How the Millennials Won Me Over

By Pat Wadors **November 14, 2015**

When I joined LinkedIn in February 2013 as head of human resources, I thought: “I’ve got this.”

I brought 20 years working in various roles and industries in Silicon Valley, a place that leads the country in creative thinking around workplace perks and pay. I had experience and passion for what I do. What I didn’t fully anticipate was the bold emergence of the next generation and how quickly they would change the world en masse.

You may call them Millennials, but I also call them Ben, Eddie and Katie. Those are my three kids; two in college, one in high school. Millennials are also known as “my employees.” At LinkedIn, we have more than 9,000 employees, and Millennials make up approximately 60 percent of my workforce. On average in the U.S., this population makes up only 34 percent of the overall workforce, so you could say we are leading the pack.

In getting to know this generation better, I’ve become a huge admirer of Millennials. I’ve learned to dismiss what I’d previously heard about them (that they can be self-serving, lazy, entitled, impatient and starved for frequent praise). In fact, Millennials have consistently won me over by being themselves.

When interviewing for a job, for example, they rarely bring up compensation. And when they do, it comes at the end with an insightful question, like “Do you believe this is fair comp for the position? And what is my opportunity for growth?” They ask about development and company purpose more frequently and earlier in the recruiting process.

In fact, Millennials generally tend to value meaning over money. Studies show that 55 percent of them make job choices based on companies’ corporate cause positions. According to a [Deloitte](http://www.sfgate.com/search/?action=search&channel=business&inlineLink=1&searchindex=gsa&query=%22Deloitte%22) survey this year, 47 percent of Millennials believe that the “purpose of business is to improve society/protect the environment.” Eighty-three percent of the 3,000 MBA students polled by the nonprofit Net Impact said they would take a 15 percent salary cut “for a job that makes a social or environmental difference in the world.”

At LinkedIn, employees have a huge appetite for volunteer opportunities, helping veterans, the disabled and others. This summer at one of our monthly InDay events, about 4,000 employees around the world participated.

Millennials also seem more appreciative than their predecessors. When executives speak at events, or when they provide coaching, the likelihood of the Millennial reaching out afterward to say thanks or express appreciation is significantly higher than what I’ve seen with other generations.

And they are revolutionizing how work gets done. As the first digital natives to enter the workforce, this generation embraces new technologies. They are the driving force behind emerging collaboration tools. Do you remember when companies banned social networking sites? This generation gets credit for why you don’t. One study noted that Millennials have on average 2.5 devices, whether cell phone, tablet, desktop or Apple watches. (My kids fit that average.)

Besides changing how work gets done, they are also changing the work environment. It is not uncommon for me to walk around a pingpong tournament on my way to a meeting. The crowd of Millennials all cheer for their favorite player — and their camaraderie is tangible. This increases employee engagement, which is why so many startups have pingpong, Foosball and other “virtual water-cooler” like spaces. It is where great collaborations get started. I do have to confess that the first time I saw these game spaces, I wondered about work productivity. Boy, was I wrong. This generation plays hard but they also work hard.

Millennials are fearless connectors — online and offline. The emergence of companies like LinkedIn, Pinterest, Snapchat and Twitter is a testament to the Millennial generation’s commitment to “communities” and connecting. Their preference for urban settings encouraged us to open a San Francisco office for 1,000 employees. Millennials connect fearlessly with strangers with whom they believe they have a common interest. They seek opinions, educate themselves and play games, all online, often without ever meeting a person face-to-face.

Yeah, my kids fit this one, too. The summer before Ben’s eighth-grade year he spent hours in the family room on Xbox Live playing for hours with “Tyler Man.” Ben never met him in person. They loved gaming. The family felt like we knew Tyler Man, as Ben would yell instructions to him as they battled other teams. We talked about Tyler Man and the gaming conquests over dinner.

They fail fast, and learn from their mistakes. One myth is that Millennials are job hoppers. But their pattern is not atypical from prior generations. Last year, the median job tenure for workers age 20 to 24 was less than 16 months. For those 25 to 34, it was three years, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](http://www.sfgate.com/search/?action=search&channel=business&inlineLink=1&searchindex=gsa&query=%22Bureau+of+Labor+Statistics%22). Compared with older generations, Millennials are more willing to experiment, try new things and “fail forward.” What they do is go after opportunities they are curious about. They are bold in their thinking, and fearless with change. It doesn’t seem to slow them down or create a sense of self-doubt. They are not tied to a single employer. If one role doesn’t work out, well, there is another.

In my first few months on the job, I traveled to our global offices, listening to employees’ ideas, questions and concerns. What I heard — often from highly vocal, passionate and articulate recent hires who are Millennials — advanced my thinking around how to attract, retain and engage the world’s best talent. We were good, but we had opportunities to improve.

As a result, we’ve improved our retirement savings programs, wellness offerings, same-sex benefits, fertility coverage, and put more effort into causes, helping the communities in which we work. We have changed a lot, always for the better.

My prediction is that with their sense of responsibility and acute social awareness, Millennials will change the world for the better. It will be a world where people get equal pay for equal work. A world where problems get crowd-solved by diverse individuals living around the world who never physically meet. A world with greater acceptance, patience and joy for those with different perspectives.

Instead of getting frustrated with Millennials as they learn their first lessons at work, my advice is to listen and observe. Their openness, freedom to explore, focus on changing the world, and ability to challenge prevailing notions will inspire you.

*Pat Wadors is senior vice president of LinkedIn’s Global Talent Organization.*

**Editor’s note:** Ideas, a new essay series, lets Bay Area leaders share their insights into business topics every other Monday. To submit an essay, send a proposal to business@sfchronicle.com.

<http://www.sfgate.com/business/article/What-do-Millennials-want-out-of-work-And-how-6632917.php>