



If We Don't Build It, They Won't Come

How Can We Attract Millennial Workers to the Millwork Industry?

BY ROSALIE LEONE

In the next few years, human-resources professionals are predicting a considerable change in the workforce. Millennials—approximately 80 million people born between 1976 and 2001—will make up nearly half of all U.S. workers by 2020. Will this mean lots of bright, young and skilled workers who are interested in pursuing a trade in the millwork industry?

A large number of baby boomers will be retiring and creating a void in the trades for millennials to fill. It's a group we are counting on to sustain our industry. But will there be enough fully trained millennials to fill the open positions? Our industry is not attracting these young people.

Schools either have discontinued or stopped endorsing shop and auto mechanics classes. At home, if Dad or Uncle Jeff hasn't placed a hammer in a young person's hand or introduced him (or her) to the basics to elicit some interest, we can assume he (or she) will study other professions at college.

With so many "flashy" career choices out there, it can be a challenge to draw the attention of would-be millwork industry stars.

But a challenge is not an impossibility. We can attract and retain millennials, but we have to start now. Let's consider how we can achieve this.

1. **Get social.** Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook are excellent ways to reach out to potential employees, because that's where you'll find them. Plus, when they see you're current with social media networks, they may be more apt to contact you.
2. **Start early.** By the time they get to high school, many kids already have an idea about what they think

they want to do. Why not visit the middle schools? For such a young audience, keep the message simple and entertaining to pique interest.

3. **Introduce a new career path.** Many high school students are looking for part-time and summer jobs. This is a great way to introduce them to a possible career in the trade, which may not require a four-year degree.
4. **Girls just want to have jobs.** Whether in the corner office or on the factory floor, women seek, and are succeeding in, non-traditional careers. While our industry may have been predominantly male in the past, it's not the past anymore. Be open to possibilities.
5. **Find the job fairs.** College campuses and military veterans' organizations are great places to start. Have your company host a booth, but maybe go one better by sponsoring a panel discussion or even a craft beer tasting that will encourage mingling and networking.
6. **Search for trade skills.** Not everyone goes to college. Speak with school guidance counselors or shop teachers. Check out community colleges that offer training in skills pertinent to our industry.
7. **Offer internships.** Millennials are eager to learn and make a difference and often are willing to spend time learning from the experts as interns. You can mentor a young person, give him or her insights about our industry and develop a relationship that could turn into mutually beneficial employment.
8. **Understand and Retain Tomorrow's Leaders.** Who are they and how do they differ from the current workforce? According to the experts,

millennials are "disruptors" in that they are already changing the way business gets done because of their numbers and pervasive use of technology. Clearly, our own business model will have to adapt to this new demographic—and quickly.

While millennials are entrepreneurial, they prefer collaboration. Millennials will be attracted by a multi-generational, experienced team from whom they can gain industry knowledge.

Flexibility is another millennial preference. A recent report from consulting firm Millennial Branding revealed that 45 percent of millennials would choose workplace flexibility over pay. If your company can offer the freedom to start earlier or later, stay after hours or work remotely, you may win some top talent.

The idea of "flexibility" carries over to other benefits as well. Being "fluid" with vacation time and offering plenty of opportunities for development could help you retain employees.

While none of us has all the answers on how to pinpoint the drive and needs of this generation, and though their job expectations may differ from the boomer parents and the Gen Xers who preceded them, the millennials are our future. Invest in them, build on it and they will come!

WMA will hold a panel discussion entitled "The Millennials: Preparing a New Generation for Leadership Success" at the WMA 52nd Annual Convention & Tradeshow, October 9-13, 2016 in Phoenix, Ariz. For more information, visit www.WorldMillworkAlliance.com. ■

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