**Introduction: The Perceptions We Hold Today**

Millennials are those born between 1981 and 1996. Generation Z is the generation following millennials, born in 1996 to the present, and are just graduating college. In the last 50 years, rapid technological changes have created a vast difference between the perspectives, values, beliefs, and expectations of the older and youngest generations around the globe.

**Where Did the Perceptions Come From?**

Initially, the theories about millennials were presented by qualified researchers who had invested hours collecting data and distilling stories into meaningful representations. Neil Howe and William Strauss, one of the first generational analysts to gain popularity, put forth an immensely positive view of the millennial generation in their seminal 2000 book, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. Later, other generational analysts such as Jean Twenge (author of *Generation Me*) and Mark Bauerlein (author of *The Dumbest Generation*) instead popularized the negative aspects of millennials. The words “narcissistic,” “entitled,” and “lazy” began to emerge. However, these phrases weren’t just passed into society through books and articles. They were passed through social media, an exponentially viral medium, in which unreliable data and sensational messages spread like wildfire.

Millennials responded with fierce blogs, “rants,” videos, and memes, and the two different worlds collided: the world of the older distinguished expert and the world of the younger digital influencer. Neither of the approaches of these two camps, positive or negative, is fully accurate. Often, proponents of both perspectives simply select the evidence, events, and data that best serve the idea they want to present: that either millennials will be saviors of mankind or that millennials are no more than device-controlled vegetables who expect everything to be done for them.

**The Business Case for Understanding Millennials**

Consider the significance of the time we are living in: *the millennial generation is the last generation to remember a world without the Internet.* Millennials are both the first generation to form their world perspective from a digitally influenced vantage point and the last to remember what it was like not to always be connected.

Organizations that don’t seek to understand and engage millennial employees, as well as digitally enabled talent today regardless of generation, are already experiencing the following business impacts:

* **Costs due to turnover.** Today’s organizations are facing unprecedented challenges to attract and retain young talent. A 2016 study by Gallup estimated that millennial turnover costs the US economy $30.5 billion every year, and 56 percent of millennials expect to leave their jobs in three years or less.
* **Lack of bench strength.** Whether hiring from external sources or developing leaders from within, lack of talent longevity creates significant skill gaps as well as a smaller talent pool of high-potential employees. Future profit requires future leaders. Future leaders want an effective, modern workplace culture in the present.
* **Loss of core knowledge.** Although baby boomers will not retire en masse, transferring core competencies built over a 40-year career takes significant time. Without creating an effective cross-generational culture, critical lessons, experience, and core values will be lost that could greatly impact profit.
* **Decreased employee engagement.** Gallup’s 2016 report also indicated that 55 percent of millennials are not engaged at work, the highest number of any generation. Understanding how to engage millennials and digitally enabled talent is imperative to build a high-performing organization.
* **Decreased access to top talent.** Organizations usually compete with each other for talent, but organizations are also at war with talent itself. For a multitude of reasons, many millennials and especially generation Z are attracted to entrepreneurship and start-ups instead of traditional 9 to 5 jobs.

**Who This Book Is For: Leaders, Managers, and Change Champions**

This bookis intended to help leaders, managers, and change champions in today’s companies and organizations achieve the following:

* Gain insight to make meaningful, strategic investments around modern workplace culture.
* Lead efforts to build a modern, high-performing workplace.
* Understand millennials better from a millennial’s perspective.
* Drive the connection of millennial behavior to modern workplace culture, beyond discussions of diversity and inclusion of generations.
* Create a win-win, effective cross-generational culture that will enable your organization to not just survive, but thrive in the twenty-first century.

**Who This Book Is About**

This book is inspired by the behavior of high-performing millennials, but it applies to modern talent as a whole. While “top talent” millennials give us clues for what works well in our digitally enabled society, the behaviors discussed in this book also lean heavily toward individuals in jobs and careers that involve highly cognitive, nonroutine work in fields like project management, customer service, and troubleshooting manufacturing issues.

**How to Use This Book**

This book focuses on transforming five of the biggest millennial stereotypes—lazy, entitled, needing to be hand-held, disloyal, and having authority issues—into more balanced strengths and, subsequently, linking them to related organizational culture changes.

Each of the core chapters follows a consistent structure:

* Using what I call the “One Coin, Two Sides” model, each chapter begins with an explanation of the stereotypical behavior and interpretation of the root cause from the traditional mindset and the modern mindset.
* Armed with a more balanced overall interpretation of the stereotype in question, I drive the connection to specific organizational culture changes that harness rather than conflict with the behavior.
* “Tales from the Trenches” showcase organizational changes in action in the real world, many of which are new and experimental initiatives. I have included stories from a variety of industries and from around the world.
* I present the first of two key tools to help you take action to create a modern culture in your organization: a short self-assessment entitled “How Modern Is Your Culture?”
* The second tool shifts the focus from your organization to you. The “10-Minute Champion” is a brief collection of actions you can do in 10 minutes or less per day to champion a more modern workplace culture.

Finally, I provide an invaluable online resource library to accompany the book, located at themillennialmyth.com/resources.

**Introduction: Questions for Further Discussion**

1. When you type the phrase “Millennials are . . .” into a search engine, how does the autocomplete function fill in the answer? Do you agree with the results? Why or why not?
2. What words and traits do you typically associate with different generations?
3. Do you see yourself as a “change champion,” open-minded to different behaviors, viewpoints, and contributions of the next generation of workers?

**Introduction Resources and References**

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