

MILLENNIALS ARE UNIQUE CORPORATE PLAYERS

With each industrial age has come a different type of employee. From Baby Boomers, to Gen-X and the elusive Millennial. Millennials are a corporate anomaly, a completely new type of employee to enter the work landscape, writes Strata-G Labour Solutions legal advisor, Aphelele Tapile.

The Millennial's childhood is synonymous with the technology boom. As a result, the millennial has not only grown up in the digital information age but has always had access to information. So, what does this mean for the current day South African workplace and the management of this new type of employee?

Management styles of previous generations have often taken a rigid, authoritative and sometimes militant approach. This can be attributed to the knowledge hub previously monopolised by management. Millennials have shown less reverence for authority than previous generations due to access to online content and online communication, making them more knowledgeable than previous generations and stripping away the knowledge monopoly previously enjoyed by management. They are aware of global work trends and different management styles and managers are no longer the sole knowledge experts.

A major challenge for corporates is how to adapt management styles to the new type of employee who present new demands and challenges to existing structures and authority. An emerging management tool suited to the millennial is to provide guidance, mentorship and critical, but positive, feedback. In aid of improved productivity and efficiencies, companies would do well to encourage the collaborative approach, but in so doing, identify the individual's strengths and efficiencies and align them to the benefit the collective.

Moving away from the rigid style of management and creating a company culture that fosters the appreciation of ideas, creativity and working towards a common goal. Great successes have been enjoyed by tech companies such as Facebook and Google, which have adopted similar models.

Millennials do not only seek a transactional exchange of human capital for remuneration. They do not seek to separate their lives and personalities from their work, but rather to integrate the two. In so doing, they ensure that their personalities become a strength with the capability of lending itself to the job. Technology and social media have facilitated constant connectivity and trends have shown that more than previous generations, Millennials seek employment that speaks to their personalities and ultimately their life's purpose. This means that they seek to align with the company's corporate culture and, as such, the employment relationship is evolving from transactional to reciprocal. Millennials are asking how (barring the financial aspect) they may personally benefit from their employers. A contentious point in this regard has been the redefinition of work-life balance.

Technology has brought an array of options that businesses may consider adopting to provide a better work-life balance to employees. One such preferred option, widely adapted in the Middle East, Asia and the America's, is telecommuting. Companies who have aligned with the digital age have found that providing employees with work tools such as a cell phone, internet connection and a laptop allows them to work from anywhere. This

has been very welcomed by Millennials, who are more interested in the result rather than the process.

The effectiveness of telecommuting is premised on the company's ability to objectively measure deliverables by setting targets that can be easily monitored. This also holds the employee accountable to ensuring that he or she is a productive and therefore profitable resource.

President Ramaphosa's proposed YES Initiative could be viewed as a possible solution to create a happy medium between unemployed youths in need of employment and experience, as well as the expectations that employers may have in terms of "business as usual".

The initiative focuses on two critical elements. Firstly, the opportunity to offer unemployed youth work experience, as research has proven that a reference letter from a previous employer may increase the chances of employment as much as 26%. Secondly, the opportunity for the company to groom Millennials into employable assets with the required work ethic before offering them the privilege of a work-life balance since the youth would now have some actual work experience.

To propel the initiative even further, South African countries would do well to learn how to eventually marry the readily available technology and this new type of employee in a way that would be efficient and profitable to the company, but also consistent with the needs of the Millennial.

Doing away with inefficient management tools such as lengthy meetings and moving into virtual chat groups (Whatsapp) where constant communication is able to take place or adopting telecons or video conferences could prove to be time-saving, increasing productivity while maintaining positive morale and general employee wellness.

Millennials have been a daunting type of employee for corporates, but there has been success where companies have managed to adapt to the digital age and effectively incorporate it into the workplace as well as embrace modern work practices and management styles, whilst maintaining company values, commitment to deliverables and, ultimately, profits.

Millennials want to understand the bigger picture and their part in the collective. Where excellence, discipline and diligence has been instilled by the company, this generation will work not only harder, but smarter than previous generations.