

Managing the Millennials

Steven Shepard
Shepard Communications Group, LLC
+1-802-878-0486 *Office*
+1-802-238-1007 *Mobile*
+1-802-221-1192 *VoIP*
StevenDShepard *Skype*
Steve@ShepardComm.com

The Greatest Berserker of Them All

One of the most powerful forces shaping the technology industry today is the emerging generation known as *The Millennials*. And while readers may scratch their heads and wonder why a sociological discussion belongs in a book about advanced communications technologies, rest assured – there is perhaps no topic more important today. Millennials, typically characterized as children born between 1982 and 2004, are interesting for one seminal reason: the oldest of them entered the workplace in 2004; the youngest of them were *born* in 2004. Their generation is complete. However, their influence is only just now being felt. Today they are entry-level supervisors in the corporation; within five years they will have begun moving into positions of influence and decision-making. These kids are your new employees, your new customer, but far more important – and relevant – *they are your new competitors*. Hear me now: Understanding what they represent and the impact they will have in the workplace and market or suffer the consequences. Read on.

Sociologists have studied the generational cycles that characterize human social behavior patterns for years. In the United States and other western nations, the identified patterns are somewhat unique because the U.S. and a few other nations tend to view the concept of the passage of time as a linear progression, whereas older, longer established societies view time as a cyclical continuum. In the Mayan *Pictun* (8,000 years), the Hebrew *Yom* (1,000 years), the lunar ecliptically-aligned Babylonian *Yuga* (12,000 years) and the Buddhist *Kalpa* (4,320,000,000 years - how the Buddhists know that their Kalpa repeats its four billion-year cycle is beyond me), it is a repeating cycle that requires time to be periodically Control-Alt-Deleted to clear out the universe's head and get things back on track again. Furthermore, most societies view this temporal cycle as occurring in a repeating pattern of four identifiable quadrants with unique yet highly related characteristics.

The Generational Link

Behavioral sociologists study this phenomenon of repetition and relate it to human generations. Generations are defined as groups of people who are born during an identified period of time and who share a common set of experiences and therefore develop something of a collective generational personality. Each generation lasts about two decades, after which it fades into the background as the next generation comes into its own. This is a good thing: After all, how much more of the Baby Boomer generation can the world take? (Before you start firing off e-mails, I'm a Baby Boomer – I resemble that remark).

There is a great deal of discussion about whether generations of people guide societal direction or whether society guides the development of generations. In fact, most sociologists who study the relationship observe that the two are inextricably related, that the two influence each other. In fact, societies as a general rule pass through four behavioral phases. These phases are driven by a powerful change agents that include the evolution of social values, political power shifts, balances in demographics and social makeup, and economic upturns or downturns. The phases blend one into the next like the seasons of life, with each season lasting about 20 years. The first of these, by convention, is a social strength, a time of growth and optimism during which business institutions grow stronger and the individual grows weaker as individuals place more trust in the institution – banks, health care institutions, large corporations. During this period the individual becomes relatively anonymous and places his or her trust in the institution to guide society along. Think back to the 1950s and 1960s when seemingly everybody worked for a large oil company, or a bank, or IBM, or AT&T (remember that there was a time when AT& had a staggering one million employees). This is the period when comedian Bob Newhart released his

“Organization Man” album, which made light of Corporate America. During this period a social norm emerges and flourishes as the strength of the previous norm declines. The most recent occurrence of this evolutionary phase was during the Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy presidencies in the U.S. During that time the United States became powerful and confident, but also became highly conformist. A societal “Borg” formed as everyone marched to the dance of the large corporation. This was the “Leave it to Beaver” era when the corporate uniform was the white button-down shirt, dark blue suit, red tie, briefcase and hat. At the same time, however, a feeling of spiritual emptiness gripped the country that prompted follow-on generations such as the Millennials to seek greater meaning in their lives. More about that later.

The second phase in this inexorable process is a period of realization that bubbles just below the surface for quite some time. During this period the individual, who has become anonymous with the vesting of their social power in the institutions, begins to question “the meaning of life.” Increasingly disturbed by the sense of being increasingly powerless, a strong probing of social mores ensues. This period becomes loud and passionate, and, prompted by the sense of spiritual emptiness that has begun to grow, attacks on the existing social order begin to occur as new values arise and begin to take effect. Think about the rise of such movements as EST, Lifespring, and other movements targeted at the self-affirmation process during the 1960s and 1970s. Most recently this phenomenon was seen during the Carter and Reagan presidencies, a time that saw such manifestations as the sometimes violent unrest of the 1960s and the Reagan tax revolt. A certain “moral courage” came into play as the values of the past were openly rejected and a sense of personal liberation and a glimmering of individual power emerged.

In phase three, society is in wholesale revolt against the institution. The individual rises in importance, rejecting the anonymity of the corporate workplace. A search for greater meaning in life begins as the institution weakens. During this period individuals become much stronger and more influential elements of the social fabric, institutions weaken as they decline in the public trust, and the values of the inbound “regime” take root and push out the remaining incumbent values. As the quest for meaning peaks during this period, a sense of moral restlessness grips the country. The controversial presidencies of the elder George Bush, of Bill Clinton and Bush the Younger fall into this category.

Finally, phase four arrives amidst a strong sense of change. This is a period of secular crisis in society, a period when individuals go in search of relevance in their lives. This final phase is a period of crisis and social emergency, a time of strong social upheaval that continues as the new social infrastructure takes effect. The George Bush Junior second term presidency is in the middle of this phase at the time of this writing as the country picks up the pieces from the devastation of 9/11 and the ensuing Iraq war.

These four evolutionary periods have been cycling for as long as historians have been studying cultural change, and as might be expected sociologists give each generation a name. In recent times the four archetypical generations, in the same order as the four phases described above, are the Hero Generation (born 1901 - 1924), the Silent Generation (born 1925 - 1942), the Baby Boomers (born 1943 - 1960), and Generation-X (born 1961 - 1981). The most recent arrival, the Millennials, are born between 1982 and 2004. This is critical because the oldest of them have just entered the workplace; the youngest of them have just been born.

Note that we have just named five generations, yet in the last few paragraphs we described four archetypes. In fact, the Millennials are the beginning of the next cycle and are identical in every way to the Hero Generation, the generation that rebuilt following World War II, the generation that Tom Brokaw called “The Greatest Generation” in his book of the same name. This is a

generation of fixers, a generation determined to right the wrongs left behind by the prior two generations – at least that’s how they see their role. And they are extraordinarily good at it.

It should be noted that these generational phases are not a U.S.-only phenomenon: they occur throughout the world, within all social strata, and while they vary somewhat from region to region, the basic characteristics are identical. In fact, my own research has turned up remarkable parallels among societal groups in such diverse markets as Singapore, South Africa, Romania and Kansas.

And Today?

Today we find ourselves at the end of an inner-driven, introspective, Baby Boomer-centric era. The narcissistic Baby Boomers, with their emphasis on accountability, wealth accumulation, and community values, left their mark on succeeding generations. Following the Boomers are the Gen-Xers, an alienated group of kids who felt abandoned by their dual-income parents. And behind them arrive the Millennials, sometimes erroneously called the Gen-Yers (wrong because ‘Y’ implies that they are an extension of the Gen-Xers – and they are decidedly *not*).

So What?

So what does this have to do with the technology industry in general and IMS specifically? In fact, a lot, and it behooves corporate leaders to pay very close attention.

A Tale of Three Generations

Each of these most recent generational groupings has definable characteristics that follow them throughout their lives. The Baby Boomers are ideological to a fault, highly judgmental, focused unwaveringly on values, and inordinately narcissistic. They are the most ego-centric generation to come along in a very long time (Enough about you, what about me?), a characteristic that show up often in the workplace. Baby Boomers feel an inordinately strong need to be right, and will often argue their own point of view unceasingly in meetings to ensure that they are heard. When it comes to work they are driven: remember that these are the children of the people who grew up enduring the impact of the Great Depression, people who saw their accumulated wealth disappear on one, single, fateful day. As a result they inculcated in their children (the Baby Boomers) the belief that wealth is fleeting and should therefore be amassed and diversified. Baby Boomers are the dual income generation, a generation for whom work is life and for whom the line between the two is increasingly ephemeral. They have a love-hate relationship with authority of all kinds (think 1960s, Berkeley, Kent State, the Blue Meanies of Chicago). These are the people who smoked so much dope in the 60s that they don’t even *remember* the 60s, yet if they catch their own children smoking it they ground them for the rest of their lives¹. Baby Boomers are perfectionists by nature, somewhat spiritual, and quite community oriented. They are also fairly optimistic and involved in life, concerning themselves with youth (their own as much as that of their children), health and wellness. They are also somewhat schizophrenic when it comes to relationships: they have the highest divorce rate in history, often because work comes first above all else. The all-important work-life balance is often lacking in their lives.

Finally, Baby Boomers are highly team-oriented, but with a bit of a twist: “It’s alright for the team to win as long as I get the credit” is a thought process characteristic of them. The need to win, to be credited, is strong in this group.

¹ There’s wonderful saying about this generation: “If you remember the 60s, you clearly weren’t there.”

The Generation Xers, on the other hand, are strikingly different from their Baby Boomer predecessors. They are skeptical and somewhat cynical about life, as you would expect. These are the children of the Baby Boomers after all. Because both of their parents worked, their perception is that they grew up in a modern-day equivalent of a Charles Dickens novel, raising themselves and living on their own. As one Gen-X'er said to me in jest, "I lived on the street and had to kill small animals to eat." These are the latchkey kids who came home from school to an empty house and had to fend for themselves. As you would imagine they are remarkably self-reliant, action-oriented and highly self-accountable. They are also far more balanced in terms of the division of time between their work and personal lives. A typical interaction at work between a Baby Boomer and a Gen-Xer might go something like this: "Look, boss, I understand that to get paid, I have to work hard for you - *for eight hours*. After that, I go home. And as for this misplaced, pathological idea you have that I'm going to carry a pager and a work cell phone so that you can call me after hours? That's just not going to happen." Imagine what happens when a driven Baby Boomer manages a group of Gen-Xers.

Similarly, they are also unimpressed with authority - a puzzlement to law enforcement officers. In fact the most common verbal response to exercised authority from a Gen-Xer is - preceded by an exaggerated sigh and roll of the eyes - "Whatever..."

Gen-Xers have difficulty making long-term commitments, yet paradoxically they are family-oriented, diversity aware, risk-friendly, and focused on achieving results. They are also balanced in terms of managing their work and personal lives and extremely technically adept. And because they grew up to be self-reliant, they don't work well in teams. Put them in a room and ask them to come to a group consensus and there will be blood on the walls before they reach a satisfactory conclusion. On the other hand, they do work well as individuals and are very good at troubleshooting, technical support, and other "standalone" jobs.

Now we turn our attention to the Millennials. The Millennials are as different from the Gen-Xers as the Gen-Xers are from the Boomers. Millennials tend to be confident, team-oriented, and remarkably, refreshingly conventional. Unlike the Gen-Xers, who eschewed everything that would identify them with their parents, it's OK for Millennials to be smart. And *also* unlike the Gen-Xers, the Millennials actually *like* their parents.

Perhaps the most important thing to learn about them is that they are on a quest for meaning. Millennials are looking for relevance, for a way to make a difference in their lives. They are not looking for a career; they are looking for a job. And if the job gives them a sense of relevance they will stay in it for a very long time and make it look like a career. Place them in a position, however, that has them doing the same meaningless task repeatedly with no sense of social value and they will leave without warning.

I recently had an opportunity to see this phenomenon firsthand in India. A large corporation that operates call centers in Bangalore asked me to spend some time with their management team to help them resolve a problem they faced with entry-level employees. They had a practice of hiring college graduates and placing them in call center positions as operators, a position that for years had worked well as an entry point to the corporation and from which employees could move on to greater responsibility within the firm. New hires were given ten days of training before being placed on the phones. The problem that this particular company was facing was that the average new hire was staying on the job for an average of *four days following the completion of training*. It didn't take long to realize that the vast majority of these new employees were Millennials, and after four days of answering phones, day in and day out, they saw no relevance whatsoever to the daily grind they were subjecting themselves to - so they left in large numbers.

We conducted telephone interviews with both current and former employees, and predictably discovered that our conclusions were correct: They were leaving because of the lack of a sense of being valued by management or of providing value to something greater than themselves. After asking them a few other questions that consisted of nothing more than a generic skills inventory, we returned to management and submitted our findings. "These kids," we told them, "come into your business with diverse skillsets that are important to them. Are you aware, for example, that that fellow over there (pointing out the supervisor's window to a young man in a cubicle) speaks eleven languages, and that those languages are important to him? And did you know that that young lady in the far corner has very strong sales skills, yet you have her answering technical support questions?" They weren't, because as far as they were concerned these new employees were coming in as *tabula rasa* and had nothing substantive to add other than their energy and whatever they learned in training. So we suggested a few changes to the way the call centers were being run, the most substantive of which was that the Millennial new hires be given the freedom to use their skills in a way that would make them more valuable as employees. The control-oriented, Baby Boomer managers reluctantly agreed, and within weeks the retention rate went to just over seven months.

As a rule, Millennials tend to be strong achievers if they are properly motivated, optimistic about all things, sociable, street smart, and highly moral. In fact, this generation is one of the most moral, rule abiding generations to come along in a very long time². They play by the rules. For example, when the older end of this generation goes out to party on weekends, they appoint a designated driver *who does not drink – period*. When I was a kid, being the designated driver meant that you'd only drink beer. These kids take social responsibility seriously. In fact, for the first time in decades the number of people attending church, a number that has been in steady decline for nearly 40 years, is on the rise as Millennials seek a greater sense of meaning in their lives. Peace Corps signups are also climbing, and the numbers of college students involved in community projects is higher than it has been in a very long time.

Another interesting thing about this generation is that they are *absolutely oblivious* to authority – not love/hate, not unimpressed, but oblivious. They are so morals-driven, so self-policing, that they just don't understand the need for outside authority in their lives. This, too, is a puzzlement to law enforcement, as much because of their obligation to enforce laws that the Millennials don't understand the need for as their need to understand the behavior and drivers of Millennial employees coming into law enforcement.

Another characteristic of Millennials is their commitment to long-term relationships with each other. As early as high school, Millennials enter into serious relationships that last for a very long time. This also flows over into the way they make decisions. Millennials are the antithesis of the Baby Boomers who wanted all the credit. Whereas the Baby Boomers are wont to say, "It's alright for the team to win as long as I get the credit," Millennials are more likely to say, "It's alright if I get a little credit as long as the team wins." Here's why.

What We Know About Millennials – The Important Stuff

Here's what we know about Millennials that is worth remembering. Keep in mind that this demographic and sociological data is important because these kids, who today are your new employees, will soon move up into higher management levels and take on decision-making responsibilities. Not only will they be your employees, they will also be your customers and

² My wife and I have two Millennials on long-term lease. As a result, I have a little Millennial laboratory that I can consult anytime I like by simply observing our kids and their friends.

competitors. The time taken today to understand what drives and motivates them is time well spent.

It should come as no surprise that Millennials are heavily influenced by and dependent upon technology, particularly communications technologies. This is the first generation history to grow up in a world that has always had the Internet, has always had the World Wide Web, has always had mobile telephony, *and that has no allegiance whatsoever to twisted pair*. A wired telephone to this generation is an anachronism, and they are disconnecting them in growing numbers, relying instead on their mobile devices. More and more of them, for example, are choosing to use their mobile phone as their primary mode of communication, eschewing the perceived safe harbor of 911 service and “carrier-class” voice quality in favor of the freedom of mobility and on-demand connectivity. Needless to say, this poses a substantial challenge for incumbent telephone companies that have invested untold billions of dollars into their in-place, wireline networks and now watch as their costs remain the same while revenues decline. Predictably, a Millennial’s preferred communications modality is Short Message Service (SMS) or Instant Messenger (IM), second, e-mail, and third, if they absolutely have to they’ll talk on a phone but it better not have a wire attached to it. They carry more gadgets on their hips and in their purses and backpacks than Batman and spend an amazing U.S. \$109 *per week* on technology-oriented products and services. Never mind that the vast majority of that money came out of their parents’ pockets – what matters is that the Millennials direct the spending of it. Furthermore they influence between 70% and 80% of the spending in the home.

Millennials enjoy group activities and in fact work best when able to do so in cooperative teams. As individuals they do not test well in problem solving situations, yet they test *off the charts* in groups. Even in social situations they prefer larger groups. If you ever have the opportunity to attend a Millennial high school dance, do so, just for the experience. They don’t dance in couples; they dance in *clusters*. And they don’t date in pairs either – they date in large groups, enjoying the camaraderie of their peers.

In the center of Tokyo there is a large intersection where five major roads come together. Traffic lights there are timed to all go red at the same time so that pedestrians can cross in any direction they like, similar to the “chicken walk” in downtown San Francisco (luckily the lights at Shibuya Crossing do not all go *green* at the same time). Every time the lights go red, 3,000 people cross the street – it’s quite impressive. If you stand at the sidelines and look closely, you will see hundreds of Millennial kids at the periphery of the crowd, some walking through the crowd with an eerie sort of radar working for them, all banging away on the thumb pads of their SMS devices. The first time I saw this phenomenon I asked quite a few of them what they were doing, and without exception the answer was, “Setting up get-togethers with my friends.” The SMS device serves as a location beacon and is used to “triangulate” the location of friends so that they can meet in a mutually convenient location.

Millennials also gave the world the concept of Flash Mobs, the practice of spontaneously gathering large numbers of people at a common public place, typically for no particular reason – although these Flash Mobs have been used to great effect for political protest and to bring about social change. Flash Mobs are characterized as the technique of rapidly assembling a large group of people from multiple directions in a single location for the purpose of attaining a particular goal. The goal may be social, political, or military; in the case of the Millennials it is (for now) purely a social phenomenon. Typically there are four phases in a successful swarm: identify the venue, gather, act, and disperse. For these four phases to work in a coordinated fashion they must be synchronized between large numbers of people, and what better way to perform this massing phenomenon than through the capabilities of the distributed mobile telephony network.

This grouping phenomenon is an interesting one that has considerable implications in the workplace. Millennials are remarkable problem solvers when allowed to do so in groups. They often subconsciously use a mobbing theme to resolve conflicts and problems that to biologists is eerily reminiscent of the technique used by honeybees to make collective hive decisions about nest locations, flower availability, predator avoidance, etc. When confronted with a problem, Millennials collectively analyze the problem, individually analyze the data, and then gather to collectively make the requested decision. All ideas “go into the discussion pot,” and the discussion ensues. If an idea is deemed to be invalid, irrelevant, or simply wrong, it is instantly and emotionlessly discarded. It can always come back into the discussion later if need be. As a result the “fact tree” is rapidly pruned and a decision is reached rapidly. I have watched this process in action on numerous occasions and it’s a remarkable thing. Individuals may peel off at a moment’s notice to call or SMS a friend or colleague to ask a question, thereby extending the knowledge web that produces the most accurate possible answer. This behavior is a living example of Metcalfe’s Law, which states that the value of a connected network increases exponentially as a function of the number of nodes in the network. If the network is a Millennial decision-making process, it is easy to see why this technique is so astonishingly functional. It is also to see why a Baby Boomer or Generation-X manager watching this process might wonder what in the world is going on, because to the unschooled eye it looks an exercise in unbridled chaos. Baby Boomers and Gen-Xers were taught to respect the laws of linear thinking, whereas Millennials are non-linear problem solvers. Managers beware: Just because they don’t approach a problem the way you would doesn’t mean they’re wrong. It also means that their behavior as customer and competitors will be substantially different than the norm to which we have become accustomed. They will use every means at their disposal, most of them electronic and immediate, to use their knowledge web to gather intelligence about a product or service. You must be prepared for this. Recognize also that this behavior of using the web of connectivity that is an inextricable component of their lives feeds directly into the IMS concept – anywhere, anytime access to content and computing, with services delivered to any device recognizable by the network.

It is also interesting to note that the Millennials are members of the first generation in the 54-year history of television that is watching *substantially* less of it than any previous generation, choosing to get their entertainment content elsewhere. As you might imagine, this is a serious, vexing concern for television advertisers, forcing them to place ads elsewhere, such as in video games.

One final observation about this generation. Because of immigration and emigration, globalization, and the growing number of multinational corporations who move employees freely and routinely around the globe, Millennials are more ethnically and racially diverse than any previous generation. But far more important, they are ethnically and racially *oblivious* - they don’t see it. There may be hope for the world yet. I saw a firsthand example of this several years ago when my daughter made friends with Angela (a pseudonym), another girl in her high school. Because of my ridiculous travel schedule I didn’t meet Angela for over two years. Whenever she was over at the house I was on a trip, and whenever I was home she wasn’t around. However, because she was part of my daughter’s group of friends I soon knew as much about Angela as I would have had I actually met her. I knew where she lived, where she was from, who she was dating, and what her teenage problems were. So when the day finally came when I met her, I did a double-take, because Angela is African-American. I wasn’t shocked because she is African-American; *I was shocked because it never occurred to my daughter or to any of her friends to use skin color as a way to describe their friend.* Never once, in two years of hearing about their lives and activities, did that ever come up.

Millennials in the Workplace

So what do you need to know about Millennials to take advantage of their remarkable capabilities on the job? First, recognize that employees fall into four tiered roles. In each tier, employees interact with the values that will guide them throughout their careers and lives. The lowest tier is the entry-level position during which employees *learn* the values that will establish professional behavior patterns throughout their careers. Most of you have seen the Dell Computer commercials that use the “interns theme” to demonstrate the company’s capabilities. Those interns are Millennial employees. In most corporations today this role is held by the older Millennials that are just now graduating from college and entering the workforce.

At the second tier we find the stratum of employees who generate corporate enthusiasm and exude limitless supplies of energy. These are the employees who are often found working at trade shows and marketing events, working 27 hours a day and loving every minute of it, displaying their tireless enthusiasm as they *test* the values that they learned early in their entry-level training. Today, they too are typically Millennials.

At tier three we find the slightly older Generation-X employees who are now in middle management and who are *applying* the corporate values that now shape them in their careers and personal lives. They are professional role models for the up-and-coming younger employees and are often supervisors. They are tirelessly energetic, often working at all hours in data centers, manufacturing plants and call centers.

Finally, at the uppermost tier, we find the corporate leaders. With their professional longevity they are now charged with *creating* the values that guide the corporation. Today they are for the most part Baby Boomers. The last shadows of the Silent Generation are retired, and the Gen-Xers have for the most part not yet penetrated this tier.

Now shift gears and look how the profile changes over 20 years – one generation beyond where we are today. The Baby Boomers have retired and Generation-X have moved into the upper tier of the corporation. The Millennials are now in the middle and lower tiers of the management ranks, which means that they will be hiring and firing employees, making purchase decisions, establishing sales and marketing strategies, and preparing to run their companies. This is why it is so important to develop a strategy today to deal with Millennials in the marketplace tomorrow.

Understanding the Millennials

To effectively interact with or manage Millennials it is critical to understand what drives them and what shapes the values of their generation. There are also a number of perceptions that employers must be aware of when working with Millennials. First among them is the perception that there is “no such thing as reality.” This is the Internet Generation, after all, and if nothing else the Internet has proven to this generation that it takes no effort whatsoever to seamlessly attach Pamela Anderson’s head to Sylvester Stallone’s body, or to create a gaming experience that seems quite real but clearly isn’t. And yes, they know the difference between killing people in a video game and then taking a break and going out to do it in the real world. Remember – this group is morals-driven.

It is also important to know that Millennials are primarily experiential learners. They learn by doing and they learn quickly and accurately when allowed to interact with whatever they are attempting to learn. When you got that new mobile phone, who did you ask to program it? More than likely it was a Millennial. Notice also that instruction guides are wasted on them. They’d rather just use whatever it is that’s unfamiliar to them until they have learned what they need to know.

Another interesting thing about this generation is that the Internet is perceived to be far more fulfilling than television. As we noted earlier, Millennials are watching less television than any generation that came before them, the result of which is a shift in advertising revenues and a renewed interest in presence technology as a way to learn more about the demographic behaviors that are so important to sales and marketing efforts.

A great deal of material has been published on the subject of Millennials and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and whether this generation is more prone to it than other generations (whatever *it* is). Lately, articles have begun appearing in serious medical and psychological journals about this subject, but with a bit of a twist. Some health care professionals and behaviorists are beginning to ask whether ADD may simply be a neurological response to the Millennials' need to multitask as the number of simultaneous sensory inputs that they are bombarded by grows. Whatever the case, Millennials multitask exceptionally well. If you don't believe that, stand behind one of them while they are sitting at the computer, engaged in seven IM sessions, talking on the cell phone propped between their head and raised shoulder, ripping a CD, answering e-mail, listening to music, and doing homework – *all well*. I don't claim to be any kind of psychologist, medical professional or behavior theorist, but I do read enormous volumes of information about the subject of evolving Millennial behavior and find that the accelerating levels of interest in this subject is quite appealing.

One other observation while we are on the subject of computers: to a Millennial, they are *not* 'technology,' any more than the telephone or television were technologies to earlier generations. And, they are not an option: they are a necessary part of everyday life and their availability is not open for debate. Similarly, connectivity – and it better be broadband – is not optional.

Colleges and universities are finding this to be the case in a somewhat painful way. It used to be the case that a major profit center at institutions for higher learning was the campus telephone network. Dormitories were wired for voice service and students paid a monthly fee to the university for the privilege of having a telephone in their dorm room. Not today: today, students arrive on campus fully wired with mobile phones, wireless PDAs, Blackberries, WiFi-equipped laptops and a solid understanding of the concept of free voice. Their message to the college? "Oh, thanks anyway, but I don't need your phone. I have a phone. What I need is broadband wireless, and it better be campus-wide or I'll go somewhere else." And they do: ubiquitous broadband wireless connectivity is becoming a criterion for school selection in colleges and universities today. More than one school has gone through the onerous task of selling their campus switch because maintenance has become a major drain on resources, particularly given the fact that campus voice revenues have largely disappeared.

One last fact before we leave behind this subject of Millennials and technology: For those of you who bought the nice Mont Blanc pen and pencil set as a graduation gift, *take it back*. Millennials compose well, collect and share ideas well, but they do it on computers and SMS devices. They don't write. A nice matched wireless keyboard and mouse, perhaps...

Other Millennial Tidbits

The list of Millennial characteristics continues to grow, and becomes more and more fascinating the more we learn about them. Whenever I lecture about this subject there is always a handful of people who come up to me laughing, telling me that I just described their kids. And it's true: the Law of Large Numbers says that as long as the statistical sample is sufficiently large, it is valid to make general assumptions about the behavior of social groups. So here are some additional facts. Because Millennials play by the rules, they naturally expect others to do so as well. Baby

Boomers, take note: *If you make a commitment to a Millennial, and then fail to meet the commitment, you will hear about it for the rest of your natural life.*

One seemingly unavoidable aspect of Millennial life is video games. In conversations with them I have learned that video games to them are “windows on the world,” a technique for performing a subliminal form of scenario planning and what-if analysis. In fact, video game companies have picked up on this and are now beginning to manufacture games for the major platforms that are actually very powerful business tools. For the right amount of money, video game companies will build “Sim-IBM” (assuming you work for IBM), complete with customers, competitors, products and services, employees, financial data, competitive intelligence, and so on. Strategists can play the game, changing the variables to engage with different outcome scenarios to see how the company would fare under different market conditions. Gamers who have used these products rave about them because they tend to give an accelerated view of how the company would behave given different sets of competitive conditions.

A recent example of this what-if scenario process occurred in 2004 when a half million players engaged in an Internet-based “scavenger hunt” for four months, often divided into teams and occasionally required to together to solve complex problems. The game required players to gather in both the real world and online to collectively solve their given tasks using information garnered from Web sources, and then physically deliver information to locations in the real world. One piece of the exercise, for example, required participants to find and decipher GPS location data, send players to phone booths scattered all over the United States, and upon calling a specific number respond within a few seconds to unexpected questions from a live actor on the other end of the call. To deliver the proper answer, each participant had to trust a group of people they had never met before to instantly provide the information they needed to respond correctly.

The game's name is *ilovebees*, and it centered around the website of a fictitious honey company that served as the starting point for the game. Interestingly, the real purpose of the game was to serve as a viral marketing tool for the Microsoft Xbox game, *Halo 2*.

This kind of immersive gaming experience is often referred to as an *Alternative Reality Game* (ARG). And while ARGs work well as marketing tools they are actually instructive, teaching participants how to navigate their way through massive volumes of data and information and how to collectively *swarm* a problem to resolve it quickly and accurately.

According to *ilovebees* primary community coordinator Jane McGonigal, these types of games create players “who feel more capable, more confident, more expressive, more engaged and more connected in their everyday lives.”³

These immersive experiential environments evolve and change as the participants make their way through them, causing participants to change their own responses to unexpected outcomes that occur within the game. And one of the things that makes these experiential environments so effective as learning and problem-solving tools is that there is a tacit agreement among participants that they will suspend belief while playing, and accept the fact that while immersed in the game, this *is* the “real world.” As a result the ARG experience becomes that much more effective.

³ Jenkins, Harry. *Chasing Bees, Without the Hive Mind*. MIT Technology Review [online edition]. Henry Jenkins; December 3, 2004.

One final observation about the Millennial Generation is this: they believe that content found on the Internet should be free to everyone— sorry, Metallica. They casually burn CDs of ripped music and routinely share the files with each other. And while this technically constitutes theft of intellectual property, here's the interesting thing: after they rip the music, they buy the CD. In fact, when the government shut down file-sharing sites Napster and KaZaA a few years ago in response to pressure from the music industry, CD sales took a savage dip.

All of these characteristics should lead the reader to understand that this is a distinctly different group of people than those found in the typical corporation today. They are a rich source of corporate capability and energy, and as long as they are motivated properly they will prove to be a formidable component of the workforce. The question, of course, is how to do that. Read on.

Motivating the Millennials

So what is the best way to motivate Millennials in the workplace? First, pay attention to the characteristics listed earlier and to the degree possible structure the workplace around them. Recognize Millennials' high level of required social interaction. Use experiential learning and team assignments wherever and whenever possible. Give them freedom with regard to where, when and how they do their jobs. Put work in a nice place, like their homes, and encourage telecommuting. As morally-driven as this generation is, an employer will not be disappointed with the results. Note that the self-policing Millennials do not tolerate delays in themselves and others – they are often seen to be unrealistically impatient – and will therefore deliver on time. They also will not tolerate “being managed.” Just because they don't do the work the way you would do it is not a reason to assume that the work will be done poorly.

Next, make the work they are assigned meaningful. Nothing will turn off a Millennial faster than work that has no perceived value. Remember, they are looking for meaning, so give it to them. At the same time, they like variety, so give Millennials a chance to learn continuously and reward their learning with diverse, ever-changing jobs.

Remember, Millennials look at work differently than generations that came before them; they're not necessarily looking for a *career* – they're looking for *meaningful work*. If the work is meaningful and challenging, they may become long-term employees.

Finally, give them plenty of continuous feedback. When assigning work, state the desired outcome as clearly as you possibly can, then step out of the way and let them run with it. It *will* get done, and will most likely exceed expectations – *provided the work is meaningful and challenging*. This cannot be stated strongly enough.

Conclusion

Because the Millennials are a functional repeat of the famously capable Hero Generation, they are ideally suited to inherit the chaos of the early years of the 21st century. They will rebuild and strengthen the institutions that stabilize the country, will create a longed-for sense of community and belonging, and will restore order and purpose, leading the country out of the secular crisis that plagues it today. Fear not: We're in good hands.

Let me reiterate for the readers who are scratching their heads and wondering why a treatise on sociological norms is included in this book about IMS. Networks are only as valuable as the people using them, and the value is directly proportional to the degree to which they bring value to those users. Millennials are a very different group of people for whom technology is a lifestyle

choice, not a visible set of tools that they occasionally use. They expect to be fully connected, all the time, and want to have seamless access to content from a broad variety of devices, both mobile and fixed, without hassle. The network to them is immaterial, because in the minds of Millennial customers, *access* means *access to my stuff*. The network must adapt to ensure that it delivers the right content, to the right device, in the hands of the right person, in the right form, with the right features, at the right time, for the right price. Period and end of discussion. In other words, the network must learn to adapt to the requirements of the user, instead of the user having to modify their behavior because of the physical limitations of the network. As we'll see later in the book, this is what IMS is all about: Building a user-aware network infrastructure that has the ability to do what we've just described. And because Millennials will soon be not only employees but also highly influential customers and competitors, it is critical to start thinking now about how the network must evolve to accommodate their needs.

Steven Shepard is the president and founder of the Shepard Communications Group, a Vermont-based firm that provides industry analysis, technical education, management consulting, and media development to technology companies throughout the world. He can be reached at +1-802-878-0486, or via e-mail at Steve@ShepardComm.com.

For more information about the Millennials, please contact the author.