

How Is the Millennial Generation Changing Manufacturing?

The manufacturing sector is facing a dilemma that must be addressed, and addressed soon, if crippling labor shortages are to be avoided. The current workforce is aging rapidly, with retirements looming and no new workers in the pipeline to replace those leaving. Logically, Millennials should be recruited to fill the vacancies, but will that happen?

Why are Manufacturers Having Trouble Filling Job Openings?

Actually, there is no simple answer to that question, as multiple issues are leading potential employees to look elsewhere for careers. First of all, attracting workers will require the manufacturing sector to alter the perception Millennials have of the sector. Manufacturing is still viewed by many prospective employees as being dirty with no real career path available.

Dan Campbell, CEO of Hire Dynamics, in a mfrtech blog submission, suggests Millennials don't recognize how dramatically the sector has changed. But, perhaps more importantly, he points out that Millennials can play a leading role in future developments if their needs are met. However, to this point, that hasn't happened.

Millennials: Are They Really All That Different?

According to Scott Stone in *How Millennials Can Help Manufacturers Adapt to Change*, many manufacturers "believe that this generation lacks the work ethic and discipline to succeed." Others argue that point of view is exaggerated.

The reality is, however, as the current workforce ages out, those companies will be forced to find ways to attract, hire, and train Millennials to fill the void. Stone goes on to suggest several strategies for manufacturers to work with Millennials to meet industry needs. Those strategies include:

- **Address the Old Perceptions.** Focus on educating the public on the true nature of today's manufacturing environment. Potential employees still picture tedious assembly lines where no one ever escapes the same daily routine. That image has to change.
- **Promote Education.** Today's (and tomorrow's) jobs require sophisticated skill sets, which means workers will need training to meet the challenges of modern manufacturing.
- **Embrace Technology.** Millennials have been raised in an era where technology is part of their everyday world. Industries adapting new technologies will almost certainly be better positioned to attract new employees.

So, are Millennials really different from past generations? As people, probably not. However, their attitudes may be somewhat distinctive in that their expectations are different than past

generations. They've been raised believing attending college is the only path to true success, and they are quickly learning that's not always true. But, what they did learn during their education is an alternate way to accomplish goals.

In *7 Best Ways To Manage Millennials In Manufacturing*, Pat Dean suggests Millennials are more comfortable working in teams than individually. Dean states, "This can be a real strength in manufacturing, which often involves complex processes that benefit from group focus."

That means employers may need to explore new operational strategies geared to the different styles of the Millennial generation. It also means, as Stone stated and Dean reiterates, technology is important to Millennials, and they are drawn to organizations that embrace technology to enhance their procedures.

What Do Millennials Bring to the Table?

Campbell points out Millennials have a great deal to offer. He goes on to say, "This generation is one that seeks to apply creativity in all facets of life, especially at work where they feel they can truly make a difference."

Millennials also bring the technology skills they've been incorporating into their own lives since they were very young. That level of comfort is beyond anything most older workers enjoy, which means they readily accept new challenges involving the integration of technology into the workplace.

Can Manufacturers Take Steps to Lure Millennials to Fill Job Openings?

The short answer is yes. Dean's article suggests several strategies to help Millennials be successful in the workplace. Perhaps most importantly, Dean suggests offering training that allows new employees to expand their skills and provide challenges.

Dean also recommends offering Millennials solid career paths allowing them to advance their careers. With the rapidly evolving manufacturing environment, doing so not only meets the needs of the workforce, but also the employer, as every organization must stay abreast of changes to remain competitive.

Millennials will almost certainly drive changes in manufacturing, and those changes will benefit the sector if manufacturers are committed to taking advantage of the skills Millennials can provide. Manufacturers taking the advice of Campbell, Stone, and Dean are likely to see improvements in their business if they embrace Millennials and look to the future rather than trying to make the generation adhere to standards of the past.

Sources:

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Pat Dean. <http://www.mbtmag.com/article/2016/01/7-best-ways-manage-millennials-manufacturing>