



# Debunking Millennial Myths

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SABINE HOOVER

Rather than focusing on outdated stereotypes, construction employers should develop workplaces where top talent across all generations can engage and thrive.

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**M**illennials<sup>1</sup> are an 80-million strong generation today. In 2015, they surpassed the baby boom generation as the nation's largest living cohort and now make up 34% of the nation's workforce, according to the Pew Research Center. This number is expected to grow to 50% by 2020.

Many American millennials graduated from college with staggering amounts of student loan debt and started their careers in one of the greatest recessions of all time. Seen as trendsetters, millennials are well known for their outspoken qualities and knowledge of everything from technology to fashion to food. As a result, they have puzzled companies and marketers for years. Furthermore, millennials are often saddled with a reputation for being entitled, disloyal, lazy or optimistic go-getters, but it turns out that they're actually not that different from their older work colleagues.

In 2015, FMI surveyed almost 400 construction industry professionals, more than 200 of which were millennials, in order to measure this young generation's level of engagement and explore what a millennial worker is truly looking for in an employer. The following article presents five key misconceptions of this young generation and explains what they are looking for in a construction industry employer.

## Myths and Truths

The information and opinions swirling around the millennial generation can be broken down into two categories: myths and truths. Based on our industry survey<sup>2</sup> and dozens of conversations with millennial employees in construction, we have uncovered the following myths surrounding this largely misunderstood workforce:

### Myth 1. Millennials are Lazy

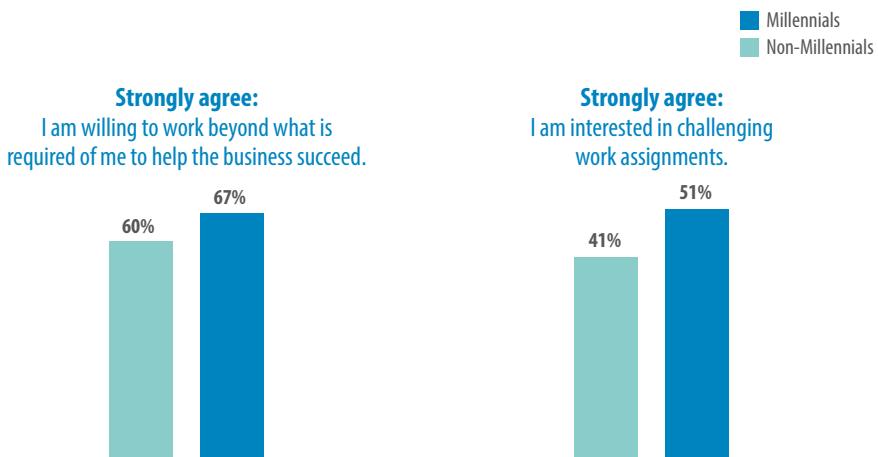
**Fact: Millennials are eager to be challenged and ready to go beyond what is required to make their companies succeed.**

For years, pundits and contemporary publications have criticized millennials for being lazy. It turns out, however, that this might be one of the greatest misunderstandings about this generation. According to a recent survey published by the HR Policy Foundation,<sup>3</sup> two-thirds of the companies surveyed said that their millennial employees were making significant contributions in the workplaces due to their inquisitive nature, tech-savviness and drive for innovation.

Responses from millennials in the construction industry confirm this position. Almost 70% of participants expressed their willingness to work beyond what is required of them to help the business succeed (Figure 1). Like other generations before them, millennials want to be challenged with interesting and meaningful work.

As one survey participant put it: “When trying to engage millennials, it is important to emphasize the appealing aspects of the industry. In construction,

## EXHIBIT 1 MILLENNIALS WANT TO BE CHALLENGED AND HELP THEIR COMPANIES SUCCEED



projects are always different. Showing millennials the challenges each project offers gives them a sense of purpose and greater determination. The constantly changing work environment offers a more exciting route compared with the monotony of replicated day-to-day activities.”

Not unlike other generations that enter the workplace, millennials have new perspectives to share, innovative ideas about getting things done, and interesting ways of tackling problems. They are less willing to accept the “old school” methods of completing work, and they are always searching for new ways to streamline processes and increase efficiencies. This mindset is critical for pushing the industry forward. Failing to nurture the innovative and inquisitive nature of younger workers will create disengagement among employees and result in a less productive workforce over time.

## **Myth 2. Millennials are Job Hoppers**

**Fact: Millennials want job security and stability.**

Much like their predecessors, millennials are interested in job security and stability. And despite popular belief, they aren’t poised to switch jobs as soon as another opportunity presents itself. That said, these younger workers come from a “connected” generation that truly values collaboration, teamwork and social opportunities. Our study also indicates that millennials value the use of new and innovative technologies to solve client and corporate challenges. Letting young people contribute and participate in such meaningful ways — and showing genuine interest in their careers and personal lives — is key to engaging them long term.

Company cultures focused on employee engagement require a defined and well-communicated company vision. This point is especially important for young people who are kicking off their careers. By explaining the whole picture, company leaders can connect the meaning to their employees. This, in turn, gives workers a clear sense of purpose and an understanding of how their efforts fit within the larger plan. According to our research, when the company’s vision is inspiring and clearly communicated, millennials are *25% more likely* to stay longer with the company compared to those who don’t understand the company’s vision and direction.

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### **Myth 3. Millennials are Altruistic and Don't Care about Money**

**Fact: For millennials, money is very important.**

For years, thought leaders have been talking about how millennials are just out for a “purpose crusade” and how they are more interested in meaning than money. Our research paints a much different picture. When asked what’s most important to them, millennials rank competitive pay as their highest concern.

Haydn Shaw, a renowned generational expert, confirmed this finding and says, “The vast majority of surveys show that millennials rank base pay as the most important factor in selecting and staying in a job, just as the other three generations do. They want meaningful work and a supportive culture to work in, but they want a well-paying job and career advancement more.”<sup>4</sup>

Using well-defined incentives that motivate their employees to go beyond the call of duty, progressive construction firms are taking charge and improving company performance. Beginning with a well-defined incentive compensation system, companies can effectively develop employees who excel at maximum levels and beyond. With the right combination of clear direction, quality feedback, and tangible rewards, employees become engaged and satisfied with their jobs. This, in turn, helps to create a win-win situation, where employees are inspired by the fact that management truly values their efforts.

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### **Myth 4. Millennials Want Constant Acclaim**

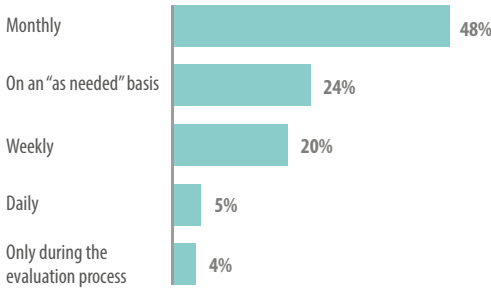
**Fact: Millennials want regular feedback — not because they are looking for a trophy, but because they are still learning the ropes.**

Feedback is a big topic for millennials in construction. Young construction employees are looking for mentors and coaches to help them learn the business and understand the ins and outs of their daily tasks and routines. In this Quarterly issue, we explore this topic in more depth in the context of field leader development.<sup>5</sup>

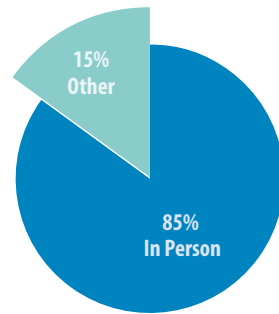
Progressive construction firms have started to create formal coaching and mentoring systems that support younger employees while also providing an important platform for knowledge transfer. By weaving these programs into their company fabric — and making them a part of employee performance

EXHIBIT  
2MILLENNIALS WANT ONGOING  
FACE-TO-FACE FEEDBACK AND INTERACTION

## I would prefer to receive feedback...



## I would prefer for feedback to be provided...



Source: FMI 2015 Millennials Survey

reviews — firms can effectively reach the 75% of millennials who see mentoring as being *crucial* to their success. Unfortunately, most construction employers are still missing the mark in this area.

According to our latest Talent Development Survey,<sup>6</sup> more than three-quarters of all participants (77%) are counting on annual reviews to increase employee performance and development. Conversely, almost 50% of our millennial survey participants stated that they wanted feedback on a monthly basis — a key indicator of how this young generation is driving change in performance management and overall communication (Figure 2). This generation is used to speedier reactions and responses; annual reviews are no longer a viable solution. Employers must shift their mindsets and start developing mechanisms for frequent, in-person communication and information exchange across all company levels and age groups.

**Myth 5. Millennials are Entitled**

**Fact: Millennials are ambitious and eager to make an impact in their careers, which sometimes can be misread as entitlement or even arrogance.**

This young generation of workers wants to participate and contribute in meaningful ways. They enjoy collaborative employment opportunities that allow them to stretch their creative wings, share new ideas and actively participate in their companies' successes. Too often, old job descriptions and company policies keep younger workers from contributing at levels that would create real value for their employers. In such cases, executives should think about how to change their work environments, team configurations and incentives.

Our millennial research also confirms that if employees feel like they are making progress and advancing in their careers, they will be more likely to

remain with their companies for the long term. Of survey respondents indicating that they understood their career paths and opportunities within their firms, 81% of millennials expected to stay more than five years at their company. Conversely, of those respondents not expecting to stay more than five years, one-third were unsure of their current roles, responsibilities and expectations.

The topic of career development is particularly relevant for companies in the construction industry, where many firms lack well-defined job tracks or comprehensive talent development and leadership programs. With young, ambitious millennials wanting to learn, improve and advance through an organization, employers must develop better solutions and challenge the old ways of “how things used to be done” — starting with the ways people interact and collaborate with one another.

### What Does This Mean for You?

As millennials become the dominant generation in today’s workforce, companies must be cognizant of the actions they take to engage these employees. Aligning each individual’s development plan with the company’s vision and goals is essential in ensuring improved engagement. Millennials are especially eager to contribute and want to know that they are adding value to the company. Never before have the company’s mission and vision been so important to a workforce.

The following business implications, which are structured around three organizational levels (strategic, operational and tactical), can help organizations make sure they have the basis for engaging and aligning their millennial workforce with the bigger picture. [Q](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Individuals born between 1980 and 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Millennials in Construction: Learning to Engage a New Workforce. 2015 FMI Industry Survey.

<sup>3</sup> Talent Sustainability Report. The CHRO View From the Front Lines of the War on Talent. HR Policy Foundation. April 24, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Haydn Shaw. Sticking Points: How to Get 4 Generations Working Together in the 12 Places They Come Apart. July 22, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> The Big Crew Change: How to Empower Your Next Generation of Field Leaders. Part One. Ethan Cowles. FMI Quarterly, Issue 1. 2016. and The Big Crew Change: Breaking into the Succession Plan. Part Two. Kim Jones and Ed Rowell. FMI Quarterly, Issue 1. 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Talent Development in the Construction Industry. 2015 FMI Industry Survey.

EXHIBIT **3a**

# BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS

	Strategic Level	Operational Level	Tactical Level
<b>Vision</b>	<p>Start by identifying an inspiring vision and communicate that vision clearly to the company.</p> <hr/> <p>Define a focused and strategic talent development program for all employees.</p>	<p>Develop processes for building corporate communities that truly inspire and engage employees long term.</p> <hr/> <p>Promote a collaborative and transparent work culture.</p> <hr/> <p>Attract and retain key employees for continued company growth.</p> <hr/> <p>Develop the necessary framework to effectively communicate the company's vision across the organization.</p>	<p>Develop specific interview questions for hiring new candidates to make sure they are a good cultural match.</p> <hr/> <p>Leaders need to stay in touch with their workforce and remain "approachable."</p> <hr/> <p>Employees need to understand what their career can look like long term with your company.</p> <hr/> <p>The organization's culture needs to be healthy and productive.</p>
<b>Culture of Engagement</b>	<p>Use the vision to drive a culture of engagement by aligning the organization around the vision.</p> <hr/> <p>Emphasize quality training and continuous employee development. Training should be seen as a continual process, not a one-time "event."</p>	<p>Develop and implement performance management processes that factor in ongoing training, coaching, development and associated performance metrics.</p> <hr/> <p>Develop systems and tools for diagnosing corporate culture.</p> <hr/> <p>By implementing an effective performance management process, companies can identify employees that are poised for high performance.</p> <hr/> <p>A culture of engagement starts at the top and requires leaders to continuously challenge team members and consciously demonstrate a focused effort to engage employees. Vision requires near constant communication, so leaders must recognize it is an essential aspect of their responsibilities.</p>	<p>Redesign the hiring process to place an emphasis on cultural fit first and role fit second.</p> <hr/> <p>Develop formal learning and engagement plans that leverage new technologies, methodologies and outcomes. Leverage senior leaders in mentorship roles for younger employees.</p> <hr/> <p>Develop individualized career plans and adjust on a continuous basis.</p> <hr/> <p>Conduct culture surveys and employee engagement assessments to review the current state of the organization and track progress as it improves.</p>

EXHIBIT  
3b

## BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS

Talent  
Strategy

## Strategic Level

Develop a talent strategy that aligns with the corporate vision and culture.

Reinvent your human resources business and corporate policies to develop employees at all levels with the skills they will need to help the organization realize its vision.

## Operational Level

Build a focused and strategic talent development program that is closely aligned with other core operational functions (e.g., estimating, project management, project controls, accounting, etc.) and that aligns with the overall corporate strategic goals.

Develop a communication platform where all employees can provide ideas and suggestions around strategic business issues as well as concerns they may have about less effective characteristics of the corporate culture.

Effective performance management processes correlate directly to sustainable company growth. Leaders must leverage this advantage with merit-based systems by defining expectations and standards for the team and individuals, and talking openly about shared objectives and goals.

By encouraging collaboration and implementing programs to solicit suggestions and feedback, companies can better engage their employees and provide the opportunity to connect with the company's larger strategic picture. Leaders need to be open to employees asking questions about the vision and raising any concerns they have. Open communication about the vision is critical to ensure the workforce understands and supports it.

## Tactical Level

When hiring new employees, alignment with the organization's vision and culture should be the priority. Candidates with great knowledge and experience but whom do not fit the vision or the culture will eventually leave due to that misalignment. It is easier to teach a new hire a specific skill and much harder to encourage him or her to change to fit the culture.

Incorporate innovation within talent development programs. Leverage innovation to connect older and younger employees.

Clearly defined career plans allow employees to understand the knowledge and skills they will need to progress through the organization. Without clear career plans, millennials may feel like they have plateaued or are stuck and look for their next opportunity outside of your company.

Anticipate potential feedback and be prepared to make substantive changes based on input from millennials as well as other constituencies. Even great cultures have aspects that frustrate employees. Great organizations want to understand where they are weakest so they can chart a path for improvement.



EXHIBIT  
3C

## BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS

**Implications  
for  
Millennials****Strategic Level**

Millennials don't just want to know what the vision is but also how they can help achieve that vision. They want to know how their specific tasks and responsibilities help contribute to the overall vision.

Old policies and job descriptions may stand in the way of millennials contributing at a level that would bring real value to their companies. To further drive the culture of engagement, encourage millennials to participate in the process of rewriting old policies and job descriptions. Seek feedback on the effectiveness of the strategic talent development program and adjust accordingly. The program needs to continually evolve to meet the changing demands of your workforce.

**Operational Level**

Millennials are still early in their careers, so they are looking for personal and professional developmental opportunities. They want to learn and grow in their roles and know they are working for an organization focused on their continual development, rather than treating them like cogs in a machine. Upgrading their skills is a major motivator for many millennials.

Millennial employees that feel motivated and free to provide input on strategic company objectives (and know their opinions will be heard) are more likely to feel they are making an impact at the company. Many millennials express a desire for more communication from their leaders—they want to be actively involved in their workplaces, and the more they understand, the more connected they will feel. Many millennials believe it's impossible to over-communicate with them.

High performers who are challenged at work and feel they are aiding in the success of the business are more likely to be promoters of engagement. Millennials are the most connected generation in the workforce, so they will actively communicate with others outside the organization. If you can inspire millennials to be vocal supporters of your culture, they can be a great source for referring other millennials.

Millennials welcome the opportunity to provide input and new ideas that promote innovation. They want to see a direct connection between their work and the company's vision. Millennials are content to work hard, but they want to know their efforts will have a meaningful impact. Leverage their perspectives and ideas to engage them, while also benefiting from their innovative insights.

**Tactical Level**

Millennials want to work with people who share similar values and objectives as they do. If they see employees who don't fit the vision or culture and yet go unchecked, it can be discouraging and create skepticism about the company's vision.

Millennials benefit from real-time feedback and a program that has the infrastructure for goals that can change. Millennials are comfortable with changing technology and want to work for organizations that stay up to date with the latest technologies.

Millennials want to understand their career opportunities and how they can move from A to B. Most millennials are willing to "pay their dues," but want to understand the general time frame and path before them. They want to know opportunities are available to them, and if they work hard, they will be rewarded with career progression.

Millennials want to know that the company has an accurate view of itself. Leaders should both communicate the positives of the organization as well as acknowledge the areas they are working to improve. Many millennials get frustrated when they believe an organization is plagued by blind spots or maintains an inaccurate view of its strengths and weaknesses.