



MILLENNIALS Rising

MANAGING MEMBERS OF THIS DYNAMIC GENERATION CAN BE CHALLENGING. HERE'S HOW TO RELATE TO THE RISING STARS IN YOUR PRACTICE.

by Akiva Fox

What comes to mind when you hear the word “millennial?” Social media-obsessed? Everybody gets a trophy? Job hoppers? Avocado toast? While these associations certainly apply to some millennials, they’re equally applicable to members of other generations, too. (Let’s be honest, who doesn’t love avocado toast?). But watch out: falling victim to generational stereotypes could mean that you’re underestimating a good chunk of your practice’s staff.

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In today's healthcare market, that's not a mistake that an independent practice can afford to make. Millennials have aged into a major portion of the workforce, and properly developing these younger staff members is vital to helping your practice succeed. By doing so, you'll reduce staff turnover and its associated costs, for one. But more importantly, by identifying and mentoring these next-generation leaders now, you'll also be better able to position your practice for longer-term profitability.

Millennials have their own unique set of values and skills, and yes, weaknesses. Psychologist and consultant Gustavo Grodnitzky, PhD has identified some of these core traits. Here's what to watch for when managing the performance of this generation in your eye care office:

THEY WANT A "BLENDED LIFE."

Baby boomers value spending long hours at work; Generation X wants work-life balance; millennials prefer to work wherever and whenever they need to. To millennials, Grodnitzky advises, "it doesn't matter where they get things done, it just matters that they get things done." Their always-connected way of life makes them happy to work offsite or at odd hours when necessary.

TIP At your practice, you might consider letting "back office"

employees work from home (with proper security and supervision, of course). For example, many daytime calls to patients regarding billing or payment issues go unanswered since patients are at work, too. Could these calls be more efficiently handled outside of normal business hours?

A QUICK RECAP

Millennials make up about one-third of the U.S. population, so it's likely that an increasing number of your eye care practice staff is part of this generation of 35-and-under. How is this generation different from the ones before it? Millennials grew up as digital natives, never knowing a time without the internet and cell phones that have changed our world. Not only do they communicate differently; they also value time, money and relationships very differently from previous generations.

THEY ARE CAUSE-DRIVEN.

Whereas previous generations might gauge their success by how much money they make, millennials care more about being a part of something bigger than themselves. Fortunately, eye care practices have a clear purpose: to help people see better. That clarity alone can help you keep the best millennial staff members.

"Everything they do, even entry level positions, must be in some direct way tied to the cause of the company—how the company's product or service changes the world or changes human experience in the world," notes Grodnitzky. They want to be as involved as possible in how your practice makes patients' lives better. If they feel like a part of the cause, they will work their heart out for you; if they don't feel connected or they feel that the cause isn't important, they will start looking for a new practice that can give them more meaning.

TIP

Many practices would love to start a charity initiative, volunteer, or make appearances at community events—they just don't feel they have the time. A millennial employee could be the perfect person to head up such a project. Charity involvement can work as free marketing for your practice, upping your reputation and visibility in your local market.

THEY MAY LACK "SOFT" SKILLS.

The downside to their growing up online is that many millennials never mastered many of the in-person social abilities that their parents and grandparents did. "Skills like eye contact, body posture, mirroring, and some verbal small talk are lost to them because their primary form of communication is digital and asynchronous," warns Grodnitzky. "They may have to be taught to initiate conversation when a patient walks in, rather than waiting for the patient to ask for help."

TIP

The average age of patients at many eye care practices skews older, so differences in the communication expectations between older patients and younger employees can be a hot button issue. Don't be surprised if you have to teach your millennial employees some skills that seem second-nature to you. "They may have to be taught when [it is] more desirable to pick up a phone and call or actually go see a customer, rather than just send them a text message or an email," Grodnitzky notes.

THEY'RE FEEDBACK-DEPENDENT.

"Millennials want feedback immediately after completing a task or project," says Thuy-Lan Nguyen, OD, who spoke to physicians about millennial staff and patients at the recent SECO 2017 conference. This makes them well-suited for in-depth projects, where they can receive an assignment, follow it through to completion and then get an evaluation. "The challenge for the eye care industry is that there are more day-to-day tasks that need to be completed, and not as many big projects," she cautions. "That is why many millennials don't perform well as a front desk receptionist or in optical sales."

"They also respond to non-traditional incentives," says Nguyen. "For example, instead of a raise, consider another type of bonus such as tickets to an event or dinner at their favorite restaurant."

TIP

If you have a millennial working your front desk—and many practices do—consider using metrics to track performance. (We wrote extensively about this in *Eye Care Leaders'* Spring 2017 issue; visit eyecareleaders.com/magazine if you missed it). Front desk metrics will ensure that your millennial employee has concrete, objective performance goals to meet, and if you track them weekly, will satisfy their need for feedback while positively impacting your practice's performance.

KEEPING TODAY'S STAFF & Finding Tomorrow's

Millennials feel much more comfortable switching jobs more frequently than earlier generations did. But that has less to do with a specific millennial mindset than the way that employment trends have developed over the past decades. Long gone are the days of signing up with one employer and staying until retirement.

Either way, you may be reluctant to invest time and resources in developing an employee, given that said employee might jump to another practice after only a few months. Grodnitzky stresses that the best way to avoid losing your millennial staffers is to create workplaces and relationships that fulfill them. "They come and stay if a company focuses on relationships, a cause, and a culture that allows them to blend their lives while maintaining growth and performance," he says.

Millennials' most important relationship is with their supervisor. "They're not job hoppers; they're boss shoppers," he says. "They need to have a good supervisor who is willing to engage them on a personal level," says Grodnitzky. "They need a sense that the

supervisor is interested in their growth globally, not just at that place of employment." The more interested you are in their growth as a person and as a professional, the more likely they are to stick around long term.

Forming strong relationships with your millennial employees can actually solve both your retention and hiring problems at the same time. "They become your best recruiters," Grodnitzky suggests. "If you build a good relationship, then all you have to do is go to them and say, 'We'd like to hire more people just like you. Do you have any friends who might want to work here?' If you have a good culture with good leaders and supervisors, you'll be flooded with resumes." 