

## Baby Boomers Are NOT Immortal? Millennials Can Answer the Talent Crisis – and Personality Testing Will Help

By Sharon Birkman Fink, CEO of Birkman International

As 2008 nears its end, a frequently-heard lament is that stock market misery will force Baby Boomers to postpone their retirements – or prevent them from being able to retire at all. This is a short-sighted reaction to recent events that ignores the long-term demands of business strategy and demographics. Either due to job mobility or simply, the ongoing need for innovative thinking, smart companies will always seek to identify, develop and retain new management talent as business needs and economic trends dictate.

This ongoing need will be indistinguishable from the inevitable retirement of Baby Boomers, whose 80 million-strong presence in the workforce cannot endure forever – not with the equally large number of millennial generation workers already in their 20s and eager to assume job responsibility.

Through active promotion, retirement of current managers and normal attrition, every company will need to identify where the leadership and talent gaps are likely to occur. The company should then plan a strategy to develop talent internally, or source it externally, or both. According to a recent study sponsored by Birkman International and Stanton Chase, only 18% of U.S. companies have a talent acquisition plan in place. Of these companies, 31% say they've addressed, but not yet implemented a plan and 51% have done neither. If these companies are to avoid a future managerial crisis, this must change.

### Tomorrow's Talent

The goal of organizational recruiting and development should be to accelerate the promotion of qualified candidates into positions of responsibility. Finding tomorrow's management talent is critical to creating an organization that is capable of self-sustaining change as it navigates through inevitable economic and cultural changes.

The best way to accomplish this with tomorrow's workforce is to structure personality evaluation to assess the organizational assets of Millennials. The advantage of using a good personality assessment is that it can position and align people in the organization. This means they are more content and more empowered to execute to their fullest capability. The goal of talent management is to focus on measuring and understanding

precisely how and whether specific personality traits mesh with actual job requirements.

Job requirements go beyond hard skills and experience. They include the ability to work with others or to lead others productively and effectively. The best personality tests analyze and report what motivates workplace behavior, and can identify the needs that drive behavior in positive and productive directions.

For any generation, but especially for tomorrow's managers, personality testing identifies and brings these characteristics into focus. Personality assessment becomes a recruitment tool that helps those responsible for hiring to understand and even predict how job candidates will interact and communicate with other employees and clients in everyday workplace situations.

When approached in this way, management training will accelerate the promotion of qualified employees who can help the company grow and evolve. The best way to accomplish this with your workforce is to structure training to emphasize the individual strengths of your employees. Training should focus on measuring and understanding whether personality traits mesh with specific competencies required for the leadership task at hand. Competencies, which often go beyond hard skills and experience, may address the ability to productively work with or effectively lead others. They may also include behaviors such as how we accept feedback, advance teamwork and demonstrate workplace satisfaction.

### The Millennial Challenge

The generational characteristics of Millennials can offer managerial excellence when recruitment identifies and training reinforces each person's potential for individual success. These are the managerial benchmarks that should be part of the assessment process:

- Acceptance of feedback. Millennials respond well to individual, one-on-one mentoring and feedback. If testing acclimates them to receive positive but pointed instruction and objectives for improvement from their supervisors, they will be far more likely to see feedback as their means to improve, rather than seeing it as criticism that holds them back.

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- Acceptance of leadership responsibility. Some of the classic self-promotion skills that people use to get ahead are detrimental to managers who can boost organizational performance. These negative characteristics tend to be foreign to the millennial worldview. Therefore, they themselves can be a positive force to support the values of organizational leadership, and (if convinced through effective training that the objectives are worthwhile) they can also provide valuable backing for the programs and initiatives of senior management.

- Advancement of teamwork. Millennials have grown up in technological and social networks. They are ideal candidates for working within and contributing to team efforts. They see teamwork as a means to creativity and satisfaction. Training programs that emphasize team projects and related rewards will find a receptive millennial audience.

- Advancement of workplace satisfaction. Because millennials seek and value positive personal experience, they can be a tremendous force for increasing workplace satisfaction if properly trained to do so in the roles they fill. Quality of work/life elements such as communication, teamwork and flexibility can effectively motivate this group, and with proper training they can actively advance them throughout the organization.

## **YOUR future organization**

All successful organizations – business, non-profit and government – maintain their ability to adapt and grow by identifying and nurturing employees with the most potential. Millennials as a group have tremendous potential to transform the organizations where they work by serving as a new generation of managers who are flexible, able to cope with change, and ready to find new ways of solving problems. The best ways to realize this potential can be learned, cultivated, honed and enhanced through effective training programs that use accurate managerial and behavioral testing to identify individual capabilities.

Success is being able to measure and understand how an individual's personality traits enable them to work with others or lead others productively and effectively. The best personality tests analyze and report what motivates workplace behavior and identify the motivational needs that drive behavior in positive, productive directions. Millennials like feedback, stimulation, interaction and a team focus. By channeling these traits to best fit with the job responsibilities, no organization need fear a talent crisis. Instead, it will discover a whole new level of management excellence.

## **About the Author:**

Taking over for her father, Dr. Roger Birkman, in 2001, Sharon Birkman Fink is President and CEO of Birkman International, Inc. providing a unique assessment tool that accurately measures internal needs, behaviors, occupational preferences and organizational strengths. She can be reached at 713-623-2760 or [sfink@birkman.com](mailto:sfink@birkman.com)

## **About Birkman:**

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