



BUSINESS BOOK SUMMARIES®

Stay on Top of Best in Business KnowledgeSM

January 4, 2009

The Trophy Kids Grow Up

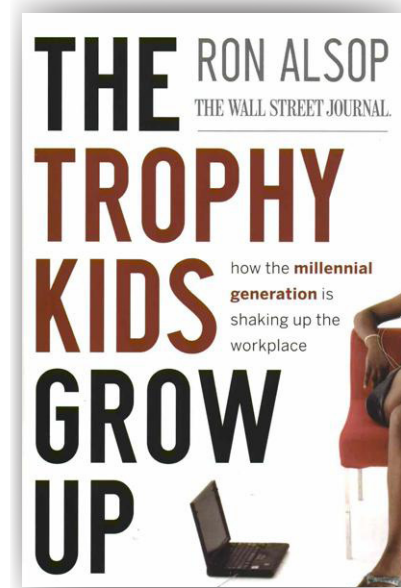
*How the Millennial Generation
is Shaking Up the Workplace*

Ron Alsop

©2008 by Ron Alsop

Adapted by permission of Jossey-Bass

ISBN: 978-0-470-22954-5



INTRODUCTION

The millennial generation – comprised of individuals born between 1980 and 2001 – is shaking up the workplace. A polarizing generation that is both admired and critiqued, millennials are serious about changing work environments to meet their needs. Currently, employers are facing the monumental challenge of integrating the millennial into the workplace with three other generations – Generation Xers, Baby Boomers, and Traditionalists – who have very different attitudes and behaviors.

In **The Trophy Kids Grow Up**, Ron Alsop seeks to provide colleges, companies, and other organizations with the information needed to understand and reach out to the millennials. Based on surveys and interviews with millennials, parents, professors, college admissions directors, corporate recruiters, and managers, Alsop paints a portrait of the promises and

perils of this fascinating generation.

THE TROPHY KIDS

Although individuals born between 1980 and 2001 have been referred to by a variety of labels – including Generation Y and Generation Next – they prefer the term **millennial** popularized by generational experts Neil Howe and William Strauss. The trophy kids of their parents, this generation has experienced emotional security within their families. Although they have experienced traumatic events during their development – including the September 11th terrorist attacks, the Columbine shootings, and Hurricane Katrina – the millennials remain full of hope and ambition for the future. Millennials also tend to be constantly connected with technology, experience prolonged adolescence, switch jobs frequently, and appreciate diversity.

Like all generations, millennials have both strengths and weaknesses. Regarding the former, millennials tend to be philanthropic, strong multitaskers, and team-oriented. Regarding the latter, millennials often engage in unhealthy activities such as binge drinking and sexual promiscuity. Their competitive drive has also led millennials to become stressed out, anxious, and sleep deprived. Finally, millennials are often perceived by other generations as arrogant and entitled.

Parallels have been found between millennials in the United States and their counterparts in other countries across the world. For example, a study by the market-research firm Synovate labeled these individuals as the “stay-at-home generation” across the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States because they rely heavily on parental support and housing. Millennials across countries have also been shown to be technologically adept, likely to switch jobs frequently, and driven to succeed. However, some recruiting experts are concerned that millennials in the United States may face stiff competition from Asian millennials due to their stronger work ethic and reduced desire to tend to their own personal needs.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

According to Alsop, the millennials are “...a generation with great – and sometimes outlandish – expectations.” Others often feel that millennials expect the workplace to adapt to their needs. For example, they desire rapid advancement, diverse experiences, flexible work routines, frequent performance feedback, and opportunities to engage in community service. Consistent with these perceptions, over 85 percent of hiring managers and human resource executives report feeling that millennial workers have a stronger sense of entitlement than do their more seasoned counterparts.

One expectation that is particularly important to millennials is meritocracy. Rather than experience career advancement as a result of years of seniority, millennials seek advancement based on performance. Millennials become impatient with traditional lock-step promotion tracks, which has posed problems for many traditional employers.

Because of their great expectations, millennials typically do not stay at one company for much of their

KEY CONCEPTS

The millennial generation, born between 1980 and 2001, is shaking up the workplace. In order to recruit and retain talented millennials, companies may want to consider:

1. Using seminars to open lines of communication between generations in the workplace.
2. Allowing parental involvement in some aspects of work while making others off limits.
3. Providing frequent, informal performance feedback.
4. Teaching millennials to deal with ambiguity, take risks, and problem-solve.
5. Addressing millennials’ demands for technology, while ensuring the technology is not abused or overused.
6. Instituting policies that allow for flexibility, a casual work environment, and work-life balance.
7. Using online technology to identify talented candidates.
8. Giving employees time to devote to community service.



Information about the author and subject:

www.thetrophykids.com

Information about this book and other business titles:

www.josseybass.com

Related summaries in the BBS Library:

Motivating the “What’s In It for Me?” Workforce

Manage Across the Generational Divide and Increase Profits

Cam Marston

Generations at Work

Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace

Ron Zemke, Claire Raines, and Bob Filipczak

career. Most employers cite retention – rather than recruiting – as their biggest challenge with the millennial generation. Most millennials seek to develop and refine as many marketable skills as they can during their tenure at a company only to use these skills to obtain a better position elsewhere within a few years. They do not see job-hopping as a weakness and have no qualms listing multiple jobs within the same year on their resumes.

Millennials' lack of loyalty towards employers is understandable considering many have watched family members lose their jobs due to downsizings or outsourcing. Rather than allow millennials to permanently leave their companies – taking their talent and skills with them – some employers are trying a new approach.

These companies are focusing on “recapture” rather than retention. For example, these employers call former employees months after they leave the organization to invite them back if they are not satisfied with their new employment.

Overall, however, it is clear that employers would benefit from increasing retention and decreasing mobility in this transient generation by carefully managing millennials' expectations. For example, employers should not try to bully millennials, as they prefer a collaborative environment to a command-and-control management style. Also, companies should avoid telling millennials they will have a lifelong career with the company, and instead, focus on exactly what they need to do to advance. Experiences that build skills and resumes – such as international or learning expe-

riences – are also appealing to millennials and should be used to retain talent.

Although some accommodation to millennials' expectations is warranted, they too must make some trade-offs and conform to the existing corporate culture. For example, millennials need to learn that they cannot have everything they desire all the time and that job advancement is not as immediate as they would like. Employers, parents and college career placement offices can all help nurture this philosophy.

The millennial generation may expect so much because they were never denied much. From the nursery onward, millennials were indulged and made to feel special by parents, coaches, and teachers.

APRON STRINGS

In generations past, parents tearfully said goodbye to their children as they sent them on their way to college and “cut the apron strings.” Whereas those parents were lucky to hear from their college-age children once per week, parents today often communicate with theirs at least daily. Millennial parents remain intimately involved in their children's lives in college and into their careers. Because of this involvement, it is important for educators and employers to better understand what drives millennial parents.

Millennial parents are often referred to as helicopter parents because, “...they hover like helicopters near their children, ready to swoop in at a moment's notice to help resolve problems big and small.” From the time they are born, these parents micromanage and protect their children in every regard. These are the parents who argue with sports coaches when their child's team loses, berate teachers when their child receives a disciplinary consequence, and write admissions essays to increase their child's chances of being admitted to an elite college. Even after college entrance, these parents get their children the best class schedules and housing assignments and assist during the job application process. Together, these behaviors have led to an increase in “adulthoods,” young adults who continue to rely on their parents for emotional and financial support.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ron Alsop is a writer and editor for *The Wall Street Journal*. In addition to authoring additional business books, Alsop speaks at conferences and universities on corporate reputation, the millennial generation, business education, and career development.

Most helicopter parents are well-intentioned and view themselves as being merely supportive and concerned. In fact, some researchers have suggested that these close parent-student ties may actually result in benefits during the college years. However, others suggest that helicopter parenting is characterized by suffocation rather than support, hampering millennials' ability to be self-reliant problem-solvers. Although some millennials appreciate their parents' involvement, others realize it may be self-handicapping and seek more independence. For example, a recent survey revealed that a quarter of recent college graduates felt their parents were so involved in their lives that it was annoying or embarrassing (e.g., more than a third of parents had met with their academic advisors and 31 percent had contacted their professors to complain about a grade).

It is important for parents to allow their adult children to make decisions on their own and learn from their mistakes in productive ways. Many college officials are communicating this message as early as freshman orientation, although some parents object that they have always been encouraged to be partners in their child's education and they are not ready to vanish quietly. Actually, parents have less to fear these days when they send their children away to college since increasing numbers of college graduates – coined "boomerang kids" – are returning home after college.

For millennials, the cell phone has become the new high-tech umbilical cord. E-mail and text and instant messaging also contribute to the more frequent contact between parents and their grown children.

TAKE YOUR PARENTS TO WORK

With helicopter parents hovering nearby, families are increasingly influencing the workplace. As Alsop notes, "Companies today aren't just hiring the child; they get the whole family in the bargain, like it or not." Some parents attempt to become involved in interviews, salary negotiations, and performance evaluations. For example, one-third of surveyed companies report witnessing parental involvement in the recruiting process and early career stages. In fact, some supervisors have even reported that employees consult their parents on routine work decisions.

Employers are handling this increased involvement in diverse ways. Some view this behavior as inappropriate and seek to eliminate parents from the workplace entirely. The risk with this approach, however, is the potential alienation of millennial employees whose talent may ultimately be lost to other employers. A more effective approach may be involving parents in select ways while setting limits and avoiding intrusive involvement. When setting limits, it is important to take a positive approach, emphasizing the benefits associated with increased employee independence. In order to include parents in harmless ways, a few workplaces have sponsored a day to bring their family to work or mailed information packets to parents during the recruiting process.

HOW AM I DOING?

The achievement-motivated millennials, who received plentiful feedback as they grew up in their homes and schools, have come to expect the same in the workplace. Whereas workers in previous generations adhered to the philosophy "no news is good news," today's millennials seek frequent and ongoing positive reinforcement from their supervisors rather than rely exclusively on annual performance reviews. They contend such feedback builds their confidence and increases feelings of security.

How did millennials come to need such praise and feedback? Since birth, millennials have been showered with affection and praise for every milestone in their lives – no matter how inconsequential. In addition, schools have increasingly focused on regularly assessing students and providing frequent feedback. Although some millennials welcome constructive criticism, many want only positive feedback. This may have been fueled by a number of factors including the self-esteem movement that emerged in the 1980s. Unfortunately, unwarranted praise can lead to complacency, foster narcissism, and cause millennials to avoid worthwhile risks.

Some employers refuse to give in to what they consider high-maintenance requests for frequent performance feedback. Others are beginning to believe that regular feedback cannot only benefit the millennials, but also the entire company. Unlike millennials' parents

and coaches, however, these employers are providing praise only when it is truly justifiable and not for mere presence or participation. Because millennials can be sensitive to criticism, employers may find it useful to deliver critiques carefully.

CHECKLIST KIDS

Another common characteristic of millennials is their preference for directions and checklists in the work setting. Millennials are efficient and effective when given clear directions, but often have difficulties making decisions and taking risks in more ambiguous circumstances. This may be partially caused by helicopter parents who have carefully programmed their children's lives and intervened to solve problems and make decisions along the way. Compounding this effect, schools have increasingly provided students with explicit directions and grading rubrics. Even after leaving for college, many young adults experience little autonomy or independence thanks to technology that keeps them intimately connected with their parents.

Because of this, millennials desire a clearly defined and scripted work life, something which is elusive in today's complex world. Managers of millennials are often left feeling like babysitters who have to guide their employees through even the simplest decisions. Unfortunately, this issue is not going to disappear overnight, so managers should become adept at making expectations as explicit as possible, providing step-by-step directions, and utilizing short-term deadlines. Millennials, in turn, should strive to brainstorm possible solutions to problems before consulting their managers.

To address their discomfort with ambiguity, many companies are striving to teach millennials to deal more effectively with life's gray areas. For example, Boston Consulting puts its applicants through "case-study interviews" to determine which applicants can best deal with the ambiguity that defines the company's daily work. Another company, Fidelity, uses in-house training programs and on-the-job experiences to foster risk-taking in the face of ambiguity, even if it may result in errors. Business schools also have a role in enhancing these skills by adapting

their curriculum and teaching methods. For example, they can create assignments with less clear-cut outcomes and can specifically teach problem-solving approaches.

MASTER JUGGLERS

Multitasking is a defining characteristic of the millennial generation. Millennials are not only constantly connected to others through technology, but they also enjoy engaging in multiple experiences simultaneously. For example, many students talk on the phone or watch television while completing their homework. Although multitasking may allow millennials to make more connections and have more experiences, it can also be distracting and interfere with the development of effective written and oral communication.

Although millennials like working in teams and sharing the workload and credit, they are still hungry for individual recognition, too. Their need for applause knows no bounds.

Millennials are particularly reliant on using technology to rapidly exchange information through instant messaging, text messaging, and social networking sites. Interestingly, to the millennials, "...email is sooo dead. It's the new snail mail." Millennials expect to instantly engage in a two-way exchange of information, and companies and universities are finding it difficult to keep up with this demand. Because of their ability to harness technology and multitask, millennials often find themselves able to efficiently work on multiple projects simultaneously and complete them with speed.

Despite these benefits of technology and multitasking, there are perils as well. For example, critics contend that multitasking and being constantly connected can lead to difficulties in attention, interpersonal skills, and reading/writing performance. Given these concerns, Alsop recommends finding a happy medium regarding technology and multitasking. For example, millennials need to "unplug" occasionally and take time to relax, read, and interact with people.

FREE TO BE ME

Although Baby Boomers and Generation Xers sought some types of flexible work arrangements, millenni-

als far surpass their predecessors in seeking flexibility and work-life balance. Although millennials desire structure and direction on their work assignments, they prefer to complete the tasks at a time and place of their choosing. Because this generation watched their parents work countless hours per week only to lose their jobs in downsizings, they want more reasonable schedules and more opportunity to live life beyond the office walls. Technology has helped make this a reality for some millennials because they can be connected by cell phone or the Internet anywhere at any time.

The millennial generation's attitude: Why stay at the office until five if I want to go to my kid's soccer game? Just text me on my cell phone if you need me.

Although there has been a recent trend toward increasing flexibility in the workplace, it has been slow and scattered. The majority of companies continue to require most employees to report to a designated location at a designated time. Some companies, however, do allow a few people to work from home, have flexible hours, or take extended leaves from work. In order for such flexible arrangements to work, companies must have a risk-taking mentality, a commitment to the change, and trust in the employees. Although millennials seek these options, employers should be honest in the recruiting process regarding how much flexibility to expect.

In addition to increased flexibility in work time and location, millennials also desire flexibility in expressing their individuality in the workplace. Employers are finding some millennials clashing with older employees over clothing, hairstyles, piercings, and tattoos. Given research suggesting 36 percent of 18- to 25-year-olds have a tattoo and 30 percent have a piercing in a location other than an earlobe, employers may need to become somewhat more tolerant of these differences. Millennials also seek the freedom to have fun in the workplace. In response, some workplaces – such as Google – are making parts of their environment playful by installing such diversions as pool tables and grand pianos. Other companies are finding ways for employees to socialize after the work day through parties, picnics, and trips.

RECRUITING IN CYBERSPACE

Companies are increasingly realizing that they must go beyond traditional recruiting techniques to attain top millennial talent. For example, a growing number of companies are using social networking Web sites such as Facebook and You Tube to reach prospective employees. Although this has the advantage of meeting millennials on their own turf, it also has the risk of offending millennials who want to keep these sites purely social.

Additionally, given statistics that over 80 percent of graduating students frequently visit a prospective employer's Web site, many companies have invested in improving their corporate career Web pages. To attract millennials, these sites should address such millennial-relevant issues as work-life balance, training and development, corporate responsibility, and diversity. To address these issues, the Web sites could include blogs, podcasts, virtual tours, case studies, and video interviews.

As the demand for talented millennials continues to expand, businesses must develop creative recruiting techniques. Some recruiters are using videos and video games to attract potential talent. Others use strategy games and contests to spot potential hires. Still others read messages on career-oriented message boards, access online resume banks, and host online career fairs to reach out to this technologically connected generation. However, as Alsop notes, "The days of wining and dining students aren't over yet." In addition to virtual recruiting, companies must continue to invite a select number of candidates for face-to-face interviews to size up their fit with the organization.

A GENEROUS GENERATION

Although millennials are notorious for seeking recognition and personal success, they also have a desire to be socially responsible. For example, more than 60 percent of 13- to 25-year-olds report feeling personally responsible for making a difference in the world. For some, this may have emerged from their encouragement to engage in community service in their schools. For others, coursework or international experiences at

the college level may have opened their eyes to global or humanitarian issues.

As a result of their desire to make a difference in the world, some millennials choose to work for service-oriented organizations such as the Peace Corps or Teach for America. The majority, however, seek to work for a corporation that is socially responsible and allows them time to perform community service. In fact, more than 50 percent of millennials report they would not work for a socially irresponsible organization. In an effort to attract millennials, some organizations are establishing partnerships with Teach for America that allow recruits to provide community service for a designated time before beginning their jobs.



FEATURES OF THE BOOK

Reading Time: 12-14 Hours, 262 Pages in Book

As a result of the shared milieu in which they were raised, individuals born in the same time frame tend to exhibit behaviors and philosophies which differ in unique ways from their predecessors and contemporaries. This is particularly true of the millennials, a cohort of individuals born between 1980 and 2001. Although millennials have always been interesting to study, their relevance is becoming increasingly important as they are beginning to enter higher education and the workplace in droves.

But what happens when this generation meets the Baby Boomers, Traditionalists, and Generation Xers, each of whom have different beliefs and behaviors? And with the increasing exodus of the former two generations from the workplace, how can employers attract and retain talented millennials to ensure the viability of their organizations? In **The Trophy Kids Grow Up**, Ron Alsop explores these questions. Based on his groundbreaking research on this intriguing generation, Alsop not only captures the essence of the millennials but also describes how workplaces have adapted in response to their needs and preferences.

There are several notable features of the book that should be mentioned. First, the author recognizes – and reiterates throughout the book – that certainly not all characteristics of millennials apply to each member

of the generation. He also explains that most research about millennials has focused on college students and graduates. Readers are cautioned to avoid overgeneralization of the concepts to specific individuals.

One strength of the book is its readability; Alsop captures the reader's interest through an engaging writing style. His plentiful use of case studies, interviews, and research gives the book's content vitality and relevance. The chapters conclude with a section titled "Chapter Highlights" that uses bulleted points to concisely summarize the most important content covered.

The Trophy Kids Grow Up is relevant for individuals trying to better understand millennials. Perhaps Joel Podolny, from the Yale School of Management, best captured this sentiment by noting that Alsop's book, "...will yield insights for anyone who interacts with today's teens and twentysomethings – educators and administrators, corporate recruiters and managers, marketers, fundraisers, and nonprofit executives alike." However, its relevance also extends to millennials themselves, because the book reveals ways in which their behavior is perceived by others. In the end, today's diverse workplaces demand that millennials and the individuals around them adapt to one another in order to thrive.

CONTENTS

Preface

The Trophy Kids

Great Expectations

Apron Strings

Take Your Parents to Work

How Am I Doing?

Checklist Kids

Master Jugglers

Free to Be Me

Recruiting in Cyberspace

Dream Jobs

A Generous Generation

About the Author

Index

A NOTE TO OUR READERS

We at BBS encourage our readers to purchase the business books we summarize. BBS Summaries are intended as a service to busy professionals, as we recommend only those books that are worth your time to read in their entirety. We apply stringent criteria in selecting only the best business books, and in that selection process, strive to help you make informed book-purchasing decisions.

[Click to Buy This Book](#)

This book is available at bookstores and online booksellers.

Business Book Summaries® is a service of EBSCO Publishing, Inc.

For more information about BBS, to subscribe to BBS,
or to provide us feedback, visit our Web site.

www.businessbookreview.com

EBSCO Publishing Inc.
10 Estes Street
Ipswich, MA 01938 USA
www.ebscohost.com

Copyright of Business Book Review and Business Book Summaries is property of EBSCO Publishing Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download or email articles for individual use.

Copyright of Business Book Review Library is the property of EBSCO Publishing and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.