Leading Millennials in the Workplace: Recruitment, Retention and Integration

Exploratory Paper

Andrew T. Smith, MHA, FACMPE

September 14, 2016

This paper is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Fellowship in the American College of Medical Practice Executives.
INTRODUCTION

“Whenever representatives from a new generation flood into an institution, they inevitably shape it according to their beliefs, values, and norms” (Hinote and Sundvall 132). A leading management issue over the last two decades has been the aging of the population within the United States and the corresponding impact that trend is having on the composition of the workforce. There are three distinct generations today that comprise the bulk of the American workforce: Baby Boomers (born between 1946-1964), Generation X (born between 1965-1980), and Generation Y or the Millennials (born after 1980) (Belal, et al. 88), and in the United States, the millennial cohort comprises the largest at 95 million people compared with Baby Boomers who total 78 million (Gesell 22). Not only because of the sheer size of this group that is now entering employment in vast numbers, but also due to its unique characteristics and qualities, healthcare leaders cannot afford to be uniformed or take a casual approach to managing this demographic. With the rapid development of technology in the present economic climate, organizational leaders are challenged more and more concerning how work gets done, and compounded with the demographic differences that currently exist, leaders must be adept at effectively leveraging their human capital by utilizing and accounting for their individual and generational differences (Simons 29), In terms of their attitudes about work, their influence on how and where work is performed, and their demands on employers, the millennial generation will undoubtedly define the culture of the 21st century workplace. While Generation Y will pose challenges in recruitment and engagement, this generation will also evolve into “the most high-performing workforce in history for those who know how to manage them properly” (Tulgan 4). Beyond the obvious need for hiring employees to support their organization in the future, the demographic shift that is occurring must be a top concern for the healthcare leader in terms of maximizing the potential of these new entrants and effectively assimilating them with the present workforce. By means of a literature search, the purpose of this exploratory paper is to inform physician practice leaders on the critical importance of the millennial workforce to their current and future success, as well as providing a practical roadmap for successfully recruiting, retaining, and integrating this generation of healthcare workers.

BACKGROUND

Outside of its impressive numbers, the Generation Y cohort is also distinctive in how its upbringing shaped its perspective, values, and work ethic. Understanding these details is critical
to successfully attracting them to join an organization’s workforce, retaining them, and effectively deploying them to accomplish organizational objectives.

The Formative Years

The defining characteristic of this generation is how its members aged surrounded by digital media, leading many to label them as “digital natives” (Hershatter and Epstein 212). From laptops to smartphones, they have an affinity for technology and expect the instant answers provided by it. One effect of this upbringing is how this has contributed to their unique perspective on the world around them; millennials see things as interconnected and from a global point of view (Raines). Life-altering events, such as the global economic crisis, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and the real estate and dot-com bubbles, further emblazoned this perspective (Tom Kelly). Witnessing these major events and experiencing the constant technological advancement has created uncertainty as the natural habitat of this cohort (Tulgan 7).

Even in the midst of constant uncertainty and change, their Baby Boomer parents sought to "provide them with every possible competitive edge in today’s flat world” (Behrens 20). These “helicopter parents”, aware of how home and educational institutions had failed Generation X (the “latch-key” generation), raised up their children in a much more structured, sheltered environment (Hershatter and Epstein 215). Caught up in the self-esteem movement of the 1980s, these parents have taken up the role of nurturing, coaching, and guiding their children almost every step of the way to adulthood and the workplace. Far more so than previous generations, these parents are more heavily involved in the lives and careers of their children, creating unique challenges for leaders (Espinoza, Ukleja, Rusch 9).

Generation Y Values

From their background and childhood experiences, Generation Y members have also acquired a unique set of values, including: an appreciation for diversity, an affinity for teams, and a youthful idealism. As the world became flatter during the last few decades, millennials were raised with an appreciation for myriad cultures and correspondingly, thinking from a global perspective (Brown 29). From athletics to academics, they have also grown accustomed with being organized in teams, while also ensuring no team member is left behind (Raines). While they have this team mindset, it is more predicated towards achieving societal goals and organizational missions that resonate with them rather than being primarily motivated by an organization's financial goals or
performance objectives. Altogether, these values have intriguing implications for their co-workers and their managers (“In This Corner”).

**Millennial Work Ethic**

While previous generations may perceive them as being lazy or unappreciative, Generation Y members do have a strong and somewhat unique work ethic. These negative perceptions can stem from their impatience with advancement opportunities and recognition, as well as a somewhat inflated sense of their own abilities (Ferri-Reed 2). Not unlike the friction found between other generations, this misunderstanding is primarily traced to the fact that they see and do work differently due to their upbringing, robust education, and technological ability. For them, work is a means to an end rather than the end itself; as long as the objectives are achieved, the focus should not be placed on how the work is accomplished. Seeing their Baby Boomer parents devote themselves to the demands of work and the impact that had on their parent’s livelihood, millennials have sought to be different in the belief that they “work to live rather than live to work” (Sujansky and Ferri-Reed 7, 18). Finally, the value they place on meeting personal needs and societal goals rather than an employer’s objectives has also shaped their work ethic. Above all, they feel strongly that the work that they are engaged in should be purposeful and impactful outside of simply completing a task or meeting a deadline (Brown 33).

**BODY**

**Business Case for Maximizing Millennials in the Workplace**

Millennials are quickly becoming a force to be reckoned with, forming 25% of the workforce in the United States (*Millennials at Work*) with demographers predicting that they will comprise 50% of all workers by 2020 (“In This Corner”). Even with Baby Boomers remaining in the workforce longer, Gen Yers are quickly replacing them, and organizations cannot afford to lose the experiential knowledge these veteran employees have acquired over the years; the transfer of their knowledge and experience to the younger generation is critical to maintaining a competitive advantage. As the healthcare environment continues to evolve and present multifarious challenges, medical practices need the enthusiasm and innovative juices that millennials possess in order to survive and thrive in the future. Outside of retaining knowledge, this demographic shift will also necessitate that leaders focus efforts on mitigating the generational rift that is
common with a diverse workforce and developing a succession plan for future success (Espinoza, Ukleja, Rusch 20-21, 58).

**Talent Competition and Retention**

Organizations are quickly discovering that in today’s competitive, global economy retaining the highest performers, especially among millennials, is the most valuable competitive advantage they possess (Espinoza, Ukleja, Rusch 11). In the healthcare industry, companies are competing against one other for a small pool of talent as employees have myriad employment options, such as with hospitals, medical practices, device manufacturers, academic institutions, payers, government entities, and even opportunities with healthcare technology startups (Seidel). Not only must an employer be wary of millennials joining its competitors, their ambitious nature and rapid technological advancements have also afforded them the opportunity to create their own businesses (*Millennials at Work*). Employers must also keep in mind that Generation Y workers are well connected to others and have developed wide, personal networks from which they can seek out employment opportunities through social networking and other technological means (Behrens 20). Unlike previous cohorts, they are not inspired by unequivocal loyalty to employers, and regardless of whether they are actively job searching or not, many of them will stay abreast of new opportunities available (*Millennials at Work*). Highlighted during seasons of economic downturns, these workers learned an important lesson from the experience of their Baby Boomer parents: loyalty to an employer merits little to no reward. Contrary to prior generational cohorts, the millennial career path will likely be filled with short-term, transactional employment relationships, leading many demographers and even employers to label these employees as “free agents”. Regardless of whether this trend continues, employers cannot lose sight of how valuable Gen Yers are to their success and must focus efforts on retaining them (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 18-19).

**Impact of Turnover and Workforce Disengagement**

Healthcare jobs are in high demand and will continue to be for the near future, yet the industry is facing increased turnover rates. For example, the industry had a median turnover rate of 9.9% in 2010, but in 2015, the same rate was 13.4% (Seidel). Turnover costs can fall between 50-150% of an employee’s salary, impacting organizations significantly if it is not well managed (Sujansky and Ferri-Reed 4).
Categories of costs associated with employee turnover include:

- Recruiting and attracting costs (advertising, internal referral fees, administrative functions, etc.)
- Selection Costs (interview, applicant travel, background and reference checks, etc.)
- Hiring Costs (relocation, sign-on bonus, uniforms, orientation, etc.)
- Separation Costs (severance pay, exit interviews, etc.)
- Lost-Productivity Costs (vacancy, peer and supervisory disruption, etc.) (Hinkin and Tracey 18).

Even before an organization loses an employee, there are severe consequences for having a disengaged or even apathetic employee, including: lost productivity, increased friction between co-workers, and the potential for increased occupational safety issues. A 2007 study by the consulting firm Towers Perrin of 90,000 workers worldwide found that 21% of workers were fully engaged on the job, 8% were fully disengaged, and 71% were somewhat indifferent, feeling neither engaged nor disengaged (Espinoza, Ukleja, Rusch 148). From a financial and competitive standpoint, organizations must have an urgency to reduce turnover and engage their employees, especially as Generation Y expands further into the workforce.

**Recruiting Millennials: What They Seek and How to Find Them**

Once organizations realize the extraordinary urgency of this demographic shift, they must then turn their attention to the tall task of identifying and procuring Gen Yers, especially the high-performing ones. Over the next decade, this will prove to be one of the most significant challenges facing all organizations. Successful recruiting of millennials necessitates first understanding them in order to draw their interest (Espinoza, Ukleja, Rusch 53).

**Employer Brand Matters**

Recruiting Generation Y employees begins long before job postings and interviews; they are searching for those organizations whose values align with their own, especially in the areas of supporting societal goals, embracing diversity, and pushing them to realize their potential. With the availability of information at the touch of a button, these employees take time to learn about the company’s reputation because they want to be proud of where they work and support the work of that organization. Regardless of whether they are job searching or not, stories can go
viral via social media or the 24/7 news cycle, creating a favorable or unfavorable opinion almost instantaneously. Does the organization have a compelling mission, and do Gen Yers approve of the way the organization conducts business? Organizations that are passionate about a specific mission, vision, and core values, successfully attract these workers by highlighting those in all recruiting efforts (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 13, 46, 137). If an organization has a lackluster direction or an inauthentic one, a foundational step must be to construct (or re-construct) one that will intrigue and inspire all employees. While other generations sought to climb the corporate ladder, Generation Y members are looking for more than “just a job”; they place a high value on being a part of purposeful, worthwhile work. Above all else, successful recruitment lies in hiring managers being able to convincingly answer the question of “Why do I want to work here?” (Millennials at Work).

**More Than a Paycheck**

Previous generations were generally content with an attractive salary and benefit package, yet Generation Y employees see those as routine and are looking for much more in terms of perks from their employer (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 36). Beyond financial rewards, millennials value benefits such as: training and personal development at the employer’s expense, paid time off, and flexible working opportunities (Millennials at Work). That is not to say that compensation is not important to them; rather, other tangible benefits have become extremely valuable to them. Technological changes have further solidified opportunities for performing work differently in terms of flexible hours, telecommuting, and job sharing, so organizations that afford these options become employers of choice. Watching how demanding work impacted the lives of their Baby Boomer parents, this cohort passionately desires work-life balance, seeking out organizations that give flexibility to be with their families and more free time outside of work (Tulgan 106). Being socially conscious, Gen Yers also crave opportunities to serve others in community and social responsibility efforts, and organizations have found success in providing time off for employees to volunteer with co-workers or family members, while other companies rally its workforce to create fundraising teams for charitable causes of the employees’ choosing (Hinote and Sundvall 133). Overall, companies must develop an attractive package of compensation, benefits, and perks that demonstrates to these employees that they matter and how the organization’s success hinges on their “well-being, comfort, and enthusiasm” (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 38, 44-45).
Flexible, Fun Work Environment

Beyond compensation and benefits, employers will be challenged as never before with creating an exciting and customized work environment for Gen Y workers. These employees are enthusiastic about working hard and playing hard, so they seek out organizations that have a fun environment that draws out their energy and creativity (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 21). While medical practices typically lack the resources and are in a different regulatory environment that prevents them from mimicking the success of Google or Facebook in this regard, simply understanding and appreciating this concept is a foundational step in recruiting millennials.

Somewhat selfishly, they desire to work in the way that suits them best, meaning that they also expect the technologies used in their personal lives will also be the tools used for communication and innovation in the workplace (Millennials at Work). Customization and flexibility have always been at the forefront for them; from creating their own schedule to choosing with whom and where they work, the workplace is no exception in this regard (Tulgan 10, 65). While this can pose a significant challenge to organizations, especially smaller ones, allowing employees some latitude in these areas creates the feeling that they have some input into their experience at work.

One example is to create a scheduling team of current employees to create and manage the schedule for the workgroup. This strategy has a two-fold effect: balancing their needs with those of the organization, while also empowering them with some decision-making authority (Espinoza, Ukleja, Rusch 55, 57). Environmental elements and workplace design are also fundamental to drawing in millennials, and many of these employees go into an interviewing seeking out an environment that is physically comfortable, intellectually stimulating, and socially engaging (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 36). With their background of working in teams, organizations must work to design office space so that employees can physically share ideas and collaborate. More than anything, organizations must remember that to these employees, it matters that the job gets done, not so much where it gets done (Gesell 23).

Utilizing Word-of-Mouth Communication in Recruiting

Keeping in mind that this generation has been bombarded with all forms of advertising throughout their lifetime, millennials value and trust word-of-mouth communication much more than what appears in billboards, brochures, commercials, or other glossy advertisements. Personal experiences with organizations shared with them by friends, family, and colleagues are very impactful as they have learned to take everything, especially in regards to commercial
advertising, with a grain of salt (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 31, 199). Facebook “likes”, online reviews, and other online rating systems have taken on greater importance with assessing positive experiences and generating positive word-of-mouth. In addition, as technology further blurs the line between their personal and work life more than ever before, millennials embrace having personal connections within their work environment. Due to their interconnectedness to colleagues through LinkedIn, industry groups, listservs and other networking opportunities, recruitment through employee referrals must become primary strategy for recruiters (Tulgan 23).

**Employing Technology in Recruitment**

It cannot be overstated how much organizations must be aware of how to connect with potential employees in the digital age; without an interesting and user-friendly online presence, it will be challenging to find and intrigue Gen Yers (Tulgan 25). Millennials thrive on utilizing the latest technology to transform how work is completed, so employers who fail to embrace and employ it in their marketing and recruitment process may cause these workers to reconsider working for them. Technology is also meant to improve processes and communication, and some of the quickest ways to lose a potential Gen Y employee is to create a cumbersome hiring process, having long gaps between different stages of recruitment, and a lack of communication between those stages (Tulgan 20). As important as word-of-mouth marketing is, the challenge for recruiters is to utilize modern media in a way to attract millennials by generating positive word-of-mouth communication as mentioned above. Many organizations are finding success in utilizing sites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and even YouTube, to share personal experiences about the organization from patients, community members, and employees to attract recruits. Social-networking sites have not only become the place for recruiters to find potential employees, but they also provide the vehicle for recruiters to reach out and connect with them. More than ever before, recruiters will be challenged to become marketing experts, finding ways to creatively attract and hire the best Gen Y workers (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 26, 31-33, 39-43).

**Millennial Retention Challenge**

If an organization finds success at recruiting millennials, it must begin to turn its attention to retaining and engaging them. This generation clearly envisions a symbiotic relationship with their employer; they are loyal to organizations that demonstrate loyalty to them (Hershatter and Epstein 220). With globalization, presumed job mobility, and other factors at play, there is an
expectation that Gen Yers will have the most substantial early career stage turnover than any previous generation (Tulgan 148). There are three primary reasons that organizations fail to retain these employees early in their career:

1) They are younger and less experienced, leading them to believe that the grass is greener elsewhere.
2) They are thinking about their career in the short-term (the next 6-12 months) rather than the long-term.
3) The healthcare industry offers more, diverse opportunities today than it did in previous years (Seidel).

For an organization, eliminating turnover among millennials is nearly impossible; the goal primarily becomes engaging the high performers as much as possible. As soon as they realize that their needs and wants are not being met, Gen Yers, especially the high performers, will begin looking for job opportunities elsewhere. There are a number of critical elements that must be a focus in regards to retaining Gen Yers, including: relationship with their supervisor, regular feedback, organizational culture, the support given towards personal development, and a fair, transparent performance incentive program (Tulgan 149,154).

**Supervisor Relationship**

Research demonstrates that the most significant factor in retention is an employee’s relationship with his or her immediate supervisor (Espinoza, Ukleja, Rusch 91), and this is even more pronounced with Generation Y workers (Simons). While they have high expectations for themselves, they have the highest expectations for their immediate supervisor and demand a great deal of them. What do they want from their supervisor? Similar to most other generational cohorts, Gen Yers show respect to those managers who practice what they preach rather than simply managing via a title or authoritative approach (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 94-95). Leaders who are honest about his or her mistakes and demonstrate personal transparency will build trust and demonstrate authenticity to this generation. If they obtain what they need from their supervisor, they are less likely to leave the organization, so retaining high-performing millennials starts with leaders asking them every day “Is there anything we can do to keep you?” (Tulgan 145, 155-156).
Structured, Honest Feedback

Not unlike workers of other generational cohorts, open and honest communication is also a key strategy for successfully retaining millennials. Growing up with such nurturing and involved parents, one of the defining characteristics of Generation Y is their desire for constant, detailed feedback (Millennials at Work). While some might perceive this in a negative, narcissistic way, leaders can find appreciation in the fact that these workers are coachable and deeply value mentoring. An effective approach is for leaders to set clear targets for providing this structured feedback more on a weekly basis rather than a quarterly or annual basis as most organizations are accustomed to doing (Gesell). Being raised in a hyper-scheduled environment, Gen Yers thrive on this routine and one-on-one attention, yet leaders who fail to maintain scheduled feedback sessions are communicating to these individuals that the relationship is not reliable and the two-way communication is not valuable. Gen Yers also desire to understand where and how their performance can be improved, so leaders who withhold feedback or sugarcoat it can also damage the relationship. If given the opportunity, Gen Yers will be open and direct with their leaders, which can be a great tool in knowing how these employees feel, which is preferable to finding out at an exit interview after they have already left the organization (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 108). To successfully retain Gen Yers, leaders must establish an open line of communication early on in the relationship, even before the first day of employment (Peterson, 2015).

Building a Culture of Mutual Respect

Organizations must work tirelessly to develop a culture that is conducive to these employees, focusing on transparency, freedom, and respect. While most organizations have developed along the line of external customer service (“the customer is always right”), Generation Y workers will push organizations to evolve towards internal customer service (“treating employees the way we do customers”) (Raines). Though providing feedback is essential, managers cannot lose sight of also actively listening to employees, helping them feel valued and respected. Leaders must realize that Gen Yers respect what others bring to the organization, but they must feel that others, especially their supervisor, respect what they bring to the table (Tulgan 14). Additionally, the organizational culture must become a safe environment where ideas can be developed and where taking risks can be encouraged (Peterson, 2015). Does the organization appreciate new thinking, or are there outdated procedures and rules in place that really discourage fresh ideas? Most millennials will be comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions, but they also expect those to be
taken seriously (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 37, 91). Finally, a diverse, multigenerational-friendly culture is also highly attractive to Gen Yers. Instead of focusing on generational differences, leaders should spend time understanding and identifying intergenerational commonalities. Creating the conducive culture needed to retain millennials begins with leaders casting the vision for what it should be and leading by example in demonstrating respect (Brown 30).

Emphasizing and Supporting Personal Development

A 2014 PricewaterhouseCoopers survey found that “this generation is committed to their personal learning and development and this remains their first choice benefit from employers” (Millennials at Work). Receiving structured education early in their childhood, these workers thrive on continuous learning and seek out new experiences to absorb information because it is somewhat second nature to them (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 142). Participation in training, education, and learning opportunities must be encouraged and supported by the organization (Raines). Due to their flat organizational structure and a lack of resources, this can pose a significant challenge to medical practices (Behrens 21). An effective strategy to cope with this challenge is to put Gen Yers through a rotation program where they can gain diverse experiences and interact with numerous individuals throughout the organization. Additionally, employers can match Gen Yers with a career adviser within the organization to help them to look strategically at opportunities and guide the employee in their career path during their tenure (Tulgan 116, 163).

From a leadership standpoint, millennials want to see their supervisor as a coach or mentor who supports and pushes them to develop personally and professionally. Being self-motivated and ambitious, they generally have a preference for learning by doing (Millennials at Work). Partnering with employees, such as working side by side with them on occasion, has proven to be a more successful approach versus dictating to them how to perform (Espinoza, Ukleja, Rusch 86, 136). While they may not seem ready to tackle significant projects or take on advanced responsibilities, leaders can support Gen Yers by breaking apart these complex tasks or roles, allowing them to take on meaningful work at earlier stages along the way. This approach allows every task to become the proving ground where they can demonstrate their competence and possibly acquire additional responsibilities in a step-wise fashion. Finally, leaders can encourage millennials to create an individualized learning plan as well as a journal to set goals and track
progress. Overall, finding ways to connect the employee’s personal and professional learning objectives to the organization’s objectives is crucial to retaining them (Tulgan 48-49, 54).

**Rewarding and Recognizing**

Adequate rewards and recognitions are essential to retaining any employee, but there are some specific methods to approach Generation Y workers in this regard. An effective performance appraisal strategy for these employees can be summed up in two words: timeliness and individualization. These employees are seeking extensive evidence that others recognize their accomplishments, and they will not hesitate to end their tenure if they do not feel that they have received the raise or recognition they deem appropriate (Behrens 20). As an organization, it is necessary that the performance management process be transparent in exhibiting how performance will be recognized and rewarded (*Millennials at Work*). One successful approach is to relate to a Gen Yer’s likely childhood experience with video games by spelling out clearly what the rules and pathways are for reward and recognition so that there are no surprises along the way. Of utmost importance though is that millennial workers feel that rewards are tied to outcomes that are a result of actions that they can directly impact or influence (Tulgan 16, 72).

In regards to timeliness, successful leaders must move towards immediate recognition of a millennial’s accomplishments rather than delaying awards, such as with a quarterly bonus or an employee of the year award (“In This Corner”). Small interactions with a supervisor, such as in hearing praise for a job well done, impact them tremendously and lead to renewed efforts (Behrens 20). Even with promotions, millennials expect rapid advancement due to the fact of watching their parents loyally work for years on end to finally earn the promotion they deserved (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 7). Keeping this in mind, an additional method of achieving this goal is to provide frequent, smaller promotions along the way, while perhaps also adding responsibilities (Tom Kelly). Senior leaders can also establish short-term growth opportunities in entry-level roles by creating a career ladder with defined expectations of how to move to the next rung (Seidel). More than advancement opportunities, successful managers can engage Gen Yers by showing appreciation for their efforts while also helping these individuals realize how their work fits into the big picture of the organization’s strategy (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 52).

If organizations want to reward employees in a meaningful way, they must take time to understand their employees’ unique needs and wants. Millennials value what they value, so
leaders cannot afford to guess incorrectly at something so important (Espinoza, Ukleja, Rusch 63). These workers treasure time above all other non-financial rewards, and customization of rewards, be it those that fit their personality, hobbies, or passions, is key (“In This Corner”; Tulgan 104, 159). Complementing their passion for personal development, some organizations have found success in rewarding these employees for completing specific learning and development programs/objectives along a predetermined pathway. Overall, managers must ensure that reward/recognition strategies align with the needs, preferences, and values of millennials (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 30).

Successful Integration of Millennials

Though strategies for retention and integration crossover in some respect, managers will find success in utilizing some specific, practical methods of employing millennials in their organization. Capitalizing on their strengths and identifying mechanisms to overcome their weaknesses is of utmost importance as millennials make their presence felt in the organization.

Importance of Beginnings

A key component of integration is to provide sustained, intense support to these employees long after the orientation and onboarding process (Tulgan 46). While employers typically focus much attention on training and building skill sets of new hires early in their tenure, there is no question that providing comparable emotional and social support during this period is often overlooked. Successful organizations have moved past the traditional “buddy system” that connects new hires with another employee for the first 30-90 days; instead, they establish structured mentorship programs that can last up to two years in the new hire’s tenure. These mentorship programs include scheduled feedback sessions, formalized objectives, and even a manual outlining the steps for success in the role (Seidel). Other organizations create formal teams, composed of newly hired employees along with veterans, fostering a goal of close collaboration from the start. Finally, success breeds success, so it is vital to have millennials set small goals with fixed timelines in order that they can clearly see their progress along the way in the new role. Achieving small wins and visualizing improvements can effectively motivate millennials, leading to greater contributions in the future (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 145).
Establish Boundaries and Set Expectations
Successful integration for any employee, especially Generation Y workers, includes managers providing clear guidelines and expectations for them early on in their tenure. Paradoxically, while millennials thrive on freedom and customization, they also have some affinity for structure and boundaries due to the “over-parenting” experienced throughout their childhood. They will look to their supervisor for coaching and direction, and they have no qualms about requesting specific directions until they feel comfortable. As in other relationships, Gen Yers will fail to meet the expectations of their supervisors that have not been well-defined upfront. Ambiguity with assignments or lack of specifics when it comes to deadlines will severely frustrate them, so leaders must take time to thoroughly define objectives and other key information (Hershatter and Epstein 216). With their exceptional motivation and affinity for innovation, organizations can maximize the performance of millennials by allowing them the freedom to take risks and make mistakes within the boundaries given to them. While it might seem counterintuitive, the more concrete and specific guidelines a leader provides, the more free and creative a Gen Yer will be working within those. An example of this would be to assign a task with a strict deadline and defined goals, but allow the employee the freedom to choose the team members with whom he or she desires to work and also the flexibility to decide how the task is to be completes. Providing autonomy to them communicates respect, trust, and a belief in their ability to follow through; micromanagement has the opposite effect and other unintended consequences. Giving them space and freedom to make mistakes is really as critical as providing formal training (Tulgan 65-66, 135).

Contrary to previous generational cohorts, leaders will also find that Generation Y employees are comfortable reaching out to almost anyone in an organization, and this behavior can catch managers off guard and may also appear disrespectful. Advances in social media and other forms of technology have made it possible to talk directly to almost anyone, including authority figures, and millennials will unabashedly engage senior leaders directly on issues (Hinote and Sundvall 133). There are a number of reasons why Gen Yers may commit this workplace faux pas, including: their desire to build a network for job progression, requesting assistance from those with authority to remove roadblocks, or their sincere passion to learn from others. While they are comfortable connecting with senior management, leaders should take time to establish boundaries and educate them on the protocols of doing so. Deciphering this for them early on should mitigate
inappropriate behaviors, while also encouraging them to build relationships and provide valuable input (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 157).

**Team-Oriented Projects**

One of the most important values this generation possesses is their recognition of how effective teams can be in achieving mutual goals. Gen Yers are more idealistic than previous generations, and they are more willing to sacrifice their own resources for the sake of others than previous cohorts were at their age. Leaders must understand and leverage the strength of these employees in working as part of a team, as this can lead to exceptional innovation through collaboration (Tulgan 112). Since they naturally gravitate toward teamwork, managers should consider assigning projects to groups of employees, and evaluate teams based on their progress toward benchmarks or other set goals. Even beyond their familiarity with doing so, another important takeaway is that working in teams allows them the security of also sharing the burden if a mistake is made. This freedom enables these employees to delve further into the realm of the most creative and imaginative solutions, knowing that they share in the responsibility for success or failure. As they push organizations to embrace a more collaborative environment, leaders that leverage this millennial value appropriately will enhance and expand organizational objectives more than ever before (Espinoza, Ukleja, Rusch 134).

**Leverage their Affinity for Technology**

Successful integration also requires organizations to adopt and embrace technological advances throughout its processes and workflows. Growing up in the digital age, Generation Y employees are early adopters of new technologies and will not hesitate to implement them across their personal and professional life (Simons). Technology has become almost a sixth sense for them, becoming the primary avenue through which they access information and interact with the world around them (Hershatter and Epstein 213). Though they may lack knowledge and experience, technology levels the playing field, allowing them to fill in skill and knowledge gaps with instant access to information. Organizations that lack access or fail to implement emerging technologies will quickly frustrate millennials by spotlighting the inefficiencies in their workflow. Simply asking a Gen Yer how technology could solve a problem or improve a process can open the floodgates of innovation for an organization (Tulgan 50-51).
Harness their Problem-solving Abilities

From a workforce standpoint, these employees are the most educated of any generation, so the pool of knowledge from which they can draw is deep (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 17). Organizations will benefit from their exceptional problem-solving skills, and in complex industries, such as healthcare, these individuals can combine their experiences and access to information to rapidly navigate changing environments (Brown 30). Early in their tenure, these individuals readily seek out opportunities to identify inefficiencies in processes, and they relish the chance to find solutions to issues that others have failed to solve. An example of this might be to have them retool the recruiting or the on-boarding process since they have just experienced it firsthand. While organizations harness their problem-solving abilities, millennials may struggle with long-term, strategic thinking, so leaders must find ways to support them in this area. One method of doing this is to utilize decision/action trees when working through planning activities, as well as to have them take time to stop and reflect after decisions have been made and actions have been taken. In a competitive environment of limited resources, organizations will benefit from their enthusiasm for unraveling complex processes and employing their astute problem-solving ability, yet success is found in always providing them with the appropriate context for understanding (Tulgan 117-118).

Challenge and Involve Them in Change

Generation Y members thrive on a variety of tasks, so placing them in a routine job function for considerable time can prove disastrous. Growing up in an environment of information overload from the Internet and other digital mediums, they have become experts at multi-tasking (Keegan 223). Cross-training, cross-department orientation, job sharing, stretch assignments and varying job responsibilities are effective strategies to challenge their potential as they are able to embrace learning different roles in the organization and break up the monotony of daily routines. With the dynamic changes occurring in healthcare, it is also important to remember that most Generation Y members embrace change enthusiastically and would thrive in developing innovative solutions to compete in these somewhat unpredictable times (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 83, 98-99, 118-119, 154). Inviting them to participate in idea development or to share their opinions not only communicates that their leaders value them, it can also guard against the missteps that can occur with groupthink (Hinote and Sundvall 133). Of course, asking for their input and disregarding it without consideration will prove more problematic than not inviting their participation in the first
Millennials thrive in rising to the challenges that occur, so bring them into the conversation early and often; the benefits of doing so will certainly outweigh the costs. Great managers will anticipate boredom by being prepared with the next challenge for them before they lose focus, while also soliciting their feedback in improvement strategies (Espinoza, Ukleja, Rusch 75, 76, 78).

**Reverse Mentoring**

Due to their close relationship with “helicopter parents”, these individuals appreciate and respect both age and experience, placing a high value on relationships (Tulgan 76, 85). One of the more effective approaches to bridging the generation gap in the workplace and maximizing the output of all employees is establishing a reverse mentoring program where millennials coach senior employees in the use of technology (Behrens 20), while veteran employees can mentor millennials on institutional knowledge (Gesell 24). Experienced individuals can also help Generation Y employees learn to focus and have sense of urgency on long-term goals, which is an area in which they typically struggle. Though they are advanced in their knowledge and skills early on, millennials sometimes show a lack of discipline, maturity, and a focus on productivity and quality (Tulgan 102). While previous generations thrived in sink or swim environments, this younger generation seeks out guidance and constructive feedback regularly (Peterson, 2015).

Some have found that Generation Y is an appropriate label for them because of how often they want to know “Why?”, so practice leaders must help them connect the dots and see the big picture. Employing reverse mentoring will not only help improve generational relationships in the workplace, but it will also grow the knowledge, skillset, and intangible attributes of all employees (Gesell 21).

**DISCUSSION**

It is clear that if healthcare leaders do not take a serious approach towards understanding and engaging millennials, it will be detrimental to their success as they seek to bring in the needed talent and experience to navigate the challenges of today’s complex, ever-changing landscape. These employees will challenge organizations to innovate and accommodate in ways they have never imagined, yet millennials are also committed to enhancing their workplaces and communities for the benefit of all. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach or a silver bullet strategy, but at the foundation, it boils down to understanding them as a person and appreciating
what they can contribute. If healthcare leaders will take time to understand and effectively utilize Generation Y members, they will significantly benefit from what many believe to be “the most productive, innovative generation in history”. (Sanjusky and Ferri-Reed 19).


