

Managing Millennials in HIM

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By Kayce Dover, MSHI, RHIA

Healthcare is one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy, and Millennials (individuals born between 1982 and 2000) are a vast and vital part of a multigenerational workforce. This article explores ways to bridge generational gaps in the workplace, offering insights and strategies for attracting, managing, and retaining Millennials in health information management (HIM).

Challenges in the Workplace

Managing a multigenerational workforce is a challenge for all industries, not just healthcare.

As the next generation of industry professionals, Millennials bring different characteristics, life experiences, and expectations to the workplace. HIM leaders need to respect the differences and find creative ways to engage this new generation entering the workforce—and show how they can make an impact by meeting departmental goals and contributing to the success of the organization.

Bridging the gaps is about leadership and building relationships. While common ground exists across generations, considering differing perspectives, values, and priorities is critical to communication, collaboration, and productivity. Different generations—and even different individuals—value different communication and work styles. Understanding what motivates people forms the foundation for effective management and top performance.

Millennials are often stereotyped as unfocused, impatient, entitled, and lacking motivation. Is this a fair assumption? From an HIM perspective, conversations with peers at a recent HIM meeting revealed some of the same challenges along with others related to loyalty and retention. However, the challenges were eventually reframed as ideas for connection and leadership.

According to one manager, “It’s important to help Millennials understand the urgency of completing daily tasks required to meet productivity and quality standards. We have to find ways to instill long-term commitment and understanding of job purpose to get their buy-in.”

While awareness of differences is an important first step, making assumptions can derail efforts to connect. Acknowledging similarities is equally important.

Overcoming stereotypes can be an obstacle for the younger generation. After all, it is not fair to automatically stigmatize an individual based on the stereotypes of their generation. It wasn’t long ago that young Generation X individuals were stereotyped as “slackers” with limited motivation and life direction by older generations. Are the complaints about Millennials just more of the classic “kids these days” gripes of older generations—or something different?

Managers have a choice. They can either accept and perpetuate negative stereotypes or choose to see the needs, objectives, and talents of others, as suggested by The Arbinger Institute in their recent bestseller, [*The Outward Mindset*](#).

As a start, it is important for managers to understand what matters to Millennials, and what they need to succeed.

What Matters Most to Millennials

Like people of any generation, Millennials want to feel valued and respected. They want to make a positive impact. They value flexibility, meaningful work, opportunities for advancement, job satisfaction, financial security, and work-life balance. They’re tech savvy and tend to be risk takers. In today’s high-tech world, they want to help their organizations acquire and make the most of advanced technology. This is especially important as HIM professionals seek to expand their role in health information technology.

Amid the discussion around generational differences and priorities, a [Harvard Business Review article](#) points to a growing body of evidence that suggests employees of all ages are more alike than different in their attitudes and values at work.

When asked about their long-term career goals, “Make a positive impact on my organization” was a top rated response option selected by Millennials (25 percent), Generation X (21 percent), and Baby Boomers (23 percent). This option was the top response selected by Millennials, while Gen X’s top response was “Work for an organization among the best in my industry” (25 percent versus Millennials 21 percent response), while Baby Boomers rated “Help solve social and/or environmental challenges” as their top response (24 percent, versus Millennials 22 percent and Gen X’s 20 percent).

Overall, Millennials, Gen X, and Baby Boomers were very similar in their long-term goals according to the *Harvard Business Review* survey ([Click here](#) to read full survey results).

During the recruitment and hiring process, HIM managers can fully explore a candidate’s career goals, advancement expectations, work-life balance needs, specific areas of interest, communication style, and ability to collaborate as part of a team. Knowing their values and expectations up front will help ensure job satisfaction and the right culture fit.

Creating a Positive Work Culture

Managers must engage employees to create a culture that acknowledges differences while building on common ground. Happiness in the workplace is a top priority. Everyone appreciates a sense of belonging and feeling valued.

Here are 10 strategies for attracting, managing, and retaining Millennials:

- Encourage department communication—engage employees for ideas and feedback
- Set achievable goals that contribute to the big picture—department and organization
- Empower Millennials with the latest technology—tools they need to succeed
- Understand their priorities—listen to their perspectives and ideas
- Avoid perpetuating assumptions and stereotypes
- Provide opportunities for advancement, career growth, leadership
- Address challenges up front, set clear expectations, offer encouragement
- Celebrate achievements; hold frequent huddles to share information
- Offer professional development and learning opportunities including leadership training
- Promote work-life balance—flexible hours, opportunities to work remotely

Employees feel empowered in an environment in which everyone contributes to the overall success of the organization. Effective leadership on every level—department, multidisciplinary team, C-suite—promotes a positive work culture.

Leadership—the Path to Success

In a discussion on Millennials in the workplace, author and motivational speaker [Simon Sinek](#) emphasized the importance of leadership and building relationships. And that starts with everyday interactions. “When sitting and waiting for a meeting to start... everyone should be focused on building relationships... That’s how trust forms,” Sinek said. “Trust doesn’t form at an event in a day. Even bad times don’t form trust immediately. It’s the slow, steady consistency and we need to create mechanisms where we allow for those little innocuous interactions to happen.”

Healthcare’s new value-based economy stands to benefit from the unique skills and competencies of the millennial workforce. Any entry-level professional has the potential to be a creative and dynamic force within the HIM department and across an enterprise—given guidance to perform at their best and progress in their careers. Remember, senior HIM professionals are role models and leaders. Building relationships with the next generation will help that leadership role to grow.

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