



Will You Attract the Leaders of the Future with Moth-eaten Practices? That's Risky Business!

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How much do you really know about the consumer habits and expectations of the digital natives' generation? Chances are that your organization doesn't really understand this segment of the workforce and continues to assume based on countless magazine think pieces that we're talking about an entitled generation whose personal drive is often intimidating. The truth is that no matter what you think, digital natives will soon dominate the workplace. So, either you target them now and adapt to their ways, or you will become an old-style company and lose this market segment. People aged between 19 and 35 represent 35 percent of the work force today according to numbers provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Meanwhile, the labor force aged 35 to 55 represents 42 percent of the employed population and people older than 55 represent 22 percent. The stakes are high.

So, what do you need to do to effectively attract the demographics of the future? The answer is simple: 1) take stock of the reasons why the current fundamental intergenerational "dis-joint" isn't going away, and 2) realize that you need to adapt your antiquated candidate attraction processes to what digital natives expect.

Battle of the Generations

The generational gap is not a matter of philosophy or view of the world. Digital natives grew up with broadband, smartphones, and social media as the norm, and, as a result, they expect to be able to express themselves, be recognized, access information instantly, focus on topics that matter to them, and get feedback immediately. This is their behavioral pattern as consumers and as citizens of the digital world. When they can't find what they're looking for, they simply move to something else.

An irreversible technology divide has arisen

that has deeply changed behaviors across all social strata. Given that your kids have always lived in a world with iPods and iPhones, do you think they'd be amazed at the merits of a Sony Walkman if you presented one to them?

The majority of recruiters and hiring managers belong to the Walkman generation. When the first Walkman came out in 1979, it seemed like magic: all of a sudden, people could carry their favorite recordings with them, and it significantly changed the music experience, making it more personal and adaptive. But, would you use one today? Probably not!

For digital natives, the Walkman is at best an intriguing relic of the past. A 25-year-old today was 11 when the iPod first came out in 2001. By the time it was redesigned (in 2004), the iPod was connected to the Apple online media store run by Apple and accessible through iTunes. The entire music experience changed again. You didn't have to manually compose your playlist and record it; you could simply build up your selections in a few clicks and navigate through them instantly. We live in an era of instant likes – which brings with it the tendency to instantly forget what doesn't catch us. Music listeners are now able to define the content of their experience, and there is no going back.

Digital natives are empowered consumers, and they will become the majority of the workforce by 2020. The generation after them is accustomed to even more self-curated, instant access. (Look at the number of young kids playing games with mom and dad's smartphones or tablets!)

So, as a company, you have to ask: How closely does your candidate attraction procedure map to contemporary online behavioral patterns? Chances are, it's not nearly close enough. You may want to think that the recruit-

ing industry is different from other areas that have had to adapt to our new world, but that's a dangerous assumption. It would mean that the people who will run our world tomorrow have to comply with obsolete methodologies. It's like assuming the interface Amazon offered us 20 years ago would be good enough today, when it would, in fact, be grossly ineffective at attracting new customers.

Close the Digital Gap and Up Your Game Plan

It's not up to digital natives to adapt to you. It's up to you to enhance your game and embrace today's behaviors. The findings of a 2011 PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) report¹ highlighted that "technology is often a catalyst for intergenerational conflict in the workplace, and many millennials feel held back by rigid or outdated working styles." It's time for talent acquisition departments to close the digital gap. The race for talent is no different from the race for consumers; either you connect with them and stay connected, or you don't.

In 2015, being connected means belonging to the same network. In the case of talent acquisition, that translates to a talent network that is accessible without friction, welcomes people as individuals, and offers interesting and empowering interactions

Frictionless Access

When potential candidates are interested in your company, the way you listen to their interest will make or break the relationship.

Allow them to join your talent network right away from any device (desktop, smartphones or tablet), whether or not you have a job for them. The traditional recruiting process requires candidates to show credentials right away, but that's a sure way to spook an inordinate amount of digital natives; they are looking for a career rather than merely a job, and they believe in employee growth and development.

Some digital natives may abide by your rules, especially if they have significant student debt. Do

not hope to keep them, though. As described in Mike Murphy's book *Hiring for Attitude*, employees who leave after 18 months or less are not necessarily people who lacked the skills; 89 percent of them had an attitude and culture-fit problem. Is it entirely their fault? Probably not. It could very well be due to a flawed perception of digital natives, as described in a comprehensive report² co-produced by Elance-oDesk and Millennial Branding in October 2014. They report that: "Gen X hiring managers underestimated how much millennials prized being part of a good team and working on exciting projects."

Beware your old habits, your old technologies, and your misunderstanding of modern audiences, or you will end up being left behind by the Darwinian "fittest." Your young hires will certainly tell their friends what they think about you. As early as 2012, the Talent Board³ reminded us that in the social era, every single individual is able to speak up: "More than half of candidates surveyed indicated they are *likely* or *very likely* to tell their inner circle of friends about their experiences, whether it is positive (73.5 percent) or negative (60.7 percent)."

Welcome people and provide easy access to your talent network. Once they are there, you have plenty of ways to qualify them (video screening, chats, job matching, questionnaires, etc.).

Make it Personal

No matter how good looking your career site may be, asking candidates to leave their info inside a passive "talent community," promising them that you'll push jobs their way when they're available, or using cryptic jargon asking them to "adjust their job agents" betrays your self-centered, inward-looking approach. This is not a positive candidate experience for digital natives. You are simply telling them that they will become an item in an impersonal email database, not that they are real people with whom you want to engage, which requires a bi-directional relationship. Make it personal; digital natives want a live profile that they can update as they see fit, to create a portfolio of their accomplishments and to add a video presentation of themselves.

The way you treat candidates is more often

Endnotes

1 <http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/managing-tomorrows-people/future-of-work/assets/reshaping-the-workplace.pdf>

2 <http://www.slideshare.net/oDesk/2015-millennial-majority-workforce>

3 <http://www.thetalentboard.org/talent-boards-2012-candidate-experience-research-a-summary/>

4 <http://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/gx-wef-2015-millennial-survey-executivesummary.pdf>

5 https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/millennials_report.pdf

than not an indication of how you treat your employees. Are they just the number on their badge, or people proud to bear your flag? As a Deloitte study⁴ reminds us, “Millennials believe that an organization’s treatment of its employees is the most important consideration when deciding if it is a leader.” No matter how loudly you may claim that your employees are your assets, millennials will be quick to find out if it’s true; the Internet is their continuous live playground, and information is just a click away.

In her 2006 book *Generation Me*, Jean Twenge emphasized “a generational increase in self-esteem, assertiveness, self-importance, narcissism, and high expectations.” While some recruiters may have issues with this “cultural shift toward individualism and focusing on the self,” the truth of the matter is that things are what they are and won’t be any different because you choose to ignore cultural changes. Ultimately, this “narcissism” may only be relative. If your company’s recruiting philosophy is more about looking for interchangeable cogs for your machinery, it’s clear that the desire for candidates to be treated as a real person may come across as egocentrism.

Making it personal will pay off, because, contrary to popular perceptions, statistics reported by The Council of Economic Advisers show that “working millennials actually stay with their employers longer than Generation X workers did at the same ages.”

Empower Job Seekers and Offer Personalized Information

It’s nice to push job notifications to candidates. However, what happens next? People apply, but, more often than not, you don’t give them any useful feedback, and they don’t understand why they didn’t get a job. Your organization looks incoherent at best.

If you want to up your game, allow candidates to see for themselves how their profiles fare against the jobs. Having their own job-matching experience is empowering; it’s easy for them to understand that if they have a 70 percent match; others might have a better score. They won’t be disgruntled. They may even recommend the position to a friend. Empowered candidates can turn into fervent evangelists regardless of whether or not you have a job for them!

When you invite potential candidates to join

your network, you are not simply addressing an “audience.” You are addressing individuals who voluntarily started a connection with you. So, it’s not enough to tell them what your company is about in general. It’s critical to show them what it’s like to work in your company. Allow them to join groups of interest to them within your network and showcase topics that will strengthen their positive impression of your company, such as videos underscoring not only the fact that your business can be good for the individuals you employ, but also has a positive impact on society at large. Inviting employees from multiple departments to recount a day of their life in your company is a huge plus, as is the clear demonstration of your pursuit of a proactive diversity strategy for a generation that is the *largest and most diverse in the U.S. population*.

Design career webinars and documents for download that show you care, want to stay connected, and have a lot to offer. Being candidate-centric is all about creating content to which candidates can relate as individuals. Engaging is not about throwing global marketing slogans and talking at people. It’s about talking to people and offering a message that resonates with them.

Attracting the leaders of the future requires, at minimum, that you speak the language of the people you want to reach and that you take a hard look at your talent acquisition process. It’s not rocket science, and is actually only a matter of leveraging modern platforms designed to reach out to modern audiences. It’s the key to your credibility. Ultimately, it is imperative to your employment branding initiatives to realize that no matter what your intent is, what people think of you will, in part, create your brand, for better and for worse. In the race for talent, you can only win if digital natives become your sounding board. There are a lot of them out there, and they are great, attentive candidates ready to listen to you. The Deloitte report states that “regardless of gender or geography, only 28 percent of millennials feel that their current organizations are making ‘full use’ of the skills they currently have to offer.” Do the math – 72 percent of them will reach your ranks, if you reach out to them!

About the Author



Marylene Delbourg-Delphis, a serial technology entrepreneur, is the co-founder and CEO of TalentCircles. The company markets a comprehensive talent acquisition platform that enables organizations to create live talent pipelines and targeted employment branding strategies to engage with candidates (via video screening, questionnaires, blog posts) and offer an outstanding candidate and recruiter experience that sync with the expectations of our digital era. Clients include prominent organizations such as Nationwide, Puma, Dartmouth, ResCare and the State of Minnesota. She can be reached at mdd@talentcircles.com.