What millennials want

Five qualities they look for in employers

Amid the tightest labor market in decades, companies can’t afford to dismiss the work style of the biggest portion of the workforce.

Many have commented on millennial workplace behavior: We lack commitment and are “job hoppers”; we have a sense of entitlement and expect too much from our employers; we need a constant “well done” from our bosses.

Placing these negative stereotypes on millennials because we don’t conform to the traditional workplace norms or benchmark against the established career progression creates missed opportunities for cultivating a company’s future leaders.

Commentary aside, few have asked the fundamental question: What do we actually want from a job and employer, and why?

Ambitious millennial employees look for the following five qualities in current or potential employers:

1. Show the growth path within the organization: We want to know where we can go with an organization and how to get there. We want to be confident that our effort doesn’t culminate in a dead-end. We get bored because we don’t accept that working for a company in the same role for 30 years is a badge of accomplishment. We also don’t see tenure as a path to growth. If we’re prepared for the next role in 18 months, we don’t expect to be told to wait because the role has traditionally been a two-year rotation. This isn’t meant to be interpreted as entitled, but rather recognition of a job well done.

2. Provide regular feedback to help us grow: We don’t want a pat on the back for doing our job, we want feedback on how to do it better because that’s how we grow. Engagement and connection to work doesn’t mean that we’re changing the world, it means that we can see that what we’re doing adds value to a team, organization or customer.

3. Demonstrate that our work adds value to enhance our engagement: We reject the premise that “work” means sitting at a desk until 5 p.m. to get a paycheck; we want more. Engagement and connection to work doesn’t mean that we’re changing the world, it means that we can see that what we’re doing adds value to a team, organization or customer.

4. Foster a learning environment: A company that supports our personal growth is one that earns our loyalty and appreciation. Boredom is a result of flailing on the growth curve. If we’re not learning, we’re going to look for a job that is more intellectually stimulating. Allowing us to pursue new skillsets or knowledge areas that benefit ourselves and the firm shows a commitment to our personal well-being and growth, which is a message that resonates with millennials.

5. Recognize the benefits of flexible working arrangements: Physical presence is valuable, but creativity is also sparked by a change of environment. Something as simple as working from home or a coffee shop for two days per month can give a new perspective to the same work. We’ve blurred the concept of work and life more than ever and nowadays many tasks can be completed with just a Wi-Fi connection.

We carry our email in our pocket, and when something comes in at 8:30 p.m., I’m going to check it. Even if I leave my job at 6 p.m., I’m still mentally engaged. We don’t see face time in an office as representative of our commitment to the firm, and we want to earn the trust of our managers through the quality of our work, not the length of time that someone “sees us” working on it.

Our expectations of an employer are different, but that doesn’t mean they should be trivialized. We’ll job-hop until we find the right employer. We’ll keep asking for feedback until we get it right. We won’t compromise our expectations of what an employer should deliver just because no one has expected that of them previously.

Companies can call us entitled or disloyal, but forward-looking companies that see change as opportunity will be looking at the above as a competitive advantage to recruit, retain and grow motivated millennial employees.

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