What HR Managers Need to Know About the ‘Millennial Split’ Generation
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No other generation has been more dissected than the millennials, it seems. Here’s something else to think about: there is actually a “millennial split” within the generation that divides older members from their younger counterparts.

The millennial generation, of which I’m a part, is stereotypically into social media and all things digital, and according to everyone else, we’re obsessed with ourselves. We want instant gratification and we’re also known as the “me” generation.1,2

One reason for the interest in millennials is its sheer size. There are about 75 million of us who were born from 1981 to 1997, which makes us even larger than the baby boomer generation.3 We carry a lot of spending power, which makes retailers want to understand us.

Researchers view millennials as a vastly different generation than those that preceded us.

Millennials are more likely to focus on eating right and controlling weight. We are also more educated, more saddled with student loan debt and more likely to spend our 20s figuring out what we want to do with our lives.4

Many argue that lumping the entire generation into one is unfair when there is a clear millennial split.

Here’s a look at the millennial sub-groups and what motivates them:

The Older Millennial Split

Older millennials were born between 1981 and 1988.5 I fall into this category. We were teen-agers at the turn of the century and clearly remember the events of September 11th. We also remember a time before the Internet, iPhones and iPods. The older half of my generation got a job after college and purchased our own cell phone plan and car insurance.

And more importantly for employers, older millennials didn’t have the privilege of staying on their parents’ health insurance until age 26. That law didn’t go into effect until September 2010; by that time most of us who were working full time had already navigated the health insurance industry through our employers and had begun to understand the value of health & welfare benefits.6
The Younger Millennial Split

The younger half of my generation was born between 1988 and 1997. They’re digital natives. By the time they were heading off to middle school they could access the Internet with ease. They were likely given cell phones as teen-agers and now are keener on hanging out on Snapchat than Facebook.

Younger millennials were also hit harder by the Great Recession of 2008, which occurred when many were in college. This event made finding work after college (and even during summers between college) more difficult. The recession contributed to their “boomerang” habit of moving back home after college.

The millennial split and their generational differences can complicate matters for HR professionals, who are tasked with ensuring that new employees understand everything from how much the company contributes to core health & welfare benefits (medical, dental, vision, life and disability insurance), to explaining the nuances of voluntary benefits and ensuring that employees understand how health & welfare benefits work and how to use them properly.

But what further complicates this gap is that some HR professionals might be of yet another generation, either gen-X or the baby boomer. An older gen-Xer or baby boomer might lump millennials into one category and treat them as such, when in reality there are two generational subsets with their own attitudes, opinions and education about benefits.

How to Deal with the Millennial Split

Start by acknowledging that all millennials are not equal. Older millennials grew up in a time completely apart from their younger generational counterparts and require different types of employee benefits education and communication materials.

For example, a total compensation statement that outlines exactly how much an employer contributes to benefits can show job candidates the company’s commitment to employee health and wellness. Younger millennials who have recently aged out of their parents’ healthcare benefits may not realize the true cost of medical, dental, vision, life and disability benefits. Their primary concern is still their salary and take-home pay. A total compensation statement can be a real eye-opener.

In addition to total compensation, many younger millennials might need a crash course in how medical benefits work. Many employees who’ve been on their own health & welfare insurance plan for years still confuse terms like copay and coinsurance. It’s unfair to think that younger millennials would understand how a health savings account works and knows how to choose the best benefits plan at enrollment time.

HR professionals can arrange group benefits education sessions for new employees to explain how benefits work and how to choose the best plan for their needs.

Consider communication media options (we call this channel of choice communications) for different types of employees. Younger millennials may read internal social media posts or email more so than their older
counterparts. This is a good time to consider the communication preferences of the entire workforce.

Being sensitive to new communication avenues for a diverse employee group can help ease benefits administration for HR. And understanding that not every millennial learns the same way—or has had the same experience with health & welfare benefits—could help shape plan design and benefits education strategies.

1 CNN “Snapchat? No thanks; I’m an Old Millennial”
2 Kaiser Health News “New Health Law’s Protections For Adult Children Begins”
4 Time “Millennials: The Me Me Me Generation”
5 LinkedIn “8 Millennials’ Traits You Should Know About Before You Hire Them”
6 Pew Research “Millennials overtake Baby Boomers as America’s largest generation”
7 NPR “Amid The Stereotypes, Some Facts About Millennials”

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