

{My Madison}

Generation Y and Millennials are stirring up the workforce

BY KRISTIN ANDREWS ('08)

Any recent graduate will most likely tell you that the first year after college is the hardest. This was the case for me. As soon as I graduated, I was eager to jump into the working world. With a great education and a resume full of internship experiences, I felt ready to tackle anything. I found my dream job as a Web designer for the U.S. Army Web site and signed a lease for a beautiful apartment in the Washington, D.C., area. Feeling on top of the world, I hit the ground running.

I started my new job with the expectation that I would go above and beyond the call of duty, and I was determined to prove my worth. However, several months into my job, I found that I was beginning to clash with some more seasoned employees. My drive for immediate success was causing conflict among those with years of experience. Questioning why this would be, it became very clear: I am a classic product of Generation Y or the Millennials. According to Brazen Careerist.com, an online community of Generation Y leaders, the millennial generation can be defined as the generation born between 1981 and 2000 and is the largest of the four generations currently in the workforce.

Wikipedia.com further defines Generation Y as people born between 1979 and 1995. The Web site defines Millennials as those born between 1982 and 2001. Both groups consist primarily of the offspring of baby boomers and Generation X. Once you begin to research generation definitions it becomes clear that there is no consensus on which birth years make up a generation. Most data shows that Generation Y and Millennials make up more than 70 million people and is the largest generation since the baby boomers.

Most definitions also describe Generation Y and Millennials as racially and ethnically diverse, and extremely independent because of divorce, day care and latch-key parenting. Millennials are driven, self-motivated, enthusiastic and competitive. We put more emphasis on balancing life outside of work, yet we still expect to be rewarded for the time and effort we put into our jobs.

So why do we clash with other generations? Many critics see us as a group of lazy, young individuals who don't want to pay our dues. They categorize us as impatient with no job loyalty. While many critics are extreme in their generalizations, some of their claims do have a degree of validity.

Here's why: Throughout our school years, Millennials have benefitted from some of the finest opportunities to learn and grow from

other generations — like internships with CEOs and retail work experience. We've been able to learn through the successes and failures of others. We've built a knowledge-base to fall back on when we encounter problems. We are solutions oriented, and when we see a better way to do something, we will push for it. Hence, the clash.

For example, a project came up at work, and my supervisor was tasked to head up a brainstorm meeting. Knowing very well that some meetings can be time consuming without any real take-away points, I decided it would be more effective for each of us to come up with ideas on our own and then to reconvene. I proceeded to do so on my own. After all was said and done, my supervisor politely pulled me aside and asked me to not jump the gun on projects and to wait until I had been directly told to do something. I couldn't see how I had done anything wrong, but now I realize that my way of thinking came across as domineering and threatening to those above me. I saw my approach as a more effective way to reach the end goal, while to others it

came across as me pushing and not respecting their way. Where did I fall short? By taking the initiative, as many Gen-Yers like to do, I had failed to communicate my intentions to my team.

With an increasing number of baby boomers retiring, the generations need to work together. As Dan Schawbel, author of *Me 2.0: Build a Powerful Brand to Achieve Career Success*, points out, "Gen-Y is going to start to overtake the workplace." Our generation sees this as an opportunity to help carry on the torch that the generations before us once carried. We grew up in a time of emerging technologies and want to help companies learn how to leverage these to their advantage. Carla Blumenthal ('08), a 2009 graduate of Emerson College's Global Marketing master's program, says, "Millennials are constantly connected through social networks, BlackBerrys, e-mail, Facebook and Twitter, something older generations in the workforce may see as a waste of time. But, together we can help companies adapt to new forms of communication."

As with any type of change, there will be opposition. However, I am confident that with a combination of teamwork, effective communication and leadership skills, we can make our workforce a better one. **M**

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