



THE

# MILLENNIAL MYTH

Transforming Misunderstanding  
into Workplace Breakthroughs

**CRYSTAL KADAKIA**

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## **Praise for *The Millennial Myth***

“Crystal captures the fundamental disconnect between what people think of Millennials, misguided generalizations based on tired stereotypes that have followed every generation, and who they actually are—which is the future leaders of our workforce. At Bullhorn we’ve adopted a ‘Millennial mindset’ of our own, remaining agile, innovative, and transparent in how we operate and build software, and the impact on productivity and employee happiness has been unprecedented.”

—**Art Papas, CEO, Bullhorn**

“The behaviors that result from our perceptions are real—even if our perceptions are incorrect. Crystal is clear in her eye-opening and clarifying concepts that lead to mutual understanding. The new generation entering the workforce at an accelerated pace are messengers from the future. Their presence shines a light on the way the world is becoming. To mislabel or ignore them would be detrimental to all the generations in the workforce. Crystal shows how Millennial behavior is modern behavior and will be a guide for many generations to come. You will love this book!”

—**Mick Ukleja, PhD, President, LeadershipTraQ, professor, and coauthor of *Managing the Millennials***

“Crystal Kadakia is the champion for Millennial engagement and so much more. She spells out a compelling and thoughtful framework that goes beyond generations. Without incorporating a growth mindset, an eye for high potentials, and an ability to adapt with technological advances—which are all skills we can learn from Millennials—our businesses will become obsolete. This is bigger than generations clashing in the workplace—it’s the future of business!”

—**Zulna Heriscar, Worldwide Field Partner Sales Lead, Cloud + Enterprise Division, Microsoft Corporation**

“When popular philosophy falls behind technological and economic advances, social institutions are at risk of failing to provide opportunity for their members—it is called structural lag. Crystal masterfully describes the effect of structural lag on Millennials and how organizations can create opportunity for an emerging workforce to have a positive influence.”

—**Chip Espinoza, PhD, coauthor of *Managing the Millennials*, *Millennials@Work*, and *Millennials Who Manage***

“As cofounders of Culture of Good, Inc., which inspires more than three thousand Millennial employees to do meaningful work, we found *The Millennial Myth* to be spot on. Not only has Crystal helped dispel myths that simply hold little truth about the next generation of leaders, but she has also provided in extensive detail the way forward for those leading them. This book is a must-read for those who expect to have success in leading the next generation of employees.”

—**Scott Moorehead and Ryan McCarty, cofounders of Culture of Good, Inc., and coauthors of *Build a Culture of Good***

The  
**Millennial**  
**MYTH**

# The Millennial MYTH

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**Transforming Misunderstanding  
into Workplace Breakthroughs**

**Crystal Kadakia**



Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.  
*a BK Business book*

# The Millennial Myth

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*To the many who have inspired me along the way by embracing the changes in life as though they were a true friend, one who challenges you and helps you rise to greater heights.*

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## PREFACE

# Millennials and the Modern Workplace

I'm a female. I'm an American-born Asian. I'm a chemical engineer by training. I got my first job when I was 13 and graduated with my bachelor's when I was 20. I spent seven years working for a Fortune 50 company, beginning as an engineer and then as a training manager. I left to launch my own firm, Invati Consulting. I've given over 100 talks that have reached over 5,000 people, including two TEDx talks, on a unique intersection: millennial behavior and modern workplace culture. I've discussed challenges like modernizing to a digital workplace and generational transition with countless executives. I've developed proprietary consulting and training solutions to enable the shift to organizational designs that support modern workplace culture. I've been recognized for these achievements, including receiving the Power 30 Under 30, Association for Talent Development's One to Watch, and Chief Learning Officer's Learning in Practice awards.

Before I get hurt patting myself too hard on the back, let me share that I'm also . . . dare I say it? A millennial.

Today, I cringe at owning this part of my identity. It feels like the moment I type the word "millennial," I have somehow discounted all my other qualities and accomplishments and made them less true. Yet indeed, I am a part of this "lazy, entitled, job-hopping" generation. The most common retort to my admission is, "Oh, but you're Asian, so it's different for you." Being Asian automatically brings up preconceived notions of Tiger Moms and driven children. However, my achievements cannot solely be attributed to my Asian upbringing. My achievements are attributed to my whole self, the varied fabric that makes up me.

To explain the seemingly “un-millennial-like” behavior of the many millennials they know, older generations often find similar excuses. I’ve often overheard an older generation individual saying to a millennial, “You’re the exception” or “I’m not talking about you, of course.” These justifications seek to hide one of the largest inconvenient truths: *that perhaps the majority of millennials are not, in reality, the lazy, entitled, disrespectful, feedback-driven job-hoppers that they are often believed to be.*

When I started my career, I was just Crystal Kadakia. I pursued things like actively challenging myself, trying to make a difference in the world, and focusing on what I could do instead of what I couldn’t. I wanted to bring all of that potential to work and make use of it. I didn’t know back then how “millennial” I really was by single-mindedly pursuing the idea of using my potential to its highest level, including wild experiments with lifestyle and career choices with little regard for traditional structure. Today, I know that older generations perceive such behavior as millennial. But what I also know is that *this is not just millennial, but modern. I know that millennial behavior signals the behavior of generations to come.*

My passion became clear as several pieces began to collide. While in my role as a training manager at the Fortune 50 company, I had a baby boomer directly reporting to me as we designed training for new hires. Around 2010, negative perspectives on millennials were everywhere in the media. It wasn’t the negativity that bothered me; it was the misalignment with reality. My boomer colleague and I would often discuss misleading media accounts about millennials, and we decided to prove them wrong in our training work. We launched several successful cross-generational programs based on what we were actually seeing, and none of them conformed to stereotypes—but these local successes didn’t satisfy my drive to change the dominant stereotypes about my generation.

The proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back was when I saw HR leaders, trainers, and seminar speakers espousing incorrect generational traits based on these media resources. Remember those tables of generational differences with values like hardworking or loyal for each

generation, as though entire generations had a single personality? Everyone, regardless of generation, would look rather confused at the end of these training programs on embracing generational diversity. Participants often commented, “I feel like an old soul” or “I feel like a millennial at heart” were common phrases spoken by participants. People didn’t fit into the neat, confining boxes being presented or learn actionable skills; the training simply reinforced attitudes based on stereotypes.

I wanted to draw new connections for people of all generations, and particularly for corporations trying to adapt to a digitally driven world. I eventually built the momentum to start Invati Consulting, where today I speak, train, and consult on this unique challenge: changing the focus of the conversation from generations and millennials to understanding modern talent behavior and the corresponding new workplace design. I discovered the audience was hungry for meaningful, actionable perspectives in this arena. Through my extensive research and my own experience as a millennial, I have established a completely different language for interpreting the behavior of my generation, recast in a new light based on the impact of digital technology. Because all society is digitally enabled today, this new understanding then provides clues for much-needed organizational changes to better engage all modern talent.

To put it another way, despite the extremely heavy focus on millennials, it’s not about them. It’s about what makes modern talent, in the context of today’s digitally enabled environment, engaged and productive. Millennials are the first generation of “digital natives,” having coming of age with computers, the Internet, and digital technology. As such, they just happen to be the best informants to strategically guide modern workplace trends, both in terms of what we should change (based on the positive behavior of millennials) and what we should bring forward from the past (based on the risks of millennial behavior). To do so, we require a high degree of objectivity and cross-generational understanding.

Unfortunately, it is this very objectivity and understanding that is missing. Over the last five years, I have extensively researched the perceptions of millennials in the workplace, why they exist, and what we should act on instead. Ultimately, the perceptions we hold today are

rooted in a sensationalized media profile of an entire population. As a result, people, including senior leaders, have a tendency to transform interactions with millennials into negative experiences. For example, when asked for training and career growth opportunities, managers and leaders may automatically think, “Oh, you must be entitled. What have you done to deserve that?” This is an example of cognitive bias called confirmation bias, defined as “having a tendency to listen only to information that confirms our preconceptions.”<sup>1</sup> Yet the millennial perspective is, “I’m entitled? Because I want to learn about how to do my job and to do it so I succeed?” Unfortunately, these misconceptions have deeply infiltrated the workplace, especially at the managerial level and higher, where the shaping of the workplace happens.

I wrote this book to spark a new discussion among leaders and managers. Instead of complaining about adapting for millennials, it’s imperative for leaders and managers to acknowledge the role of millennial behavior as an indication of the needs of the modern workplace to attract, leverage, and retain modern talent. Many look at millennials as a topic related to diversity and inclusion or generational traits. Separately, others look at the topic of the future workplace. The new discussion I am launching drives an unbreakable, crucial connection between five of the most misunderstood millennial behaviors and the digitally enabled workplace revolution.

My objective is not to defend the millennial generation or present a view of what is right or wrong, good or bad, best or worst. Nor is it to focus on changing the workplace for millennials specifically. Rather, it is to provide an accurate, inclusive picture of how the world has changed and how that has impacted talent across all generations today and will continue to impact talent tomorrow.

It’s about reducing turnover and increasing engagement, but also about ensuring profitability, driving innovation, and existing as a company in the future. If an organization can’t engage their youngest employee base to contribute to building their vision, how can they attract their youngest customers to purchase their products? One of the biggest fears of CEOs today is to be “Uber-ized”—that is, to lose business

due to a complete revolution in the way things have always been done, just as Uber has done with the public transportation industry. To overcome this fear and remain successful, more than ever before, it is vital to deeply understand and embrace the future generation. Unlocking and harnessing the potential of modern talent is the ultimate key to survival in today's global, hyper-connected, digital society.

The  
**Millennial**  
**MYTH**

## INTRODUCTION

# The Perceptions We Hold Today

*Every cloud has . . .  
a silver lining.  
The greatest invention since . . .  
sliced bread.  
Computing power . . .  
doubles every two years.  
Millennials are . . .  
lazy and entitled.*

Why? Why do we automatically complete this sentence with “lazy and entitled”? Why do search engines such as Google and Bing highlight these stereotypes in their autocomplete feature? Why are there a million-plus search results for “lazy and entitled” that are linked to the millennial generation? What autocomplete words do we have for other generations? And, as organizations, leaders, and coworkers, what expectations, behaviors, and contributions are we missing out on because of these biases?

Millennials, as defined in this book, are those born between 1981 and 1996. Generation Z is the generation following millennials, born in 1996 to the present, and are just beginning to graduate from college. In the last 50 years, rapid technological changes have created a vast difference between the perspectives, values, beliefs, and expectations of the older and youngest generations around the globe. The difference is so vast that we fundamentally struggle to understand the world we each come from. It's not an exaggeration to say that different generations may

see the same behaviors or dynamics in the workplace and perceive completely different things, whether positive or negative. My purpose in this book is to help bridge this gap for five of the most misunderstood behaviors, especially for the senior workers and leaders for whom millennial employees and their perceived expectations so often seem mysterious.

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## Where Did the Perceptions Come From?

Many books, written in the past decade mostly by baby boomers and gen Xers, looked into the crystal ball and made predictions about millennial characteristics as they were growing up. Before the explosive rise of the smartphone and social media, in their seminal book published in 2000, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, Neil Howe and William Strauss cautioned, “Nearly all of today’s teen negatives are residues of trends launched by the boomers, apexed by gen Xers. Conversely, nearly all of today’s teens’ positives are new trends, unique to millennials, with much of the initiative coming from them.”<sup>1</sup> Today, we continually witness the impact of negative perceptions as leaders struggle to choose between inaction and action, afraid of “pandering” to millennial expectations, rather than viewing these new perspectives as an opportunity to modernize for the common good.

Initially, the theories about millennials were presented by qualified researchers who had invested hours collecting data and distilling stories into meaningful representations. Howe and Strauss were among the first generational analysts to gain popularity. They put forth an immensely positive view of the millennial generation. Later, other generational analysts such as Jean Twenge (author of *Generation Me*) and Mark Bauerlein (author of *The Dumbest Generation*) criticized their approach and instead popularized the negative aspects of millennials. The words “narcissistic,” “entitled,” and “lazy” began to emerge. However, these phrases weren’t just passed into society through books and articles. They were passed through social media, an exponentially viral medium, in which unreliable data and sensational messages spread like wildfire.



Millennials responded with fierce blogs, “rants,” videos, and memes. Two different worlds collided: the world of the distinguished expert and the world of the digital influencer. As social media’s two-way information flow grew at an enormous rate post-2000, the distinctly negative perception won out, because frankly, that is what made headlines. More than 20 articles per day are published online on the topic of millennials, everything from how they choose to vote to home-buying habits to the latest top 10 list on what is liked or disliked about them. Living in this information-bloated world, it’s no wonder society at large began to parrot the drama we heard. In contrast, while every generation has dealt with complaints, gen X and boomers didn’t have such a variety of high-volume, fast-paced sources of vocal discontent to contend with when they were coming of age.

Regardless, neither of these approaches, positive or negative, is fully accurate. And often, whether the writers are experts or bloggers, they simply select the formative events that best serve the idea they want to present: either that millennials will be saviors of mankind or that millennials are no more than device-controlled vegetables who expect everything to be done for them. Through the virality of social media, these crystal ball predictions have become the accepted truth, instead of being validated and confirmed. Older generations invented a tool they didn’t know the full capability of: the Internet. They failed to realize the avalanche of biased blind spots and generation gaps that would be caused by their quick judgment. The root cause behind the challenges of attracting and retaining millennials in the workplace lies within this widespread avalanche of misunderstanding. What we have today is just a slice of the overall picture, presented by white papers, top 10 lists, blogs, videos, books, TV interviews, and misguided speakers and trainers.

The degree of the disservice we have done to the millennial generation through the unintended impact of social media is evident. Pew Research conducted a study in 2015 on how generations perceive themselves.<sup>2</sup> It’s telling that only 8 percent of millennials feel the generational label describes their generation very well. Furthermore, when the study

goes on to explore the traits attributed to each generation, millennials are the harshest critics of their own generation, unlike any of the other generations. Surprisingly, this indicates that millennials themselves have internalized the media's negative definition of them, but *92 percent of millennials don't identify with the labels!* There is a significant disconnect between the characteristics assumed of the millennial generation and the reality experienced by actual millennials. Evidently, the generational labels we have for millennials today are . . . mislabeled.

Like much propaganda, it's those at the top who have the most power to shape our views—and the people at the top today are boomers, equal in size to the millennial population. Ironically, generation X voiced many of the same workplace desires as millennials, but as a smaller generation, they were relegated to fighting like David against Goliath. Today, it's more equally matched and like a game of Chicken, the question is who will dodge first? Will the deeply ingrained command and control preference of traditional mindsets win out, or will the collaborative tendencies of millennials influence us to work together to shape the future of work instead?

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## The Business Case for Understanding Millennials

Why do we need to reset our perceptions of millennials? Every generation has to overcome negativity from the older generations, right? The new kids on the block should be the ones to adapt.

Every generation that has gone before us has thought that. And yet, every new generation has created progress through their resistance of the status quo. Eventually, the new generation's expectations, small or large, were integrated into how we work and live.

Today, integrating new expectations may seem insurmountable because they are being driven by a significant, fast-paced change in the world. Consider the significance of the time we are living in: *the millennial generation is the last generation to remember a world without the Internet.* Millennials are both the first generation to form their world perspective from a digitally influenced vantage point and the last to remember

what it was like not to always be connected. The Internet is such a big change to the world, the way we do things, the way we behave, that to dismiss its impact on millennials by categorizing their behavior as fleeting generational traits is a serious error in judgment. Overall, the impact to businesses that don't seek to understand millennial employees is that *they inherently will not understand how to engage generations beyond millennials*, as well as digitally enabled talent today regardless of generation.

To complicate things further, other generations had decades to get used to big changes. Consider major inventions like paper, electricity, television, and new forms of transportation like ships and trains. As these inventions became the new normal, skills, attitudes, and behaviors became obsolete, were transformed, and were created. For example, many said that the light bulb would never happen. Once it did, it transformed society by bringing about the need for larger power grids and distribution networks. Behaviorally, attitudes and expectations formed around always having light. The scope of activities we could do in the evening changed. Some activities, skills, and values were lost. However, in the past, these game changers occurred further apart and fewer between, and we had generations to get used to them. Starting with the boomer generation, changes began to come faster and faster, often within the span of a decade or two, leading to a need to integrate expectations faster.

Unfortunately, the slow integration of millennials' new expectations, driven by the combination of the innate desire to maintain status quo and the avalanche of negative, viral social media, has led to highly visible consequences. Many have become focused on either doing nothing ("We don't need to change; if it ain't broke, don't fix it") or rigidly trying to make millennials fit in with the existing paradigm ("They should adapt to us"). As a result, many organizations are already experiencing the following immediate business impacts:

- › **Costs due to turnover.** Today's organizations are facing unprecedented challenges to attract and retain young talent. A 2016 study by Gallup estimated that millennial turnover costs the US economy \$30.5 billion every year.<sup>3</sup> According to Millennial Branding's

study on millennial retention, 56 percent of millennials expect to leave their jobs in three years or less.<sup>4</sup> It's easy to conclude that this loss is tied to lack of understanding of modern talent needs.

- › **Lack of bench strength.** Along with the costs of higher turnover, profit is at risk due to lack of a leadership pipeline. Whether hiring from external sources or developing leaders from within, lack of talent longevity creates significant skill gaps as well as a smaller talent pool of high-potential employees. Future profit requires future leaders. Future leaders want an effective, modern culture in the present, including clear personal reasons to stay at a job other than the benefit of an employer's brand name.
- › **Loss of core knowledge.** There is limited time to understand what should intentionally be brought forward from previous generations. Without transferring knowledge, profit loss can be significant and unpredictable. For example, an aerospace company went through a period of early retirements to cut back on costs during the recession. A few years later, they had to shut down a plant for two weeks because of a problem no one knew how to solve. They had to hire back retirees for the fix. Although boomers will not retire en masse, transferring core competencies built over a 40-year career takes significant time. Without creating an effective cross-generational culture, critical lessons, experience, and core values will be lost that could greatly impact profit.
- › **Decreased employee engagement.** Gallup's 2016 report also indicated that 55 percent of millennials are not engaged at work, the highest number of any generation.<sup>5</sup> Ongoing industry-wide research has proven that organizations with highly engaged employees consistently outperform organizations with disengaged employees in the marketplace. Understanding how to engage millennials and digitally enabled talent is imperative to build a high-performing organization.

- › **Decreased access to top talent.** Today, many organizations are engaged in talent wars, spending millions on recruiting top talent. Organizations usually compete with each other for talent, but organizations are also at war with talent itself. For a multitude of reasons, many millennials and especially gen Z are attracted to entrepreneurship and start-ups instead of the traditional 9 to 5. According to Millennial Branding's 2014 study on high school careers, 72 percent of high school students, nearly three-quarters, want to be business owners someday.<sup>6</sup> Internal workplace culture can be changed to match employees' shifting expectations and thereby attract top talent.

With the many innovations in the last few decades, we have created a complex social paradigm. Older generations want younger generations to behave in a way that is congruent with how the world was—to be able to replicate today the practices that engaged and retained employees “well enough” yesterday. With the exception of a relative few, that's by and large what the generations that preceded them did: focused on assimilating the new to the old. Yet so much has changed that the gap is wide between what an older generation expects and what a younger generation knows to do or believes is right.

Moreover, the creator of the gap, digital technology, is not going away. Unsurprisingly, since we all live in this digitally enabled world, it is often said, “Millennials want what everyone wants!” If that is the case, why resist giving everyone the changes they want? Traditional-minded leaders continue complaining about the latest generation instead of engaging in the timeless generational practice of shifting from complaints to serving as mentors, showing millennials the ropes, and acknowledging forward-thinking practices. The negative perception of millennials by older generations can be validated and reinforced by the Internet and other media, stopping the inclination to offer acceptance that someone once did for older generations in their early career days. However, we can successfully navigate these uncertain, unknown

waters and build a bridge into the future by fairly and thoughtfully considering both established experiences *and* new perspectives of the way we work.

Through my research, it has become clear that the changing behavior highlighted by millennials is indicative of evolving needs for all of us, that is, all digitally enabled talent. Through offering an incomplete, biased picture of millennials, we have created a critical barrier to the modernization of the workplace. The potential upside for letting go of our stereotypes, reestablishing understanding, and acting purposefully is immense. Boomers, gen Xers, and millennials can form relationships where knowledge is transferred, productivity increases, and supportive community is built. We can be better prepared to attract, engage, and retain generation Z as they enter the workplace and avoid the challenges experienced with millennials. We can feel more empowered ourselves, knowing that we are not just doing what we have always done, but are doing the right things.

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### **Who This Book Is For: Leaders, Managers, and Change Champions**

As you read on, I hope you find that this is more than just another book about millennials. Rather, it is intended to help you:

- › Gain insight to make meaningful, strategic investments around modern workplace culture
- › Lead efforts to build a modern, high-performing workplace
- › Understand millennials better from a millennial's perspective
- › Drive the connection of millennial behavior to modern workplace culture, beyond discussions of diversity and inclusion of generations
- › Create a win-win, effective cross-generational culture that will enable your organization to not just survive, but thrive in the twenty-first century

This book is targeted toward global leaders at all levels, from C-suite level all the way down to frontline managers. Although written from a US vantage point, especially concerning statistics and data, the underlying millennial behaviors, themes, and concepts are intended to be as globally relevant as possible. If you are responsible for cascading culture and building the organization, this book will prove to be an invaluable resource to translating modern talent expectations into organizational culture strategies.

One of the biggest mistakes organizations make is assuming that what works for the Googles of the world will also work for them. We would like to believe that we can simply copy and paste superficial changes that appear “sexy” and that these will solve our deep engagement and productivity issues. In reality, changing the color of the walls, having snack machines, installing ping-pong tables, and moving to open office layouts, among other façade changes, are only Band-Aid solutions that do nothing to address an inevitable revolution. This book will help change champions like you understand the variety of factors related to engaging, productive modern workplaces that we can learn from millennial behavior. Armed with this new understanding, you’ll be in a better position to use your deep experience wisely, while making strategic investments that are more impactful and cost-effective than putting your staff on matching bicycles.

In the last decade, the majority of books published on millennials focused on dissecting their attitudes and beliefs from a diversity and inclusion or managerial perspective. Books have also been written about the future workplace but either exclude or minimize the impact of millennial behavior. Oftentimes, this is because the authors aren’t millennials and lack the understanding needed to drive the connection. Instead of leveraging millennials to understand the needs of a digitally enabled workforce, we have moved on as though generational differences were a passing fad. Senior leaders and managers find themselves in need of something practical to guide their actions, yet the search is akin to finding an oasis in the desert. We come across many mirages and are unsure of ever finding a true paradise. This book is a sharp deviation

from previous works in that it seeks to start a new discussion for leaders and managers by reexamining our presumptions for five of the biggest millennial stereotypes, learning a new language, being inspired by the rewards, and enabling strategic, purposeful action.

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## **Who This Book Is About**

This book is inspired by the behavior of high-performing millennials, but it applies to modern talent as a whole. To explain what I mean by high-performing or “top talent” millennials, consider that with the advent of digital technology, some millennials (and people in general) are more capable at filtering through the overwhelming amounts of information and leveraging it to take action. Some, however, are instead overwhelmed and let technology drive them. For example, some are sensitive to digital distractions and procrastinate, lack focused attention, and exhibit other problems. While neuroscience research is ongoing to discover the cause for these differences, this book is based on the behavior of those millennials who clearly have adapted successfully. Those who have persevered through college or entrepreneurial gap years post-high school and have made it through the high hurdles of today’s world-class recruiting processes are more likely to have adapted well to technology.

These top talent millennials give us clues for what works well in this digitally enabled society. They have experimented and tuned productive behaviors since childhood. They are truly digital natives, not digital immigrants, and possibly, more fully than most, they exploit and comprehend what it means to be digitally enabled and digitally influenced. Similarly, where these individuals are ineffective (e.g., face-to-face communication) indicates a need to bring forth best practices from previous generations or to create practices to navigate new challenges of the digital world. So, please keep in mind that I’m well aware that every single thing millennials do isn’t an indicator for a best approach, but it is simply outside the scope of this book to address that topic!

The behaviors discussed also lean heavily toward those individuals in jobs and careers that involve highly cognitive, nonroutine work. Some



examples of this type of work include project management, customer service, and troubleshooting manufacturing issues. As we will explore in the next chapter, this is a purposeful choice because of the significant increase of nonroutine work (whether in the office or as physical labor). Routine work, even something like serving in a fast-food restaurant, is decreasing. (In the fast-food case, fully automated restaurants, complete with robots, have already been launched!) Therefore, my research has focused more heavily on reinterpreting the drivers, the needs, and behaviors of top talent, high-performing millennials in cognitive, nonroutine roles.

Many of the expectations and cultural changes in this book will resonate with modern-minded gen Z, boomers, traditionalists, and gen Xers as well; a group that we will refer to as *modern talent*. As you read this book, you may find a millennial behavior and think, “That’s not just millennial! That is how I am too!” That’s great! Regardless of generation, many of us have adapted well to digital technology. If you identify with a particular millennial behavior, all that means is that you identify strongly with modern perceptions of work. The caveat to keep in mind is that *for older generations, many “millennial” expectations for the workplace were wants, not needs*. Millennials and generation Z are often redefining needs—and with good reason, as I’ll demonstrate in many cases.

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## How to Use This Book

This book focuses on transforming five of the biggest millennial stereotypes—lazy, entitled, needing to be hand-held, disloyal, and having authority issues—into more balanced strengths and, subsequently, linking them to related organizational culture changes. The focus is on providing a new language to talk about millennial behavior and thereby paving the way for more effectively addressing modern talent needs. By providing a window into each generation’s perspective, the new language does something that no one has quite accomplished: close the generation gap.

In chapter 1, we begin by resetting our understanding of the millennial generation to set the stage for developing a new language. We

provide a brief foundation into generational science and explain why the most common millennial stereotypes are inaccurate conclusions, especially for the broad population of top talent, cognitive-career-focused millennials. In chapters 2 through 6, we focus on developing the new language or strengths for each stereotype, as well as recommend transformations to organizational culture to harness the potential of modern talent. Finally, we close with a summary and next steps. The five stereotypes represent the most common grievances expressed by older generations and were carefully chosen through the many interviews I have conducted. The new language and related proposed organizational changes come from my experiences with millennials who are considered top talent and my emerging work with organizations to improve engagement and retention.

The stereotypes and transformations we will examine in the core chapters are as follows:

- › Chapter 2: It's Not Lazy, It's Productivity Redefined
- › Chapter 3: It's Not Entitled, It's Entrepreneurial
- › Chapter 4: It's Not Hand-Holding, It's Agility
- › Chapter 5: It's Not Disloyal, It's Seeking Purpose
- › Chapter 6: It's Not Authority Issues, It's Respect Redefined

Each chapter follows a consistent structure. Using my One Coin, Two Sides model, each chapter begins with an explanation of the stereotypical behavior and interpretation of the root cause from the traditional mindset and the modern mindset. Consider that just as every coin has two sides, every millennial behavior can be interpreted multiple ways. And, of course, we each think our own interpretation is right! I have simplified the trends into two perspectives (traditional and modern) in order to create an easy-to-digest model, but there are certainly other interpretations that could be added. During this compare and contrast, through exploring the traditional perspective, we will learn how the stereotypical interpretation emerged. Then, I form the basis for the proposed new language through exploring the modern perspective.

Armed with a more balanced overall interpretation, I drive the connection to specific organizational culture changes. I follow with “Tales from the Trenches” of the organizational change in action, many of which are new and experimental initiatives. I have included stories from a variety of industries and have kept the global context in mind throughout. In addition, you will encounter stories of successful and not-so-successful millennials, boomers, gen Xers, and their cross-generational relationships. There are many boomers and gen Xers who do passionately believe in shaping the future and understanding the insights millennials bring. These are the individuals and organizations that I have highlighted in this book in the form of stories, case studies, and best practices.

The end of each chapter has two key tools to help you take action to create your modern culture. The first is a short self-assessment entitled “How Modern Is Your Culture?” The assessment allows you to do a “gut check” on how your organization is doing on the material covered in the chapter. It is an adaptation of my groundbreaking Modern Culture Diagnostic consulting solution that helps organizations identify their strengths and opportunity areas for attracting, retaining, and developing modern talent. By completing the self-assessment, you will get a feel for the maturity of your organization in meeting modern talent needs.

The second tool shifts the focus from your organization to you. The 10-Minute Champion is a brief collection of actions you can do in 10 minutes or less per day to champion modern culture. An apt metaphor for the 10-Minute Champion is a Twitter-sized approach to changing the workplace. Consider picking one item to champion from each chapter based on what you think is the easiest to implement and/or will have the greatest impact.

Finally, I have provided an invaluable online resource library to accompany the book. The library is located at [themillennialmyth.com/resources](http://themillennialmyth.com/resources) and includes the following tools and resources:

- › **An online version of the “How Modern Is Your Culture?” self-assessment via live survey.** You can view the results of the survey in real time and see how your responses compare with other readers.

- › **One-page summary guides for each chapter.** These include links to deeper references as a convenient way for you to source data and insight for your own initiatives. This is also a great resource for professors of graduate programs who wish to use this book as a way to spark discussion about generational trends and the modern workplace.
- › **Live collaboration space for capturing key insights.** Many readers often use a personal document to capture key insights as they read. To enrich this activity, the online library includes a collaboration document with quotes and key points that stood out for other readers of this book. I welcome you to add your own thoughts as you read along.
- › **10-Minute Champion idea space.** Contribute your own 10-Minute Champion ideas and get more from other readers in this online collaboration document.

Although I am not a boomer or gen Xer, I have tried my best through anecdotal interviews and research to accurately represent the journey that has led to the existing perspectives shared in the traditional interpretation section of each chapter. While you may not personally agree with every perspective shared, consider it as a starting point for discussion of what you do believe or what did influence you. You may find that some people around you do share the perspectives of other generations, while some may not. That's okay! Throughout the book, the focus is not on definitively identifying each and every perspective but on asking the questions "What's changed?" and "How does that impact the workplace?" You may find additions you'd like to make to the various perspectives. Similarly, there will be millennials you have met who do not follow the patterns presented here. Any global considerations and differences are also important to note. I encourage you to be a part of our community as you embark on this journey. There are many others who have similar questions and best practices to share. Also, I encourage you to reach out to me with your thoughts.



In summary, the significant disconnect between the prevalent biases about millennials and the reality is creating inertia toward the already difficult challenge of workplace modernization. Ultimately, it is driving the struggles with attracting, engaging, and retaining talent today. This book aims to not only correct these misunderstandings and redirect the conversation on millennials, but move organizations forward in creating their unique, modern workplace culture.

People who have been there forever, left to their own devices, are rarely in the best position to design the future. It's those who consciously listen to the constituents of the future who can understand which direction to move in. It's not the captain holed up in a room with the map and ship's course who can best steer the ship. It's the helmsman, the crew member who stands out on the deck with the map, feeling the direction of the wind change and conscious of the current, who makes the ship reach its destination. We thrive when we are pulled by the future, not pushed by the past.

Jack Welch, ex-CEO of General Electric, once said, "If the rate of change on the outside exceeds the rate of change on the inside, the end is near."<sup>7</sup> Through this pivotal time of generation transition and digital transformation, some companies will become a Blockbuster, some a Netflix. Do I need to even ask which one you want to be?

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