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My take on Millennials

by Rich Poryako

I often feel like I don't get Millennials. In my experience, the Millennials I have experience with have perpetuated the stereotype: lousy communicators with poor attitudes who are slow starters but want to run the show. Not all of them. I work out with some Millennials who have an insane work ethic. One's going to be a world champion. Another is going to be prime minister.

Frankly, I don't blame McDonald's for automating rather than trying to figure out how to train them. Millennials, GenX, Baby Boomers and in some cases, Matures, may all be working under the same roof at your business. As a GenXer, I have found that it is much easier and more efficient to work with someone who has 20 years of experience than someone who is just starting their career.

When I was a kid and would occasionally show off a new black eye, my judo instructor, who was also cop, would say that I was talking when I should have been listening. An ongoing trend I've noticed working with Millennials has been that they prefer to tell you the way it's going to be rather than ask for direction from someone with decades of experience who has performed the same task or project dozens or hundreds of times.

I do my best to share my experiences, ideas and knowledge with whoever is willing to learn. Jim Brady of Cal-Tech Glass Services told the audience at the 2017 Glass Connections conference, "I've always lived by the mantra that we have to give back to the industry that provides for us. You have to feed it so it can feed you." But more than a few times, I've been burned by sharing ideas with Millennials who then turn around and sell the same ideas as their own. I've also witnessed the same usual suspects throw others under the bus in order to make themselves look better. It might work for the short term, however inevitably they make a name for themselves the wrong way. It reminds me a lot of high school.

I recall talking to a young woman at a trade event in Bellevue, Wash., last year who was

new to the glass industry but believed that employers should give Millennial workers the title "manager" because it is an easy and inexpensive way for businesses to recognize younger workers. I was stunned. What do you say to that?

Part of the ongoing labour crisis is a generational issue. Family businesses are not finding successors because the kids are going off to other areas. During Julia Schimmelpenningh of Eastman Chemical's 2017 State of the Industry address to BEC attendees, Schimmelpenningh didn't hold back. "There is a well-known saying that once you're in the glass industry for five years, you are in it for life. Well guess what? The new workforce does not subscribe to that. They essentially say, 'Uh-huh, I'll be out of here in three years.'"

According to Tom Jackson of Seattle-based SteelEncounters, 95 per cent of job candidates believe culture is more important than compensation. In order to connect with Millennials, he turned to his smart phone. SteelEncounters launched a cutting edge employee app with everything from jobsite locations to an employee directory, company news, HR benefits, payroll, health and wellness and even their company store for apparel and swag.

According to a June 2019 report by PSMJ Resources, 40 per cent of people polled around the architecture, engineering and construction (AEC) industry site "inexperience" as the number-one problem in completing projects.

The Baby Boomer generation have paid their dues and earned their rights. They are looking forward to retiring. Many are leaving earlier than expected due to health issues. Baby Boomers have skills but, most importantly for your business, they have wisdom.

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