

LEADING THE MILLENNIALS



A Google search for “adults under 40” throws up varied results, from their overwhelming characteristics to their free-spirited outlook towards work. While some of what that search reveals might be true, this post is about what a team of youngsters in their mid-20s taught me, a Gen X executive, over the last three years.

But before that, here is a sneak-peek into the work responsibilities of these adults under 40. The team interacts directly with the customers globally and helps resolve their complex technical issues. For the team, this means technical proficiency, self-confidence in dealing with experienced customers with different cultural backgrounds, odd work hours, and immense job satisfaction with solving complex issues. For BMC, this means a team of talented, knowledge-hungry youngsters who learn new technologies fast and solve customer issues. They also represent the BMC brand and help ensure the customer’s satisfaction, which helps drive customer loyalty.

In such dynamic and high-pressure work, my team has displayed the key to a happy and successful work environment: collaboration.

A generation for collaboration

As a new director, I wanted to know what was going well and what improvement opportunities exist in the team. I kept some Post-it notes in my office and asked the team to write down their concerns, anonymously. Without being wary, the team provided a great response to this initiative. We categorized the problems in appropriate buckets and started addressing one bucket at a time,

ultimately resulting in a stronger, happier, and more confident team that started trusting the leader who walks the talk.

“The top-down flow of communication is outdated. Involve us in two-way communication and we will shun our inhibitions and be equal partners in embracing change in the workplace,” they seemed to be telling me.

Performance is all that matters

One of the traits of adults under 40 that is often portrayed negatively is their craving for freedom. The fact is that while they do crave freedom, they also crave performance-driven awards and want to be accountable for their actions. When I brought in improved assessment methods and instituted an open and fair culture that rewarded performance and provided structured feedback, the team was more than happy to understand and work on their weaknesses and strengths. As a result, customer satisfaction went up by 20 points in 18 months.

“Keep it black or white. We are not fond of grey,” is what I read between the lines from my team's response.

Flexibility translates to loyalty

The [2018 Deloitte Millennial Survey](#) states that flexibility in work practices correlates with loyalty. ***“Highly flexible working arrangements enhance the degree of employee loyalty,”*** the survey mentions.

Not only do adults under 40 appreciate not being tied to strict hours or locations, they also value the trust their employers demonstrate in granting that flexibility. Among those who intend to stay with their current employers for at least five years, 55 percent say there is now more flexibility in where and when they work compared to three years ago, the survey mentions.

Going a step further, I learned that in addition to flexibility in working hours and locations, allowing employees to shift to more suitable roles in different teams within an organization is very important. During my tenure, some of my team members were moved to other suitable roles, while a few from other roles were absorbed in mine. It is all about finding the right fit for the individual and the organization.

My experience working with adults under 40 has taught me many things over past three years. It can be summed up by the following quote from Alan Mulally:

“Leadership is having a compelling vision, a comprehensive plan, relentless implementation, and talented people working together.”