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Contributor, social



Build a winning team

Engage millennial employees with competitive kindness

Millennials are the largest cohort in today's workplaces and the least engaged generation of employees—a situation insurance professionals recognize as a problem. However, professional, independent insurance agents can give millennials a reason to come to work by using competitive kindness—a new approach to employee engagement that blends competition and altruism in a way that makes everyone a winner.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics, millennials will account for almost half of U.S. employees by 2025. (They're already 60 percent of the global workforce at Big Four accounting giant Ernst & Young.) But, a recent Gallup poll tells us only 29 percent of millennials are engaged at work. And, 16 percent of them may be actively sabotaging your business.

For professional, independent insurance professionals, these issues may be even more pressing. The average age of insurance agents today, according to McKinsey & Co., is 59. Twenty-five percent of them will retire by 2018. It's these older insurance professionals, and not the new millennial hires, who feel the most positive about the insurance industry, according to a Lifecourse.com study published in 2012.

Whether this is a human-resources disaster or a business blessing in disguise depends on what you do about it. Here's our best tip to get—and keep—your millennial employees performing to their full potential.

What millennials want

Leadership opportunities breed loyalty. According to Deloitte's 2016 Millennial Survey, 66 percent of all millennial employees and 57 percent of millennials in senior positions expect to have moved on to another job by 2020. Almost three-quarters (71 percent) of those who plan to leave their current employer in the next two years say they're unhappy with how their leadership skills are being developed.

Good employers are good corporate citizens. Corporate social responsibility is important to millennials. The 2016 Millennial Employee Engagement Study by Cone Communications indicates almost two-thirds (64 percent) of millennials won't work for a company that doesn't have strong corporate social-responsibility commitments. Three-quarters of millennials would work for a more responsible company, even if it meant a pay

cut. In comparison, around half of U.S. employees overall factor corporate social responsibility into their employment decisions.

Wanted: A home for digital natives. Millennials are the first generation to enter the workforce with a better understanding of technology compared to their bosses. In a 2016 Microsoft survey, 93 percent of millennials said the latest technology was an important factor when choosing their employer. In a PricewaterhouseCoopers study, 73 percent of millennials said access to their preferred technology makes them more effective at work. As an interesting aside, Facebook's research shows millennials check their smartphones an average of 157 times a day.

Yes, there is an 'I' in team. Gamification and team-building activities are popular among millennials, who seek interesting workplace experiences and opportunities to get to know their co-workers in a fun way. A poll by The Go Game, a San Francisco-based team-building business, showed 79 percent of millennials felt team and culture-building activities helped retain talent, compared to 46 percent of baby boomers. Millennials, raised on participation medals and gold stars, thrive on rewards and recognition in the workplace. In a 2015 online article, David Coons, vice president of insurance industry talent provider, The Jacobson Group, suggests insurance companies appeal to millennials by "embrac[ing] a mindset of 'everybody gets a trophy' where the trophy recognizes achievements at all levels, not just the standard 'win.'"

The small biz advantage

There is a lot for millennials to love about small- and medium-sized workplaces—it's simply a matter of spreading the news to compete with the recruitment budgets and fancy benefit plans of bigger employers.

For example, smaller businesses have fewer barriers between senior and junior staff and more opportunities for meaningful in-the-moment feed-

back and informal mentorship. The new recruit can be on a team with a director or vice president during work hours, then play in the after-work Ultimate Frisbee league with his or her bosses. That's not so likely at a company with 500 employees.

Decisions can be made more quickly in smaller workplaces. This allows millennial employees to have their voices heard on subjects they care about—technology, transparency, corporate giving, social activities, flexible work schedules—and they can see fast action on their feedback.

Millennials expect their employers to help them develop their skills. They're quick climbers and smaller businesses have a shorter ladder for them to scale, plus opportunities for formal and informal cross-training will help them expand their skill set and enlarge their work experience.

Competitive kindness

So what's the best tip for small businesses looking to engage and retain their millennial employees?

A promising new approach is competitive kindness: a way to channel the universal human drive to be the best into actions that make the world a better place. Competitive kindness appeals to the millennial's desire for individual recognition and drive to make a difference. It blends the best of team building, game-playing and giving back. A business that makes its competitive kindness initiative digital has the all-important technology piece covered, too.

For millennials, making a difference isn't exclusively about money. Simply passing around the proverbial cup for charitable donations won't cut it to get millennial employees fully invested in a cause or committed

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to a company's culture. Rather, they need to see a direct, hands-on connection with the problem, issue or goal being addressed. Millennials are looking for experiences. They're looking for fun. They're looking for new. And they're motivated to give of themselves and their talents—not just their money.

One online platform, xocial (pronounced soh-shuhl) brings competitive kindness to businesses and organizations of all sizes, making it fun and simple to engage millennial employees to achieve corporate responsibility goals and build a socially conscious, cause-minded company culture.

To initiate a campaign, a company simply sets up a social page to promote a particular goal or cause of its own choosing. The company also specifies various "challenges" employees can complete to earn points in support of the campaign's goal or cause. For example, if a company's goal is to improve staff health, challenges might include skipping the elevator and taking the stairs, drinking eight glasses of water a day, or taking a local exercise class during lunch.

As challenges are completed, points are tallied and a leaderboard is displayed on the company's campaign profile page. Visitors to the page—not just employees, but customers and potential customers—can see what the company and its employees have accomplished.

Whether a small business works with third-party solutions or creates its own in-house program to engage millennials using competitive kindness, it's an opportunity to strengthen corporate culture; connect teams using technology; inspire leadership; and enhance corporate social-responsibility programs—all things

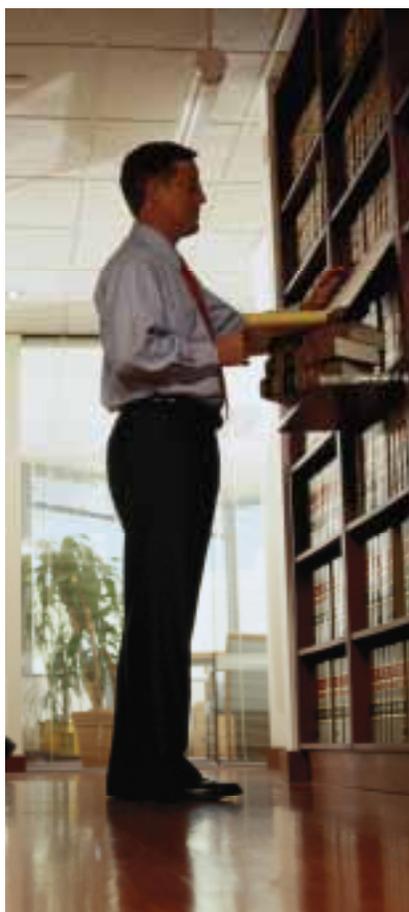
millennials say matter to them—without a big investment in infrastructure or time. In short, it's goodness delivered as a game—and in the eyes of a millennial, that might be as good as it gets. ■

Dawson is a freelance writer and community activist who has covered subjects as diverse as community gardens, industrial insulation and men's socks. To find out more about xocial, visit xocial.com.



Engaged employees: Who cares?

Gallup's 2016 employee engagement meta-analysis indicates businesses with engaged employees do better than those whose employees have tuned out—or worse, turned off. Business units that rank in the top quartile for employee engagement enjoy 17 percent higher productivity, 21 percent greater profitability, 10 percent better customer ratings, 41 percent less absenteeism and have 70 percent fewer safety incidents than business units in the bottom quartile.



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