

Millennials Leaders for the Upcoming Economic Recovery

By Richard Goldman, COO, Birkman International

The best source of future leaders for any organization is from within. Leaders may be inspirational or charismatic, creative or intellectual. Not all of these styles are equally present in any given leader, nor should they be – what motivates a sales team and a financial group may be very different. There is no “one size fits all” solution, either by functional area or by leadership style. Employers must assess the types of leaders they need at every level. Personality testing can reveal individual strengths and weaknesses in alignment with the desired leadership competencies. This assessment process provides a baseline for the cultivation and enhancement of leadership skills.

Employees with the requisite leadership traits must be identified early in their careers so they can receive training focused on integrating their personality traits with specific leadership requirements. That puts the spotlight on the capabilities inherent in the youngest and largest workforce generation: the 80 million-plus millennials born since 1981. Their strengths can be identified and nurtured through a combination of personality testing and related training that prepares them for leadership in a multi-generational workplace.

Millennial Style

Millennials tend to put everything in the context of speed, customization and interactivity. They love freedom and responsibility, and have received both throughout their lives from parents and teachers who provided stimulation and support. Millennials expect constant and positive feedback, bond closely with their peers, and view collaboration as part of multitasking. Beyond these broad trends, each individual, regardless of generational affiliation, has unique strengths, weaknesses, productive behaviors and stress behaviors that can be channeled to effective leadership development if properly identified.

Millennial generation members are high achievers who want and expect to be successful. Given their predisposition to constant stimulus, group interaction and immediate feedback, insights gleaned through personality testing can be crucial in structuring training and engagement efforts that facilitate their leadership development by making them feel valued and responsible for organizational success.

Leadership Development

Leadership in collaborative teams is essential, and testing can

help bridge potential generation gaps between older team members and millennials. Research shows that intergenerational workforce differences are not fundamental if properly addressed. Members of older generations – baby boomers in their 50s and older, Generation Xers in their late 30s and 40s – typically see teams operating with formal authority and accountability linked directly to hierarchy. Millennials expect a flat organizational structure, with competence and expertise defining the points of authority. The key challenge is to enhance the leadership motivation of millennials while helping older individuals reframe their definitions of the leadership process.

This requires training structured to emphasize the organizational assets of millennials and help them execute to the fullest of their capabilities. The training focus should be on measuring and understanding whether personality traits mesh with the core competencies for leadership, particularly the ability to work with others while leading productively and effectively. For millennials, this training can support organizational performance by reinforcing:

- Feedback through one-on-one mentoring and positive but pointed instruction and objectives for improvement from supervisors.
- Leadership responsibility to help millennials identify with and support the values of organizational programs and initiatives.
- Team projects and rewards that reinforce millennials’ natural predisposition to team support.
- Workplace satisfaction through quality of work life elements like communication, teamwork and flexibility, which millennials can be encouraged to promote throughout the organization.

Millennials as a group have tremendous potential to transform their organizations by being flexible, collaborative and positive. Personality testing that helps fit these traits to leadership responsibilities can help organizations build excellence by building upon this unique generation.

About Birkman:

Richard Goldman is Chief Operating Officer of Birkman International, Inc. providing a unique assessment tool that accurately measures internal needs, behaviors, occupational preferences and organizational strengths. He can be reached at 713-623-2760 or rgoldman@birkman.com