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Understanding Generation Y (millennials) from their own perspective

Last April, our newsletter focused on how other generations see Generation Y. We're focusing on Generation Y again this month by bringing the perspective of three 20 year old ex-directors from **ESPM Junior** (*). They are: **Lucas Minoru Yokota** (Human Resources and Quality); **Carla Camargo** (Commercial); and **Guilherme Torneiro** (Marketing). Below is the transcript of our interview and their combined responses.

Much has been said about Gen Y, seldom from your own perspective. How do you describe your generation and what are the differences when compared to older generations?

We are not experts on Gen Y, but these generalizations tend to put everybody in the same bucket, forgetting that people are different. We have one characteristic, which we believe is more related to being young, than belonging to a particular generation: We're never content with what we're given. We question and try to go beyond, as any young person, from any generation, would do. On the other hand, we do observe some habits which are typical of our generation: We live in social networks, always in front of a screen.

This is really different. Being connected is a priority. These characteristics and habits create anxiety and expectations of immediate responses. Everything is for yesterday, we need to always be busy with something, to relax is to be stressed, and we quickly become bored. We're constantly looking for new stimuli to reward our daily activities. To simply watch TV is not enough, so we are also checking our smart phones, computer and tablets as we watch a TV show. These habits don't encourage activities which require concentration, like reading, for instance.

Confusing dreams with desires is something we see as a strong characteristic of our generation. A desire is something short-lived. "My dream is to get into college". This is not a dream, it's a desire. In other words, the concept became so flexible that you don't know what a dream is and what a simple desire is. People are dreaming about very simple and ephemeral stuff. You got into college, then what? Is the dream over when you get to college? You will need another dream. People are not clear about where they want to go. Everything is instantaneous, like a fast-food dream. That's why other people may believe that this generation does not know what they want.

Perhaps companies could help these young professionals to increase their awareness so they become clear on what they are looking for. Understanding who we really are. Nowadays, everything comes in little bits. The news, the internet, everything is superficial, so we also become superficial. We do many things at the same time. You never know if you are in control, or going with the flow.

One of the criticisms to Gen Y is the perceived lack of commitment. This generation is seen as being primarily concerned with quality of life, low engagement and an unwillingness to stay in the same company for 8, 10, 20 years. Myth or reality?

Engagement is very important. One of our concerns at ESPM Junior was creating and maintaining a healthy and motivating work environment. We observed that people who are committed and engaged create this type of environment. You walk the extra mile if the environment is harmonious and friendly and you trust the people you work with. You perform and deliver, but not just because the guy is your boss. That guy is my buddy, I



trust him, then I over perform—not to impress him, but because I want to make this a better place. We call this environment the *junior spirit*, a shared willingness to grow and grow together, to grow for something that will last years and leave a legacy for the future.

In our opinion, if there is a lack of commitment it is because of a lack of the proper environment. You cannot motivate anybody but you can offer them the proper environment. We look for a work environment where we can understand what we are doing and understand how far we can go. Motivation shows up in these scenarios and then engagement increases.

We believe this has to do with what you mentioned—quality of life. It is about you being okay with where you work and with whom you work. It has to do with the leadership style, as well as the tasks you execute. This is all connected and increases your level of commitment. It is like the old saying: “If you love what you do, you don’t have to work a day in your life.” This line summarizes everything we live and breathe at our junior enterprise as well our expectations about where we will work in the future.

At ESPM Junior we have a Utopian preview of what *could* exist in the “real world” and many times, we would like the clock to slow down as this is a very enjoyable experience, which offers significant development. In the marketplace, this scenario is a little different, due to this generation’s anxiety and expectation of instant rewards. Gen Yers look for a fast career and many times are not willing to take the long path to reach the desired position within a company. The marketplace’s fast rhythm may also push away Gen Yers from building a career with the company. We have seen many employees being fired out of the blue. We are talking about good performers, people

who built a career over decades of dedication and personal effort. In a way, this reality scares us, as staying in the same company for years may signify stability or uncertainty.

You believe that organizations will obtain your commitment if the job provides satisfaction, if you understand why you are performing your assigned tasks and your managers practice an inclusive leadership model.

Everything changes when you understand the reasons for performing a certain task, and you see value in that. This is very different than doing it because you *have to*. It is like studying. There is no motivation when you don’t see the purpose of certain topics. When you see that what you do brings a positive impact to your company or to your community, or that your company is adding value to the society, then you see the value of your job. This generates commitment and self motivation.

In a corporate environment, we can’t always do only what we like. Since there is no such thing as a perfect world, what can organizations do to increase retention of talented professionals and where can your generation compromise in order to obtain this result?

If you don’t enjoy a task, it’s probably because you don’t understand why you’re doing it, or it doesn’t make any sense to you. If that’s the case, then leave the job and the company. Go somewhere else. Sometimes information is missing, and we should go after it to understand why it is important. Sometimes it’s boring but important, like in college where although the career as a whole makes sense and motivates, there are classes that you enjoy and others that you don’t. Companies that promote a sense of belonging and value a dynamic and enjoyable environment are the ones that usually retain qualified staff. In addition to that, employees work and act as if they were



shareholders of such companies. They know why tasks are needed and understand why even small tasks are important to the whole operation, even if they dislike performing them.

Describe the perfect organization to attract and leverage young talented professionals like yourselves.

At the junior enterprise, we tried to implement what we believed was the best management model. A team based model, where each player is in their position because they are the best for it. For instance, our trainee is best in class, that's why he is there. Our consultant is best in class, that's why she is there. Like in soccer, you cannot simply get the best players and place them in any position. It won't work. A team that grows together performs better. There is no such thing as "I am performing well because the guy by my side is performing poorly," quite the opposite. Our expected leadership model fosters development. Never hold back someone's development or potential. Always invest in any person who wants to be developed. In summary, it's a management style that includes and allocates people in the best position for their profile, a model more collaborative than top-down.

You respect inclusive management, not necessarily hierarchy.

At first, hierarchy may generate respect. When you start working in a company, or get introduced to someone, your first impressions are normally related to their job title. The job title brings prestige, respect and the capacity of the person, for instance: "This is Robert, Human Resources Director." Maintaining that respect will depend on what the person is able to project in their daily interactions. After the initial interaction, respect is either earned or imposed. In the first case, it generates admiration, the aspiration to be like him, motivation, etc. If imposed, it generates dissatisfaction, questioning and other

negative feelings which are damaging to the work environment.

Each generation defines success differently. Older employees define it as working all their lives for the same company, until retirement. Others define success as getting to the top of the pyramid. While avoiding stereotypes, how do millennials define success?

There is no consensus, it depends on the individual. Some of our friends define success as getting a public job and having stability for life. Others define success as working for a company, getting know-how and then opening their own business—not just a business to make money, but a business that makes a social difference. For me, success is to do something that I enjoy and at the same time make a social contribution. We also have some friends who want to open their own business with the sole intention of making money. There is no standard. The only constant is the quality of life expected. I do not see anybody who wants to spend his/her life at work. Being a workaholic is becoming a thing of the past. There are many definitions of success, perhaps because of our individualism. Each person has their own definition.

Our schooling system contributes for success to be seen as individual as well. Most people are only concerned with themselves, their success, their career, their money. For this reason, there is no concern for our society and the world. Young people are constantly fighting each other for success: school grades, accomplishments, getting into college. One example of this reality was seen during our selection process for trainees for the junior enterprise as we had difficulty finding candidates with team spirit. Some candidates with good potential did not perform well as they were too concerned with self-promotion and trying to stand out from the others.



As you join the marketplace, there are four generations working side by side. What is your assessment of this situation? How can they work so that everybody wins?

An example would be the Human Resources director from the company where I am currently working as an intern. He has been there for 15 years. He has worked in East Africa, is a great guy who is very human, accessible and he's aligned with what I value.

So that we all can work in harmony two things need to happen: 1) the older generations should not *assert* themselves as leaders to gain respect and 2) we should not show arrogance, believing that we are the best. We need to be humble, with a learning mindset. One works to learn. One works to grow. We need an open mind to understand and learn from previous generations. They are there to transmit their knowledge and experience to the newer generations, that's the great exchange. Don't forget that inspirational leadership – not positional power – contributes to the intergenerational synergy. When I was introduced to my director, my first thoughts were: "I want to be like him." Managers inspire us to be here and beyond. And we also want to be respected.

What makes a millennial choose between a job in company A or B?

Flexibility, focus on staff development, humanization of relationships . . . valuing both the contribution of experienced staff and beginners, a healthy work environment, quality of life, companies that do not expect you to be a workaholic in order to succeed and companies that do not encourage competition.

Talent retention is not related to how much money you make, but to how much you enjoy your environment, you admire the leadership, you feel recognized and respected, you see leaders inside the company that inspire you.

As typical millennials they will love if you decide to invite them to be part of your social network on Facebook or LinkedIn.

Finally, if you want to have some fun, please take the attached 14 item quiz which will tell you how "Millennial" you are. Please follow the link

<http://www.pewresearch.org/quiz/how-millennial-are-you/>

*** ESPM Junior is a junior enterprise from ESPM (School of Higher Education in Advertising and Marketing), São Paulo, Brazil**

The first junior enterprise was created in 1967, in Paris, at the ESSEC (L'Ecole Supérieure des Sciences Economiques et Commerciales). According to Wikipedia, a junior enterprise is a local non-profit organization entirely managed by students. Related to their field of studies the students offer consulting services to the market; experiencing unique learning opportunities by doing professional project work on the one side and managing small- to medium sized enterprises on the other, by doing this the students add practical experience to their theoretical skills and bridge the gap between academia and the business world. Most Junior Enterprises are linked to universities or business schools.

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