Managing Millennials

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE OF THE PACIFIC, LLC

Are people complaining about "working with Millennials?" The question to consider first is if the "complainers" are the same people who grump and grouse about everything else as well? If not, then perhaps it is worth your time to update your information on the topic in order to have current information and a best-practice approach.

Definitions:

- **Baby Boomers:** Those born between 1946-1964. Raised in a time of prosperity and hope of the American Dream if you "worked hard enough."

- **Generation X**: Those born between 1965-1980. Economic decline left many as latchkey kids of blended families.

- **Millennials:** Those born between 1981-1993. More knowledge and technology based with high expectations for reward and recognition.

Jeffrey Harris, in an article on Managing Millennials (Journal of Employee Assistance, 2017) wrote that what leads individuals to a work ethic are combinations of parental values and role models, the economy of the time, current news events, and their relationship with technology.

For example, how did the Vietnam war, Civil Rights movement and Women's Rights Movement influence Baby Boomers? How did Watergate and single working parents effect Gen X'ers? And how have Millennials been influenced by having rapid technology literally at their fingertips?

We are imprinted by our role models as we grow up and develop a sense of what is important, including the role of employment. Even those who reject their upbringings carry some level of an internal template. There are Baby Boomers who rejected the work ethic of their parents, but if you look at how hard they worked at that rejection, you can see that the "work-hard" ethic was still there. Generation X rebels who learned more autonomy and perhaps less respect for authority are now outspoken authorities on everything from politics to movie reviews. Millennials, who may have been influenced by Columbine and September 11th may now manage a bleaker world view with obsessive FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) and compensate with an overabundance of technology.

Conflict between generations is absolutely nothing new or remarkable. Working well with someone who has a different work style is nothing new. The only difference now is that it is pushed by social media into everyone's mind as a "big deal." It isn't. Using a trendy buzz word to camouflage bias or scapegoat a group of people is not new. Harassment or blaming Millennials, or any other group, should be policy-driven as unacceptable. Conflict is conflict and requires the same people skills and communication tools as anything else:

- Awareness
- Communication
- Investment
- Patience
- Time
- Intention

Considerations that may help with any, including generationally-driven, conflict:

- Create and communicate clear policies and goals.
- Educate workers to focus on productivity rather than time.
- Work toward more rapid and clear responses to all employees.
- Determine whether staff prefer face-to-face communications or technology contact and develop a consistent approach.
- Hold routine meetings and on-demand meetings to match differing styles of education.
- Provide classes or trainings that can be accessed online as well as in person.
- Do not fall into a belief system that suggests some people are "better" than others.

In other words, managers need to continue evolving more flexible methods to address the changing landscape of work, employee's varied learning styles, work ethics, technology skills, and preferences. Managing people's differences and diversity doesn't just mean sexual identification, race, or ethnicity. It means different people have different ways of learning and working and managers need to be able to see and respond to these difference. Managing people is a lot like juggling bowling balls and feathers, it takes practice and attention. But that's why managers are managers; they agreed to the job. And what that also means is that a manager is required to remain neutral in the presence of conflict. First evaluate your own biases, learning styles, and if it helps… your generational template. Then become clear that your job is primarily to facilitate a productive worksite.