



FMI
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Why Millennials Are Great for Engineering and Construction

By Michael Kulchisky

It's time to start incorporating a millennial-focused talent development strategy in the E&C workplace.

Earlier this year, the jobless rate in Canada did something it hasn't done since July 1976, when it fell to 5.7%, according to [Statistics Canada](#). The number of jobs rose by 78,600, beating expectations and bringing the full-year employment gain to 422,500, representing the best annual increase since 2002. "The economy showed unexpected resiliency as the year came to an end," [Bloomberg](#) reports, noting that since September, Canada added 193,400 jobs—the biggest three-month gain since at least 1976.¹

"The extent of the boom in Canadian jobs this year has largely caught policymakers and economists by surprise, given most have been anticipating an aging workforce to eventually become a drag on employment," the publication reports. "Yet it seems the nation's labor market had plenty of pent-up supply, and much of it is rising to the surface as the economy continues to do well."

These realities are coming together to make hiring, recruiting and retention difficult for Canadian firms that are gearing up to meet the new demands of the nation's engineering and construction (E&C) market. Many are finding success in millennial-focused recruitment and development strategies that strategically target—and cater to—the younger generation of workers.

¹ "Canada's Unemployment Rate Drops to Lowest in Four Decades." Theophilos Argitis. Bloomberg. January 5, 2018.

This is important because having different generations working together under the same roof fosters creativity, enables idea sharing and expands a company's problem-solving capabilities. Plus, a workforce that spans different ages allows organizations to fully leverage their own talent pools. "But diversity also comes with challenges. Today's workforce is made up of three very distinct generations of employees," writes [HR Works' Candace Walters](#). "Understanding the differences in approach and expectations of each age group can help your organization leverage the strengths of each and create a more satisfied and productive workforce."²

The Shift to a Millennial Workforce

For the first time, millennials (individuals born between 1980 and 2000) are the majority in the workforce. This is a significant shift for companies that now have to figure out how to most effectively attract, recruit and retain these younger workers—not all of whom are following in their parents' footsteps when it comes to job selection, company loyalty and opportunity.

Much has been written about the millennials and how they differ from previous generations in their approach to work—and careers in general. Indeed, millennials are often unfairly saddled with the dubious reputation for being entitled, disloyal, self-centered or optimistic go-getters, but it turns out that they're actually not that different from their older work colleagues.

In fact, Chuck Underwood, a pioneering and longtime authority on generations, pointed out that "Millennials are idealistic; they are demanding. They will insist that their employers are good corporate citizens, environmentally green and ethical. In many ways, they are exactly like the baby boomers and that's not an accident. Most have boomers for parents, and they absorbed their parents' values."

Underwood's notion was confirmed in a [recent study](#) conducted by the IBM Institute for Business Value, where the authors stated that the differences among millennials, Gen X and baby-boomer employees have been grossly exaggerated. According to the survey findings, baby boomers, Gen Xers and millennials share similar values, aspirations, attitudes and goals when it comes to work. The survey also found that some of the more common assumptions regarding millennials could actually be incorrect.

To measure its level of engagement and to explore what this generation of workers is looking for in an employer, FMI recently surveyed a total of 227 construction employees in Canada (127 of whom were millennials). Many of the survey results dispel widespread millennial stigmas, including:

- 58% of millennial survey respondents expect to remain more than five years with their current employers.
- 60% of millennial survey respondents strongly agree that they are willing to work beyond what is required of them to help the business succeed (versus 53% of non-millennial workers).
- 57% of millennial survey respondents strongly agree that it was important for them to understand their career path and opportunities within their company.

² "Take advantage of age diversity, leverage its strengths." Candace Walters. HR Works. October 16, 2009.

Furthermore, the following criteria ranked highest for Canadian millennials in construction:

1. Advancement opportunities
2. Commitment from the top
3. Challenging work

Millennials are also attracted to employers that provide a clear company vision and competitive pay.

Millennials Make Great Team Members

Millennials are truly great for the E&C industry for many reasons, including:

Loyalty and dedication. The majority of FMI's survey participants want to stay more than five years with their company, as opposed to jumping ship in the near term. Given good opportunities for career advancement, support for education, a collaborative culture, and competitive pay and benefits, this group of workers will go above and beyond to drive organizational success.

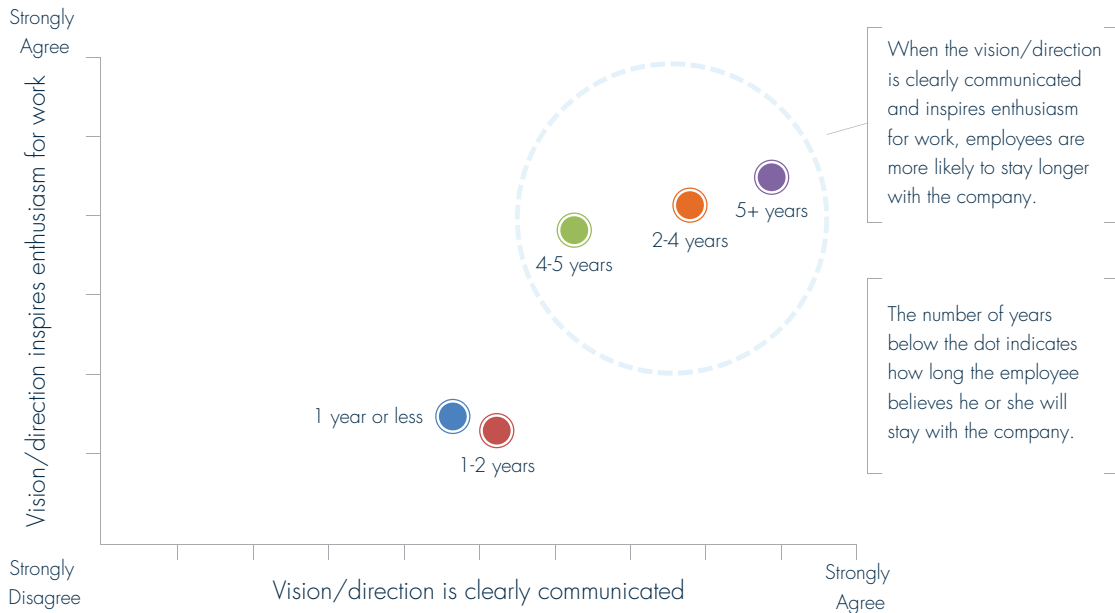
Innovative thinking. In an industry that is changing dramatically through emerging technologies and new delivery systems, millennials welcome the opportunity to provide input and new ideas that promote corporate innovation. As one survey participant stated, "I'm free to be creative and try new things." Progressive companies like DPR Construction, for example, encourage employees to use a special website to submit ideas for improvements, which can be related to software, tools or company protocols, among other things.

Tech savvy with a personal touch. It is true that many millennials adopt new technologies and gravitate toward digital media more easily than their older colleagues would. However, when it comes to learning new skills at work and receiving feedback, research shows that millennials prioritize face-to-face contact over digital options. This mix of tech savvy, combined with a need for personal interaction, can help companies drive change across multiple generations while infusing the industry with a fresh new perspective. Overall, 40% of workers prefer getting feedback on an as-needed basis, 34% like to receive it monthly, and 16% enjoy weekly feedback on their performance and progress.

They strive for a healthy work-life balance. When it comes to choosing where to work, millennials look at competitive pay. Given the challenging work conditions and often very long work hours, work-life balance is also very important but can be difficult to attain in the construction industry. However, if employers want to recruit and retain star talent, they will need to reconsider some of their traditional corporate policies and practices and find new ways to create a healthy work-life blend for their employees. For example, offering a paid sabbatical can help give employees a break and a fresh outlook without losing them for good. This will not only help workers across multiple generations but will also improve the negative image that the industry has suffered for decades.

Collaboration and communication. According to Underwood, many millennials grew up with parents, teachers and counselors who were their best friends and role models. "They need not only a mentor, but also a buddy. They are excellent team players. They will care about the entire organization, not just their own jobs," stated Underwood. Indeed, the timing is perfect. New virtual design and construction tools and integrated project delivery methods will all require higher levels of collaboration within and among project teams. Having these young people focused on a common purpose, effective processes, excellent communication and solid relationships will help transform the industry over time.

Exhibit 1. There is a strong correlation between inspirational vision and millennials' loyalty to their company.



Source: FMI 2015 Millennials Survey

While managers often perceive millennials as entitled, disloyal and lazy, this really isn't the case. As shown in FMI's recent [construction industry survey](#), millennials are ambitious and eager to make a big impact in their careers early on, which sometimes can be misread as entitlement.

New Perspectives and Ideas Wanted

Not unlike other generations that enter the workplace, millennials have new perspectives to share, new ideas about getting things done and new ways of tackling problems. They were born with technology in their hands and see it as a critical part of the workplace and their interactions with others. Long thought to be "behind the curve" when it comes to technology adoption, the construction industry desperately needs this new perspective.

"The reason millennials are the most highly scrutinized generation of all time is that they put a face to the change that every industry and individual is facing in today's turbulent times. Now more than ever, the next generation provides data points into what's next...what's next for your business, leadership, communication, marketing, etc.," Ryan Jenkins writes in [Inc.](#) "The better you understand the emerging generations, the better positioned you'll be to thrive in 2018 and beyond."

For E&C firms, this level of understanding is critical because it can push all of us forward (whether we want to be pushed or not). So, rather than focusing on outdated stereotypes, employers in the construction industry should start building comprehensive human capital programs that will benefit workers across all generations. Now is the time to capitalize on each other's strengths instead of focusing on stigmas.



Michael Kulchisky is a managing director at FMI. He is responsible for management consulting practices and overall FMI leadership in Canada. He serves as a Skills Canada, Alberta board of directors member, using his 30 years of construction, manufacturing, technical education and executive leadership to support trades awareness and skills development. He regularly sits on advisory boards and steering committees. He believes that individuals, teams and organizations with the education, strategic thinking and action-oriented planning can reach their full potential. He can be reached at mkulchisky@fminet.com.



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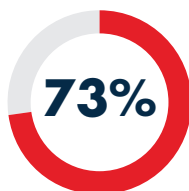
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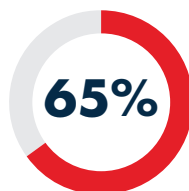
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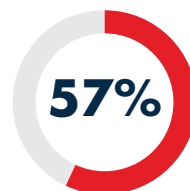
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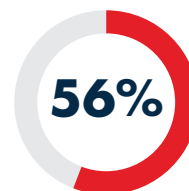
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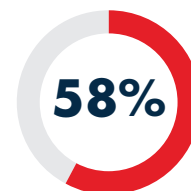
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