



Social Change in the Millennial Generation

The face of the modern employee is changing.

As the **baby boomers** celebrate nearly 40 years on the job, these 50- and 60-somethings will increasingly find themselves the minority among corporate leadership in the coming years.

“The aging baby boomers, born in the wake of World War II, at the beginning of the 20th century’s 40-year global economic boom, are fading from their prominent positions of economic and moral leadership. The tough-minded, techno-savvy generation that trails them, the digital generation, has the new world wired” (Schwartz and Leyden).

The new senior corporate executives are only “senior” in title. Coined the “**millennial generation**” or “Generation Y,” these young men and women are graduating from college and stepping into the corporate spotlight, bringing with them a profound understanding of modern technologies and an unparalleled sense of hope.

“The millennial generation is coming of age. These are the children born in the 1980s and 1990s, at the front end of this boom of all booms. These are the kids who have spent their entire lives steeped in the new technologies, living in a networked world. They have been educated in wired schools, they have taken their first jobs implicitly understanding computer technologies. Now they’re doing the bulk of society’s work” (Schwartz and Leyden).

What sets the millennials apart from their Generation X predecessors, born 20 years after the first baby boomers, is more than technological and educational advancements. The true difference involves a fundamental shift in their **world view** that they bring to the corporate environment.

“Gen Xers ... have been characterized as pessimistic, cynical, self-centered individuals with a mistrust of values and authority. But this new generation, born in 1982 and later, is far from an echo of the dark Generation X. Research has pegged the Millennials as accepting of authority, and craving feedback and constant positive reinforcement” (Woelfel).

The millennial generation also embodies a strong set of **social values** that experts predict will mold corporate cultures and guide future generations.



CHARACTERISTICS OF THE **BABY BOOMERS**

- Workaholic
- Idealistic
- Competitive
- Loyal
- Materialistic
- Seeks Personal Fulfillment
- Values Titles and the Corner Office



CHARACTERISTICS OF THE **MILLENNIAL GENERATION**

- Entitled
- Optimistic
- Civic-Minded
- Close Parental Involvement
- Values Work-Life Balance
- Impatient
- Multitasking
- Team-Oriented

GENERATIONAL TIMELINES

MILLENNIALS 1980 – 2001
Current US Population: **92 M**

GEN XERS 1965 – 1979
Current US Population: **62 M**

BABY BOOMERS 1946 – 1964
Current US Population: **78.3 M**



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“Self-reliance and cooperation will become prevalent societal values as Generation X and Generation Y replace the baby-boom generation. Gen Xers and Gen Yers are highly entrepreneurial. They are also very socially aware. Societies can expect more small-business activity, more social activism, and greater outreach across cultures and political parties” (Outlook 2009 p.8).

To the millennials, there is no problem too big or challenge too difficult, and this is a powerful trait that companies can expect to harness as more millennials enter the workforce. They fully expect to seal the largest multinational deals in the history of their respective companies and then brainstorm ways to end world hunger. These men and women are **confident** in their abilities to tackle yet-unsolved dilemmas because they believe there is no limit to what they can achieve.

How can companies recruit talented millennials in the face of their strong ties to entrepreneurialism? What changes can be made to the corporate culture to attract socially conscious millennials who hope to do more than work a 9-to-5 job?

Opportunities for **higher education** will continue to be critical in cultivating millennial minds, not just in the traditional university settings, but also in continual workforce retraining sessions, necessitated by the exponential increase in newly generated information.

Experts estimate that **4 exabytes (4.0 x 10¹⁹) of unique information** will be generated this year, more than the total amount of new information created in the previous 5,000 years combined. New technical information will continue to double every two years, and students starting a four-year degree will find half of what they learn in their freshman year has become outdated by their junior year.

“An individual’s professional knowledge is becoming outdated at a much faster rate than ever before. Most professions will require continuous instruction and retraining. Rapid changes in the job market and work-related technologies will necessitate job education for almost every worker. At any given moment, a substantial portion of the labor force will be in job retraining programs” (Outlook 2009 p.9).

SOCIAL ACTIVISM: WAYS YOU CAN HELP



Ronald McDonald House: “For nearly 35 years, Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) has been creating, finding and supporting programs that directly improve the health and well being of nearly 3.7 million **children** worldwide every year.”



Habitat for Humanity: “In the United States alone, 95 million people, one third of the nation, have housing problems including payments too large a percentage of their income, overcrowding, poor quality shelter and homelessness. Throughout the world, people live in inadequate housing, and Habitat for Humanity is dedicated to providing decent, affordable **homes** for those in need.”



Sierra Club: “Since 1892, the Sierra Club has been working to protect communities, wild places, and the planet itself. We are the oldest, largest, and most influential grassroots **environmental** organization in the United States.”



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The good news for the corporate world is that the millennial generation is generally eager to acquire new knowledge and skills. Like millions of tiny, proverbial sponges of information, the millennials are finding that **access to colleges and universities** may be the biggest obstacle they face in realizing their dreams. As the number of unskilled jobs continues to drop, education increasingly becomes “a matter of survival” (Schwartz and Leyden). While most young people aspire to greatness, they continue to lack the means to achieve their goals.

“Only about one in four high-school graduates goes on to receive a college degree. Many of the rest wish to go, but cannot afford the high cost of further schooling” (55 Trends p.8).

How can we make higher education more **affordable** and **accessible**? How can we integrate **workforce training programs** into the corporate culture while being both forward thinking and **budget friendly**? Should companies take **responsibility** for educating their employees, or should universities have the monopoly on education?

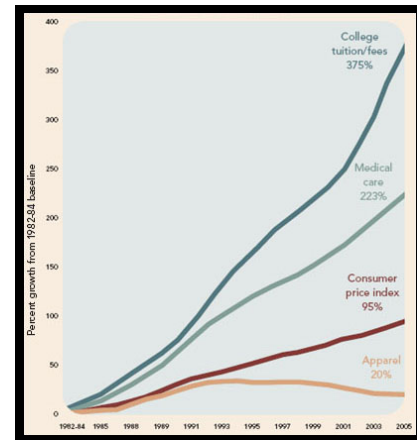
We will continue to see an increase in the number of **women** attending institutions of higher education. While this is not a new trend in the US, many societies abroad will feel its ramifications in arenas from politics to population.

“Improved educational opportunities for girls and women also are a contributing factor to falling birth rates worldwide – and by extension, better maternal health. The long-term implications of this trend likely include fewer orphans, less malnutrition, more children in school, and other contributions to societal stability” (Global Trends 2025 p.16).

The millennial generation is also uniquely **contradictory**. They enjoy a sense of personal entitlement while also being deeply committed to community activism. They anticipate hardship in the world around them but expect only success for themselves. They demand fulfillment in their careers but will continue to change employers in search of the perfect job, an idea that seemed to be completely foreign to the baby boomer generation.

FACT: The **top 10** in-demand jobs in 2010 **did not exist** in 2004. We are currently preparing students for jobs that **don't yet exist**, using technologies that **haven't been invented**, in order to **solve problems** we don't even know are problems yet.

THE RISING COSTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION



From **EdWeek.org**: “College affordability continues to worsen in the United States. Since the early 1980s, the rate of increase in college tuition and fees has far outstripped price increases in other sectors of the economy, from the costs of health care to clothing.”



FACT: Today, it costs the average American family about a **fifth** of its **annual income** to pay the total costs for a **year of college** at a four-year institution.



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The baby boomers often found themselves at the same job for the entirety of their careers, retiring with 40 years under their belts and the ceremonial gold watch on their wrists. It didn't matter if they were doing what they loved because they enjoyed a **higher degree of job security**, and consequently, they remained loyal to their employer. Or maybe it's the other way around; perhaps the baby boomers' loyalty to their employers resulted in their job security.

In the corporate culture of today, many millennials feel as though their employers view them like a cog in a wheel, pre-formed and **easily replaceable** upon malfunction.

Is it the millennials' lack of loyalty that has led to a decline in employee retention? Or is it the employer's mindset that has created a sense of disloyalty in its employees? How can the employer and the employee end up on the same page?

Around the world, countries like China and India are also experiencing significant change resulting from their own millennial generations' commitment to entrepreneurialism.

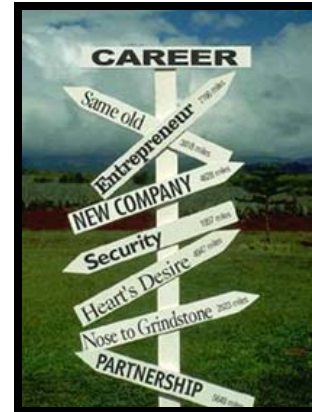
"Gen X and millennial entrepreneurs are largely responsible for the current economic growth in India and China, where they are becoming a major force in the Communist party. In India, the younger generations dress and think more like their American counterparts than their parents. In China, the democratic fervor that spawned Tiananmen Square has been replaced by capitalist entrepreneurialism" (55 Trends p.8).

But not all societies embrace the ideals of the millennial generation.

"The spread of Westernized Gen X and millennial values in the developing world will provoke an even greater reaction from fundamentalists, who will see it as cultural imperialism by America and Europe and as a threat to the piety of their children, and therefore to their afterlife in Paradise. This is likely to make the anti-West movement among Muslims even more violent and widespread" (55 Trends p.7).

The current surge in the Muslim youth population is happening in a time of rampant economic despair. With not enough jobs to go around, there exists a generation of **unemployed Muslim youth** who are searching for

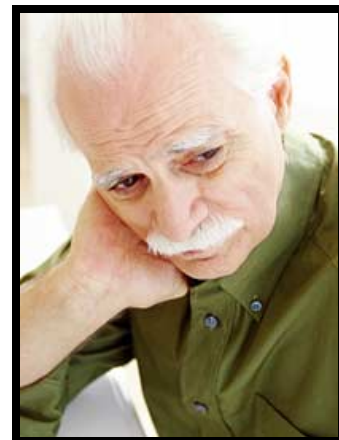
SEARCHING FOR SATISFACTION



FACT: The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that today's learner will have **10-14 jobs** by the time they are **38 years old**.

FACT: **One in four** workers has been with their current employer for **less than a year**. **One in two** has been there **less than five years**.

RETIREMENT: THE DISAPPEARING ACT



FACT: "About **one in five** people, and 40 percent of seniors, say they plan to **continue working until they die**, and nearly two-thirds of Americans say they **doubt that retirement is possible** for the middle class" (Outlook 2009 p.2).



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meaning and purpose. The American millennials fill that same void with career satisfaction and civic responsibility. But their Islamic counterparts are increasingly turning to **religious fundamentalism** as a way to make a difference for themselves and their families in both this life and the next.

“In the absence of employment opportunities and legal means for political expression, conditions will be ripe for disaffection, growing radicalism, and possible recruitment of youths into terrorist groups ... For those terrorist groups that are active in 2025, the diffusion of technologies and scientific knowledge will place some of the world’s most dangerous capabilities within their reach. One of our greatest concerns continues to be that terrorist or other malevolent groups might acquire and employ biological agents, or less likely, a nuclear device, to create mass casualties” (Global Trends 2025 p.ix).

Long gone are the days of disorganized radicals and scattered terrorist cells. With the availability and advancements of modern technologies, terrorist organizations are connected and determined to protect their future generations from the advancement of Western ideologies and millennial ideals. With a strong infrastructure, virtually limitless funding, and fundamentalist determination, the possibility of a **bioterrorist attack** has gone from dismissingly hypothetical to credibly probable.

“In the next decade, biological technologies that were once at the furthest frontiers of science will become available to anyone with a modicum of scientific training. Emerging scientific disciplines (notably genomics, nanotechnology, and other micro-sciences) could pave the way for a bio-attack. Bacteria and viruses could be altered to increase their lethality or to evade antibiotic treatment. Also, diseases once thought to be eradicated could be re-synthesized, enabling them to spread in new regions” (Outlook 2009 p.9).

The effects of a biological attack could be long-lasting, as **nanopollution**, defined as “invisible bullets” that reach beyond the confines of the traditional battlefield, has the potential to create new diseases with never-before-seen symptoms that may be difficult or impossible to treat. A sophisticated biological war could change humanity irreparably if measures are not taken to prevent against it.

Is our fear of **terrorism** born out of state-supplied **propaganda**?

WATCH: The Power of Nightmares



From **“The Missing Near Future:”** ...when there is no vision of progress or betterment to unify a society, the leaders will introduce fear to unify them. The BBC documentary series **“The Power of Nightmares”** argues that this is what recently happened in the US. When the hope of technology solving everything (the glorious days of Progress, with a capital P) petered out, it was replaced by the fear of communism as a way of unifying the country. When communism rotted from the inside and collapsed, the fear of terrorism had to replace it. That exaggerated fear governed the past decade. But unless there is a plausible, desirable vision of betterment, one that billions can agree on, another fear will have to be found.”

FACT: “In a now-declassified National Security Estimate, the U.S. intelligence community concluded that **al-Qaeda was more powerful in 2007** than it had been before the so-called “war on terror” began—more dangerous even than it had been when it planned the attacks of September 11, 2001” (55 Trends p.6).



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These are serious threats with potentially fatal consequences, and it is human nature to look at the social changes of the millennial generation through separationist “us versus them” lenses. We are the good guys, and “they” are the bad guys.

But it’s not that simple. Creating a world dichotomy hinders the advancements we have made in promoting an open society, and as a nation, the US must continue to set an example for the world to follow.

“The United States serves as a steward of the idea of an open society. The US is home to the core economic and political values that emerged from the 20th century – the free-market economy and democracy. But the idea of an open society is broader than that. Americans believe in the free flow of ideas, products, and people. Historically, this has taken the form of protecting speech, promoting trade, and welcoming immigrants. With the coming of a wired, global society, the concept of openness has never been more important. It’s the linchpin that will make the new world work” (Schwartz and Leyden).

How can we support diversity while protecting ourselves from those who wish to harm us? How will the values of the millennial generation shape our social and corporate future?

Sources:

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FOOD FOR YOUR BRAIN: Suggested Reading



From **Amazon.com**: “Alsop, a columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*, explores the emergence of the 80 million strong millennial generation into the workplace and the resulting ramifications in this insightful and in-depth look at Generation Y. Born between 1980 and 2001, millennials are a new breed of student, worker, and global citizen, with distinctly different – often paradoxical – values and motivations ... Based on data collected from interviews with student recruiters, particularly in management consulting, and at accounting and investment banking firms, Alsop explains how companies can take the lead in understanding and reaching out to Generation Y and what organizations can expect in their new hires. This well-crafted book will help companies adapt to meet the desires and demands of the millennial generation and retain the best talent.”

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