

Character counts when attracting and retaining a millennial workforce



By Danita Bye

In Equifax, Uber, Netflix, and beyond, we have witnessed the ravaging consequences lack of character has on the upper echelons of corporate America. The setback to brand status is staggering and will take years to restore. We watch these failures play out in the headlines. The harm to stakeholders is sickening. However, all businesses that fail, whether large or small, impact countless lives.

Millennials, having watched these failures unfold, know intuitively that character and integrity will eventually make or break any leader or business. They want to be part of company with a positive reputation and an authentic leader. Thus, it becomes important for us to prioritize building values-based cultures that attract, equip, and retain talented millennial leaders.

This is not a modern-day concept. Remember Aristotle and the seven cardinal virtues? Prudence, justice, temperance, courage, faith, hope, and charity are not just for the ancients. Recognizing the need, leading educational institutions, such as Harvard and the University of Mary, are committed to virtuous leadership. Their goal is to raise up a generation of character-based leaders that are empowered to transform the way in which we live and do business in our high-tech, rapidly shifting corporate world.

For high-growth companies who are committed to building a high-quality Millennial team that can grow revenues, take market share, and tap new markets, this is a call to action.

Does character really count in your recruitment process?

The answer is, “Yes!”

The workforce is rapidly shifting. We see this shift happening before our eyes as more than 10,000 baby boomers retire every day. By 2025, Millennials will comprise the majority of the workforce on a national basis. In North Dakota, Millennials already hold many leadership and management roles. Research shows that 91% of Millennials aspire to leadership. So, within the next decade, we can expect the vast majority of our leaders to be Millennials.

But what exactly does character have to do with attracting and retaining next-gen leaders and workforce?

Your company’s reputation and your personal reputation as a character-based leader is a powerful attraction and retention tool. Your vision, mission, and values will be the foundation for building a highly productive team.

Does Character Really Count in Business?

The answer to this question is also a resounding, “Yes!”

Strong moral skills offer a distinct business advantage, according to business researchers Doug Lennick and Fred Kiel. In their book, *Moral Intelligence*, they report: “...even in a world that occasionally rewards bad behavior, the fastest way to build a successful business is to hire those people who have the highest moral and ethical skills you can find.”

Does Character Really Count with Millennials?

Again, the answer is, “Yes!”

Millennials care about the character of the people who lead them. They recognize a lack of authenticity on the part of their leaders in a flash.

Phyllis Hennecy Hendry—President/CEO of Ken Blanchard’s organization Lead Like Jesus—says, “Character is very important to Millennials. They see broken families, corrupt governments, impoverished nations, and acts of terror. They know that our world is in desperate need of good leaders.”

And, yet, there appears to be a conundrum. In our research for *Millennials Matter: Proven Strategies for*

Building Your Next-Gen Leader, we surveyed over 300 business leaders. Of these leaders, an alarming 60 percent expressed concerns in working with Millennials. More telling though, 45 percent of them cited character concerns, such as:

- A lack of grit and determination to tackle tough initiatives, often leaving colleagues and clients in a lurch,
- Careless follow-through on promises, negatively impacting both internal and external clients, and
- Refusing to take personal accountability for their actions and blaming anyone and anything other than themselves for their lack of results.

Coaching Character Strength – Your Call to Action

How might you respond to this challenge? While we are tempted to complain, we must realize we also have an incredible opportunity to provide Millennials with something they desperately crave: coaching and mentoring.

Seventy-nine percent of Millennials desire something more than a boss. They want someone to take a personal interest in their development. They want a coach or a mentor. Coaching and mentoring is your opportunity to lean into character development as you attract, equip, and retain a world-class workforce that can compete on a global basis.

A Simple Tool for Coaching

For many of us, virtue-talk sounds too old-school. That’s why I’ve developed a simple acronym, based on my upbringing on The Triple T Ranch, in Stanley, N.D.. This acronym helps us translate ancient truths into practical, rubber-meets-the-road, everyday coaching and mentoring actions: **DAKOTA**.

Determination – Strengthen your Millennial leader’s sense of grit to pursue their vision, goals, and objectives, even in the face of obstacles. Encourage them to regularly set “stretch” goals. Then, support them if they get stuck.

Awareness — Expand their ability to recognize, understand, and manage their emotions, strengths, and opportunities for growth. Then help them see how

this is true for others too. A behavioral assessment tool or survey can be helpful in sparking insights. Research reveals that 72% want regular coaching conversations about how they are doing and how they can improve their performance.

Knowing — Provide opportunities for them to develop their own vision, mission, and values and demonstrate how this can support the company's direction.

Optimism — Encourage realism while still expecting positive outcomes. Living with a high sense of gratefulness boosts morale. This, in turn, is tied to increased creativity, enhanced critical thinking skills, and improved decision-making in stressful situations.

Trustworthiness — Explain the value of trust. David Horsager, the author of *The Trust Edge*, says, "Without trust, leaders lose teams... people lose sales... organizations lose productivity, relationships, reputation, talent, customer loyalty, creativity, morale, revenue, and results."

Accountability — Counter excuse-making and blame-gaming that is rampant in our culture. I encourage Millennials to take charge of their own development by asking a catalytic question: "What might you do

differently in the future to get the results you want?" The question encourages ownership, action, and innovation.

The reality is, no amount of character development will guarantee the elimination of leadership failures. We are all imperfect people with the potential to stumble. What we can do as character-based leaders, however, is guide the next generation to develop a courageous core. This will strengthen our ability to attract and retain emerging leaders of strong personal character who will enable our businesses to thrive in highly competitive markets.



Danita Bye is a leadership and sales development expert with a master of arts in transformational leadership. She is founder of Sales Growth Specialists and serves on the boards of private Christian universities. A mother of three Millennials, Danita makes her home in North Dakota and is passionate about inspiring business leaders who see investing in their Millennial leaders as a key business growth and succession strategy, integral to their leadership legacy. She is the author of 'Millennials Matter: Proven Strategies for Building Your Next-Gen Leader.' More information may be found at www.danitabye.com.



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