

## Driving Millennial Motivation: Purpose is Essential

**By:**

**Lisa Bertelsen**, Global Director of  
Research Insights

**Matt Huss**, Strategy Director

[www.siegelgale.com](http://www.siegelgale.com)

[@siegelgale](https://twitter.com/siegelgale)

[www.siegelgale.com/social](http://www.siegelgale.com/social)

*Companies locked in a competitive war for top talent are finding Millennials reluctant recruits. Undoubtedly, some battles are still won with salaries and benefits. However, the industry's overall strategy must begin with an appeal to the hearts and minds of all current and prospective employees with a clear and compelling declaration of Purpose.*

One of the greatest resources for companies is in short supply—talent.

It's a trend that's particularly pronounced when it comes to the pool of recent graduates entering the job market. While the well has not run dry, the gap between supply and demand continues to be an issue of concern. Industry leaders see a free-flowing pipeline filled with qualified and motivated Millennials as critical to operations, profitability and growth.

The struggle for qualified talent crosses industries, disciplines and international boundaries—from technology to financial services, salespeople to accountants, entry level to middle management, Los Angeles to Shanghai.

Even in a turbulent global economy, where jobs are scarce and futures are uncertain, many Millennials look for something beyond a paycheck and benefits.

They search for meaning for themselves and in the work that they do.

And they look for purpose—a defining affirmation from employers that tells them why they do the work that they do.

### **The Millennials in an environment of change and challenges**

CBS's "60 Minutes" issued fair warning as early as 2007 on the coming Millennials—the generation born between 1981 and 2000 (who, until the late 1990s, were usually referred to as Generation Y.)

"The workplace has become a psychological battlefield, and the Millennials have the upper hand," the report stated bluntly. "They are tech savvy, with every gadget imaginable...They multitask, talk, walk, listen and type, and text. And their priorities are simple: they come first."

The relationship between the next generation of professionals and established sectors of the workplace is more complicated than most, heavily impacted by both perceptions and realities.

A September 2011 survey of students conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) saw a declining number of seniors looking to the for-profit private sector as their primary, post-graduation choice for employment.

"[We are] seeing a growing number of alumni at all career stages—early, mid, late—changing jobs to enter the nonprofit sector," says Cara Costello, senior associate director of alumni services for the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School, in an interview with *The Wall Street Journal*.

Chances for nonprofit employment are on the rise. A 2011 Idealist.org survey of 3,000 U.S. nonprofit organizations claims that forty-two percent of respondents plan to hire new positions, and nearly half will fill positions that become vacant.

---

+ "And they look for purpose—a defining affirmation from employers that tells them why they do the work that they do."

---

### **Employer needs and employee desires**

Expectations and demands are high on both sides of the hiring equation, as research conducted by Siegel+Gale in the summer of 2011 revealed in interviews with industry headhunters and college career counselors.

The number of so-called “perfect” recruits from even top schools such as MIT and Stanford are, they say, anything but easy to come by for a variety of reasons.

“In today’s globally competitive and technologically driven economy, the jobs available to our country’s young people increasingly depend on the quality of the education and skills they acquire,” said Brad Smith, Microsoft’s general counsel and senior vice president.

The U.S. will have more than 1.2 million job openings in science, technology, engineering and math fields by 2018. Unfortunately, there will be a significant shortage of qualified college graduates to fill them, unless students step up their learning.

Hard skills aside, companies look for candidates who are critical thinkers, innovators and self-starters (preferably with relevant industry experience and a degree from a leading university). They seek to recruit those who can manage a variety of projects, wear a variety of professional hats and switch job functions at the drop of one of those hats.

An executive and former recruiting and university relations manager for North America told one industry publication that the company has “a constant need for new college grads,” noting after a few years’ experience a new graduate hire can “go to almost any niche of the company from management to recruiting, technology or sales.”

If that’s not challenge enough, in some fields they must also be fully prepared to relocate more than once over the course of their career.

Employees at one organization that supplies industry-specific technology, information solutions and integrated project management, can end up, for example, in any one of 80 countries.

That kind of lifestyle might be a perfect fit for “adventurers” and military veterans, but it’s far less attractive to recent college graduates who, for all their independence, indicate a strong desire to stay close to home.

A similar 2010 survey from NACE discovered: “A large percentage of students who rejected employment opportunities (16 percent) reported that a make-or-break item for accepting or rejecting a job was the location of the job close to their families” and “a significant 40 percent continued to reject offers during a very difficult job market.”

In fact, 52 percent stated they would look for a job close to home compared with only 29 percent interested in searching nationally and 10 percent who would venture abroad to locate employment if it were available.

### **News, technology and reputation**

Perhaps even more surprisingly, a 2009 report by the Pew Research Center found Millennials “more inclined toward trust in institutions than were either of their two predecessor generations—Gen Xers (who are now ages 30–45) and Baby Boomers (now ages 46–64) when they were coming of age.”

That bit of information is critical in the war for talent—much of which is won or lost on the battleground of public perception.

Companies with a reputation for integrity, innovation or nurturing corporate cultures are naturally more attractive to prospective hires who, it should be stressed, are just as turned off by firms who pretend to be something they are not.

“We now have 24-hour-a-day news,” says one Texas-based employment director. “They’re bombarded with news on their smartphones, their desktops and computers as well as the television on a minute-by-minute basis.”

Not all of that information, of course, is good information or good news.

“[If] there’s an awful lot about that market segment in the newspaper or in the public media... they can often get swayed by that,” says the same director.

And then there are the disasters such as the BP oil spill of 2010, RIM’s BlackBerry network outage in 2011, Facebook’s privacy missteps and the subprime mortgage meltdown of the late 2000s; all of which have had cataclysmic impacts that continue to reverberate throughout the respective industries.

“...Companies’ biggest hurdles are overcoming negative news,” says a recruiter at a leading international, specialized consultancy firm.

“Talking to candidates, they will always want to know how much money they’re going to make, how big their bonus is going to be and how shiny their company car is going to be,” he says. “But fundamentally, they won’t move to the job if they think the company’s got a bad reputation.”

“For most of our students, brands matter a lot,” says a career advisor at one of the nation’s top schools.

Both recruiters and studies support the notion that Millennials possess a strong desire for stability that works to the advantage of established companies.

“They want a company that’s stable,” says a counselor at one of the top U.S. universities. “If it’s a start-up, they’ll make sure it has a certain amount of funding.”

Yet another advisor agrees, stating that students are far more likely to be attracted to companies with new ideas. These innovative companies drastically separate themselves from their competitors by initiating new ways of working, instead of simply conducting ‘business as usual.’

All the more reason for traditional companies to clearly communicate the excitement and challenge of working for them by appealing to more elemental notions—for instance, by showing how their company – whether large, mid-size or small – is fundamental to human prosperity and progress.

Many people point to GE by way of example.

“GE does a really good job,” says one university-based headhunter. “They make it seem innovative and yet it’s huge. Students feel like they’re getting the best of both worlds.”

GE is helping lead innovation in recruitment by hosting evening webinars for jobseekers as an introduction to the company and to draw attention to any job openings. “[With the webinars], we really saw an uptick in our recruitment levels and the caliber of talent we were getting,” says Kim Bankston, senior human resources leader for GE’s Michigan Technology Center and corporate IT.

Millennials, while often swayed by “surface” considerations such as salary and location, remain sensitive to issues and ideas not found on the bottom line.

*What* they will be doing is usually clear.

It’s the *why* that needs to be spelled out.

### **The promise of purpose**

Where mission statements fail and allusions to “vision” are frequently far too fuzzy, purpose commands attention and cultivates retention. It’s a definitive statement about the difference an organization seeks to make in the world, a clear, credible and convincing response to the deceptively simple question: “Why do we do what we do?”

Many of the world’s most successful organizations have rallied and motivated their employees around purpose—companies like 3M, which seeks “science-based innovation to solve real-world needs,” and Google, which “organizes the world’s information to make it universally accessible and useful.”

Motorola Solutions seized the opportunity to guide, inspire and reconnect employees to the organization post-split with a clear articulation of purpose: “*Motorola helps people be their best in the moments that matter.*” From this purpose stemmed the elements of the strategic foundation—a new brand promise, values and brand voice as well as an invigorating new visual identity that introduced “Motorola Solutions” to the world. Now the employees of Motorola Solutions, energized by a clear sense of Purpose, have the tools and focus they need to feel connected to and inspired by their profound impact on the world.

Giving employees, especially Millennials, something to believe in, care about, focus on and commit to, can be the prime mover at hiring time and a powerful force far beyond day one on the job—driving employee motivation and innovation and a desire to contribute to the greater enterprise.

“Millennials are often described as feeling special and may have rooms full of trophies from competing on the playing fields, even if they didn’t win any contests,” writes Jeff Nevid, Professor of Psychology and Director of Clinical Psychology at St. John’s University in New York. “They are also frequently described as being spoiled, wanting work to be fun, and valuing friends and lifestyles over work and career.”

But, he goes on to say, “In contrast to Boomers who felt they had to make their way through life on their own, many Millennials put a greater emphasis on collaboration with others and sharing work assignments.”

Which underscores the importance of purpose to Millennials and the corporate need to answer questions employees regularly ask themselves, including: “Why should I be excited about coming to work?”



simple is smart

Millennials are not alone in wanting to be part of something bigger. It is an intrinsically human need that, when properly addressed, benefits all the workers in the company.

### **A sustained purpose**

With resources and the talent pool already stretched thin, loyalties tested by the ebb and flow of business cycles and gaps in middle management collectively challenging the sustainability of many corporate cultures, purpose provides a systemic starting point for renewal.

Because, when it is authentic, purpose engages the drive for enrichment and excellence, and it perpetuates itself with a search for new discovery.

The poet Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.”

And few accomplishments worth noting were ever achieved without purpose.

For more information  
contact us:

**New York**

T 1 212 453 0400

**Los Angeles**

T 1 310 312 2200

**San Francisco**

T 1 415 276 8770

**London**

T +44 20 7611 3800

**Hamburg**

T +49 4036 907602

**Dubai**

T +971 4 425 8600

**Shanghai**

T +86 21 2501 2895

**Beijing**

T +86 10 5775 5010