Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Millennials at work: Creating a healthy workplace for this generation



Over the next decade Millennials – the children of the Baby Boomers born between 1980 and 1999 – will make up more than 75 percent of the North American workforce. This enormous generation is highly educated, technologically adept, socially conscious -- and stressed! A recent study by Morneau Shepell found that Millennials are twice as likely to take sick leave for mental health reasons than any other age group. However, two-thirds of Millennials experiencing depression do not consider their symptoms severe enough to be absent but severe enough to have a negative effect on their performance. Supporting the mental health of Millennials has become a priority for businesses in all sectors.

Generation stressed

Long hours, increased workloads, rapid technological change, and increasingly turbulent global markets are stressing us all out but Millennials are feeling an additional strain caused by a disconnection between their high expectations and economic realities. Millennials expect to find well-paying jobs, progress quickly in their careers (more than 40 percent assume they'll to be in management positions within two years) and purchase their own homes as soon as possible. The reality is that they often graduate from college or university with high debt loads (the average student debt level in Canada is $25,000 and more than $35,000 in the U.S.), face a precarious job market and stiff competition for jobs and, if living in a large urban center, encounter skyrocketing housing prices that make home ownership unattainable.

This disconnection is fueled by their upbringing; Millennials grew up with structured, supervised activities, and were given constant encouragement to foster their self-esteem. As a result they are often

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unprepared for the rough and tumble corporate world. Many experience, perhaps for the first time, doubts about their abilities and roadblocks to their goals.

Supporting Millennials

Despite their expectations, Millennials have much to offer. So what can organizations do to support their Millennials? They can begin by understanding this unique demographic. Those that are successful do the following:

- **Give recognition.** Traditional yearly performance appraisals are not enough for Millennials. They need to know they're doing a good job on a regular basis.
- **Mentor, not manage.** Millennials admire people with experience, knowledge and integrity, and seek mentors. To motivate and retain younger employees, managers should consider framing criticism or feedback as learning opportunities and provide guidance to help them improve.
- **Provide career counseling and development opportunities.** Millennials have a need to succeed. Helping them identify what skills they need to acquire to further their careers will help motivate and retain them. Learning and development opportunities can include assignments to new projects or temporary positions within the company.
- **Respect their opinions.** Older managers are often taken aback when Millennials question their instructions. However, younger employees don't mean to be disrespectful, they just want to understand their role and the needs of the company. They've also been encouraged to voice their opinions from an early age and they too are taken aback when they're ignored or their ideas dismissed. This generation flourishes with less hierarchy and open communication.
- **Promote corporate social responsibility.** Millennials want to make a difference in the world and expect corporations to do as well. They seek employers who promote ethical practices and philanthropy.
- **Encourage teamwork.** Younger employees grew up immersed in social media and video games. As a result, they're comfortable sharing information and working in teams. Many organizations are encouraging collaboration by eliminating barriers between coworkers both physically and socially.
- **Allow autonomy.** Millennials like to find their own solutions to problems. Give them the flexibility and they'll demonstrate their ability to innovate. Stifle them and they'll move on.

By creating a workplace that supports the mental health and success of this talented generation, organizations will develop an innovative and resilient workforce able to meet the demands of an increasingly competitive economy.