

Rookies in the Workplace

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In the past few years, many participants in our training have expressed frustration and exasperation over their problems working with some of the Millennials hired into their companies. Frequent complaints include:

- They put in the minimum effort, yet expect to be promoted quickly
- Integrity issues, including over-stating their efforts or contributions, plagiarism, fudging timesheets or billable time, etc.
- Excessive multi-tasking that interferes with their ability to do high-quality work on any one item
- Overreliance on email, texting, and other "impersonal" forms of communication
- Inappropriate use of social media, such as using Facebook while billable, posting comments, tweets, and photos on their personal feeds that erode their professional credibility, etc.
- Inability to deal with negative feedback—for example, expecting nothing but praise, coming up with excuses to deflect blame when there is a problem, etc.

Much of this has been attributed to childhood influences, including "participation trophies" and other "celebrations of attendance," a focus on building self-esteem (even when the students are below-average), an explosion of academic dishonesty (largely involving passing off material from the internet as original work), and an intense integration of technology into their daily lives.

Another factor may be the "helicopter parents." These are usually Baby Boomers who are actively involved in their offsprings' lives—"hovering" over their academic, social, romantic, and professional experiences. The parents often consider themselves their children's best friends (their children may or may not feel the same). Helicopter parents may call their son's or daughter's college professors to discuss bad test scores. They may write and send out their resumes for them. (Note: as a college professor turned business owner, I've directly experienced both of these.) In some cases, parents have come along on the job interviews and/or called the employer to negotiate salary and benefits once an offer has been made.

Back in the 1980s and 1990s, Generation Xers entering the workplace also inspired a series of complaints—they were seen as "cynical slackers with no work ethic."

Baby Boomers entering the workforce in the 1960s and 1970s inspired similar "these kids today..." complaints. **It happens with every new generation.** In a few years, the incoming Millennial hires will either grow, learn, and adapt to the corporate culture of your organization, or they will decide that their future lies on another path and leave (or be asked to leave). The combination of adaptation and attrition is why older cohorts "fit" the company so much better than many of the young hires.

As leaders, you can help your young hires in many ways:

- See this as a mentoring opportunity
- Clearly spell out the expectations that you and the company have for them, including that only "above and beyond" performance leads to promotion, and "just showing up" isn't enough
- Explain your expectations for integrity, and do not tolerate dishonesty
- Consider provisional hiring and internship programs as a way of giving new recruits a short-term experience. It gives both you and them a chance to see if they are "good fits."
- Have clearly stated rules for use of social media in the workplace and your expectations and standards for posts in their personal profiles and feeds (including an explanation of why you have them)



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