents to an SBR Consulting Survey replied that they were unsure or were not going to work for corporate America in the long-term (Randall, 2010). Farrell & Hurt (2014) explain Millennials wish to work in organizations where

they are able to affect change and participate as change agents. Corporate America, especially through the eyes of this generation cannot be trusted to change or act in the best interest of its employees.

Adams (2012) addresses the how the literature supports young adults desire to find calling and purpose in their work. The movement toward ideas of calling in the workplace (Steger et. al., 2010) is extremely important to take into account for the Millennial generation. This generation seeks self-actualization, accomplishment, and contentment. Furthermore, Millennials believe they can accomplish these desires through their profession (Guillemette, 2009).

## APPLICATIONS

Ultimately, the key to properly utilizing Millennial talent in the workplace is to capitalize on their desire for achievement and self-fulfillment. As a generation of achievers, this group of employees can best be supported and developed by helping them find their niche within an organization. Helping Millennials find a sense of purpose or significance, in the sense of providing “a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that at once is meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self” (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, p. 121).

Steger et. al. (2006) articulates that finding meaning can increase psychological health and well-being not only for Millennials but for all employees.

Helping Millennials discover calling in their job is important in the retention of Millennial employees because as a generation they value meaningful and satisfying work (Hirschman, 2006; Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010; Smola & Sutton, 2002). This generation wants to go into fields where they can have a significant impact upon the world. According to the National Society of High School Scholars, St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital is the top employer Millennials seek to find meaningful work. Older Millennials seek to find meaning in their jobs and younger Millennials desire to care for others and place less importance on material possessions (Smith & Aacker, 2013).

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