



Executive Summary – The Future of Millennials’ Careers

January 28, 2011

Commissioned by the Career Advisory Board, presented by DeVry University and conducted by Harris Interactive

Interviewing: December 29, 2010 through January 10, 2011

Respondents: 500 U.S. Adults aged 21-31 and 523 Hiring Managers

METHODOLOGY

The Future of Millennials’ Careers was conducted online within the United States between December 29, 2010 and January 10, 2011 among 500 adults aged 21 to 31 who are either employed or plan to work at some time in the future, (“Millennials”) and 523 employed adults with responsibility for hiring decisions within their company or department and who interact with employees between 21 and 31 years of age. Results from the Millennials study were weighted as needed for age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, region, and household income to align them with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

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OVERVIEW

Millennials are poised to pursue career paths distinctly different than prior generations as they enter the workforce. In order to succeed, Millennials believe they need to pursue higher education, obtain transferable skills, and hold a variety of different jobs, and perhaps even multiple career paths. They believe “success” is a career where they do meaningful and personally fulfilling work that has a positive impact on others or on society as a whole while earning a high salary.

Hiring managers recognize some of the plans and ambitions of Millennials, but they still hold misconceptions by clinging to stereotypes of the Millennial generation. Managers and Millennials alike anticipate that the younger generation will have different work experiences when compared to older generations - most notably by holding more jobs and having more flexibility in location and hours worked. One of the most pervasive misconceptions among managers is that the chance to earn a high salary, perhaps without putting in the appropriate amount of effort and time, is the primary motivating factor for young workers. Managers also place more emphasis on the role of obtaining transferable skills and setting career goals with managers to give Millennials the chance to seek opportunities to advance their careers.

However, both groups agree on the weaknesses and strengths of the millennial workforce. This generation’s comfort, adaptability, and skill with technology is one of their greatest assets and the technology industry itself is seen as holding the most opportunity for Millennials’ future careers. Yet Millennial workers have weaknesses to overcome- primarily with their impatience with established processes and their inability to accept criticism from management. If Millennials are able to effectively leverage strengths while overcoming their weaknesses, they are poised to transform the landscape of the workforce and the pursuit of success.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Merits of Work that is Fulfilling versus Financially Rewarding

Millennials are committed to securing work that is meaningful and that provides them with a sense of accomplishment. When Millennials look ahead to the state of their careers in their late thirties, their primary professional goal is career growth and development.

Similarly, when evaluating a workplace, Millennials' top three priorities include achieving stable employment, doing fulfilling or meaningful work, and garnering an appropriate starting salary. Once established in a job that suits their career plans, Millennials are divided as to which factors might lead them to switch positions: two in ten would leave a suitable job to take a new position that offered a higher salary, for a new organization more closely aligned with their career plans, or if they disliked the culture of their work environment.

Although compensation is important, it is a secondary concern for the Millennial generation. However, hiring managers mistakenly believe that Millennials are most concerned with securing a high salary both now and in the future. Hiring managers also believe that securing a high-paying job with an appropriate starting salary is the top priority when Millennials evaluate a workplace. Hiring managers again suspect the opportunity for a higher salary is the primary motivating factor behind the decision to change jobs.

- Three in ten (30 percent) Millennials identify meaningful work as the single most important measure of a successful career. In fact, more than seven in ten (71 percent) Millennials believe that meaningful work is among the three most essential factors that define a successful career.
 - In contrast, only about one in ten (11 percent) hiring managers believe that meaningful work is the most important factor contributing to Millennials' career success; over one-half (53 percent) believe it is one of the top three measures of their success.
- Three quarters (75 percent) also believe a sense of accomplishment is among the top three essential factors for success.
- Nearly seven in ten (69 percent) managers consider high pay to be among the top three – and approximately one-half (48 percent) think it is most critical – indications of Millennials' career success.
- In comparison, about two-thirds (68 percent) of Millennials believe high pay is among the top three most important measures.
 - Approximately one-quarter (27 percent) of Millennials identify securing a high pay as the single most important measure of career success.
- In response to an open-ended question, nearly six in ten (58 percent) Millennials cite career growth and development as the primary professional goal they'd like to reach by the time they are in their late 30s or early 40s.
 - Their responses range from “job stability or security” (15 percent) to “moving up to management or leadership roles” (9 percent) or “helping others” (7 percent).
 - Half as many hiring managers (29 percent) cite career growth and development as Millennials' top career goal.

DETAILED FINDINGS

- While more than two in five (45 percent) hiring managers believe Millennials primarily seek financial goals, just over one quarter of Millennials (27 percent) mention financial stability as their top career goal.
 - For Millennials, these goals include being well-paid (13 percent), achieving financial security (8 percent), or earning a higher salary (5 percent).
- When evaluating a workplace over the next fifteen years, Millennials often cite among their top three priorities the chance to achieve stable employment (24 percent), doing fulfilling or meaningful work (21 percent), and garnering an appropriate starting salary (21 percent).
 - Hiring managers are about twice as likely to perceive starting salary (38 percent) as the number one priority of Millennials.
 - Many hiring managers also believe stable employment (15 percent) and amount of time spent at work (11 percent) may be the highest priority of Millennials.
 - Less than one in ten (8 percent) hiring managers cite meaningful work as the top workplace priority of the Millennial generation.
- When evaluating a workplace for the next 15 years, over half of Millennials identify their bottom three priorities as
 - having the opportunity to travel or work internationally (60 percent),
 - having a mentor (57 percent), or
 - getting the chance to lead a team (52 percent).
- Hiring managers believe that Millennials' lowest priorities for their future workplace include:
 - having a mentor (46 percent),
 - assimilating with the organization's culture (37 percent), and
 - traveling and working internationally (34 percent).
- Nearly one quarter (24 percent) of Millennials would leave a suitable job to take a new position that offered higher pay while about two in five (41 percent) hiring managers agreed.
 - Other important factors Millennials cite as reasons to leave a job include
 - Finding a new organization which provides a better match with their career plans (21 percent), or
 - Disliking the culture of their work environment (18 percent).

DETAILED FINDINGS

Perceptions about Career Progression

Two-thirds of Millennials have already decided on a career path. However, those who are not presently working or studying¹ are considerably more likely to lack such focus. Millennials see themselves working in several different careers and jobs over the course of their lifetime, and they are open to working in assorted types of organizations, ranging from being self-employed to working for multi-national corporations.

About half of Millennials expect to advance within a single career during the next fifteen years. Millennials expect that their promotions will be based on performance, rather than driven by years of service or economic indicators. In spite of Millennials' expectations, hiring managers believe that these young workers will expect to be promoted every year or two without regard to performance.

Over the course of their lifetime, Millennials anticipate pursuing three different careers and four to five jobs, on average. This expectation of re-inventing their professional personas several times might be a reflection of the large proportion of college graduates who are currently employed in fields unrelated to their field of study -- more than two in five.

- Over two thirds (68 percent) of Millennials have decided upon a career path or series of career paths to pursue, although the decision may not be final.
 - Almost six in ten (57 percent) Millennials who are not employed and who are not students¹ have not yet decided on their future career path(s).
 - Though not statistically significant, it is interesting to note that Millennials with higher levels of education are more likely to have clear goals for their future career path(s).
 - Three quarters (75 percent) of college graduates have decided on future plans, compared with just over six in ten (63 percent) of those with less than a four year degree.
- Millennials anticipate having an average of three different careers (mean= 2.9) and five different jobs (mean=4.5) over the course of their lifetime.
 - Millennials aged 26-31 expect to have significantly more careers than those aged 21-25 (mean of 3.4 versus 2.5, respectively).
 - College graduates anticipate working in notably more jobs than do those with less education (average of 5.5 jobs versus 3.8 jobs, respectively).
- Approximately half of Millennials would be interested or very interested in
 - Working for a large business (51 percent),
 - A national corporation (51 percent),
 - Being self-employed (50 percent), or
 - Working for a multi-national corporation (48 percent).

¹ Note- small base size among Millennials who are not employed and are not students (n=70). Findings should be considered directional.

DETAILED FINDINGS

- More than half (55 percent) of Millennials anticipate advancing within a single career during the next fifteen years; over one quarter (27 percent) expect to try a variety of jobs and careers, and 13 percent are not sure.
 - More than one third (36 percent) of Millennials who are not employed and who are not students² are simply unsure about their future career plans, compared with less than one in ten Millennials who are students (7 percent) or employed (9 percent).
- Nearly half (49 percent) of Millennials expect to be promoted based on their performance, regardless of their length of employment. One quarter (25 percent) of hiring managers say the same of Millennials.
 - Hiring managers most commonly believe Millennials expect to be promoted every year (32 percent) or two years (28 percent).
 - This is in comparison to 17 percent of Millennials who expect to be promoted annually and 18 percent who expect to be promoted at least every two years.
- At the time of the survey, over two in five (44 percent) Millennials name Warren Buffett as the most successful business leader while nearly the same proportion of hiring managers (36 percent) mistakenly believe Mark Zuckerberg to be the top choice of the Millennials.
 - Just one in eight Millennials (13 percent) considers Mark Zuckerberg to be the most successful business leader.
- Among Millennials who are employed and have obtained at least an Associate's degree, about two in five (41 percent) are currently employed in positions that are not related to their field of study.

² Note- small base size among Millennials who are not employed and are not students (n=70). Findings should be considered directional.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Career Experiences of Millennials Compared with Older Generations

Millennials and hiring managers expect work experiences of this generation to vary from those of their parents, especially by having more jobs and careers than older generations, working non-traditional hours, and working across a broader range of work environments. Additionally, Millennials exhibit an awareness of the weaknesses of their generation, in terms of workplace skills, when compared with older generations.

Millennials expect to have more jobs and careers than their parents' generation. Yet, knowing that Millennials will have more jobs and careers over their lifetime does not impact most hiring managers' decision to hire them.

- Nearly nine in ten (89 percent) Millennials expect their work experiences to vary from those of their parents' generation.
 - The differences many Millennials anticipate include:
 - Working non-traditional hours (50 percent);
 - Working in a greater number of work environments than their parents did (46 percent);
 - More telecommuting (37 percent);
 - Participating in more retraining programs (35 percent) than their parents; and,
 - Promotions to leadership roles at a younger age than their parents (32 percent).
- About half (55 percent) of hiring managers believe their generation lacks patience with established processes and is incapable of receiving criticism from managers (51 percent).
 - Similar proportions of Millennials cite these same flaws (47 percent and 54 percent, respectively).
- Almost four in ten Millennials (38 percent) believe that their generation cannot communicate effectively, matching hiring managers' perceptions (35 percent agree).
- While fewer Millennials believe their generation is lacking either political savvy (26 percent) or independence (19 percent); hiring managers are on the same page (24 percent and 26 percent name these weaknesses, respectively).
- When Millennials compare their generation to older generations, over eight in ten (81 percent) Millennials expect they will have more jobs and careers over the course of their time in the workforce. The same proportion of hiring managers agrees (81 percent).

DETAILED FINDINGS

- Over half (55 percent) of hiring managers report that they are no more or less likely to hire Millennials while nearly one-quarter (24 percent) are more inclined to hire them in light of the fact Millennials will have more jobs over their time in the workforce than prior generations.
 - Hiring managers in companies that employ 501 to 2500 employees are significantly more likely to be inclined to hire Millennials (48 percent) compared to their cohorts at smaller or larger companies (17 percent of those in companies with up to 50 employees, 27 percent of those with 51 to 500 employees, and just 8 percent of those in companies with 2,501 or more employees).
- About three in ten Millennials (30 percent) and hiring managers (35 percent) agree that Millennials would thrive in a workplace like The Office's Dunder Mifflin - "a casual workplace with a few eccentric characters, including the boss."

Millennials' Primary Strength: Digital Sophistication

Both Millennials and hiring managers recognize that computer skills and comfort with digital technology are one of this generation's greatest strengths, and certainly a skill upon which they could rely in the event of a career change. Furthermore, both groups believe the technology industry has the greatest opportunity for Millennials over the next fifteen years, while the manufacturing industry holds the least opportunity.

- Digital comfort— such as using social media and learning about new technology — was the top career skill cited by one-quarter (25 percent) of Millennials. More than half (54 percent) of Millennials rank it among the top three most important skills.
 - Hiring managers agree that digital comfort is the Millennial generation's most valuable professional skill: more than one in five (21 percent) rank it as the number one, and nearly half (48 percent) rank it among the top three skills Millennials have to offer employers.
- Approximately one-quarter (23 percent) of Millennials and almost one in five (18 percent) hiring managers name computer skills as this generation's most transferable skill.
 - More than two in five (45 percent) Millennials and over one-third (35 percent) of hiring managers consider computer skills to be among the top three transferable skills this generation has to offer employers.
 - Other, less frequently mentioned skills among the top three include
 - Problem-solving (31 percent of Millennials and 23 percent of hiring managers),
 - Multi-tasking (25 percent and 27 percent, respectively), and
 - Real work experience (20 percent of both groups).

DETAILED FINDINGS

- Six in ten Millennials (63 percent) and hiring managers (58 percent) believe that the technology industry is among the top three industries holding the most opportunity for Millennials in the next fifteen years.
 - Some Millennials also foresee continuing opportunity in each of the following industries:
 - Entertainment and media (28 percent),
 - Financial services (27 percent),
 - Engineering (26 percent), and
 - Education (24 percent).
 - Around three in ten hiring managers think financial services (32 percent), telecommunications (30 percent), and advertising (26 percent) are among the industries with the most opportunity for Millennials over the next fifteen years.
- About half of Millennials (47 percent) and hiring managers (47 percent) point to the manufacturing industry as one of the top three industries with the least opportunity.
 - Around one third of Millennials (33 percent) and hiring managers (31 percent) cite transportation among the three industries with the least opportunity.

Importance of Higher Education

Millennials believe that getting a proper education is the most important step they can take today to facilitate their career advancement over the next fifteen years. Large majorities of Millennials assert that completing at least a Bachelor's degree is highly relevant to achieving career success. Yet, Millennials also acknowledge the importance of transferable skills and believe obtaining them is important to their career advancement.

There is a sentiment among hiring managers that education may not satisfy all of the requirements for career advancement; they recognize the merits of learning transferable skills and of mentoring by more senior staff.

- Two in five (40 percent) Millennials believe that getting the proper education is the most important step they can take today to advance their career over the next fifteen years; nearly three in ten (28 percent) hiring managers agree.
 - Nearly two thirds (65 percent) of Millennials and almost six in ten (56 percent) hiring managers consider education to be among the three most important ways to advance their careers over the next fifteen years.

DETAILED FINDINGS

- Over six in ten (62 percent) hiring managers believe that learning transferable skills is one of the top three steps that Millennials can take today to advance their career over the next fifteen years; almost as many Millennials (57 percent) agree.
 - Nearly two in five (39 percent) hiring managers also consider setting goals with managers to be one of the top three most important ways that Millennials can prepare for the next phases of their career.
 - This is nearly twice the proportion of Millennials (20 percent) who value guidance from senior staff.
- Millennials often consider each of the following choices to also be among the three most important to advance their careers over the next fifteen years:
 - Actively networking (49 percent),
 - Getting an internship, apprenticeship, or vocational training (31 percent), and
 - Researching emerging careers of interest (26 percent).
- Both groups agree on the top two least important steps for Millennials to take in preparation for the next fifteen years, they are:
 - Joining the armed services (70 percent Millennials, 50 percent hiring managers), and
 - Joining a professional organization (42 percent Millennials, 55 percent hiring managers).
- Nine in ten (87 percent) Millennials consider completing a Bachelor's degree to be very or somewhat relevant in order to achieve a successful career. Almost as many Millennials value a Master's degree (83 percent).
 - Around three quarters of Millennials find a professional degree to be highly relevant, such as an M.D. or J.D. (75 percent), or a professional certification, such as IT, financial advisor or medical certifications (72 percent).
- Fewer Millennials consider high school diplomas (56 percent) or Associate's degrees (48 percent) to be very or somewhat relevant to a successful career.
 - Millennials who are less educated (i.e., they've received an Associate's degree or less) are significantly more likely than college graduates with a Bachelor's degree or higher to find high school diplomas (66 percent and 43 percent, respectively) or Associate's degrees (60 percent and 33 percent, respectively) highly relevant to their career success.
 - Conversely, college graduates are more likely than those with less education to ascribe relevance to a Master's degree (93 percent and 77 percent, respectively), or a professional degree (84 percent and 68 percent, respectively).