5 Things Senior Care Executives Must Know About Attracting & Retaining Millennials

A Whitepaper from OnShift

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Long-term care and senior living providers are facing a staffing crisis. A recent survey indicated that the most pressing need within the senior care industry will be to attract and retain staff. According to a 2015 study by the University of California, San Francisco, 2.5 million additional long-term care workers will be needed by 2030. Combine that with turnover rates ranging from 24%[1]-44%[2], and providers must differentiate themselves to attract and retain the next generation of staff—millennials.

Millennials: The Most Important Generation

Millennials—those born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s— are growing in force, now making up the largest group of workers in the market. As of the first quarter of 2015, there were 53.5 million millennials in the U.S. labor force, as compared to 52.7 million Gen Xers, according to the Pew Research Center.

Obviously not all millennials are the same, but many perceive this generation as different from its predecessors. In the current hiring environment with an expected labor shortage ahead, senior care providers must evaluate their tactics to ensure they are effectively attracting and retaining millennial talent.

"We can't assume that everyone else has the same background, experiences, motivation and temperament that other generations do," says Peter Corless, Executive Vice President of Enterprise Development for OnShift. "The millennial generation has different motivations that we need to be responsive to in terms of our interactions with them."

Rather than assuming millennials operate as generations before them have when seeking and selecting jobs, Corless suggests rethinking "The Golden Rule" to denote treating others the way *they* want to be treated.

"We need to look at the millennials from their perspective, and let that be the driving force behind the personnel decisions that we're making to be sure that we're attractive to them and can retain those individuals," he says.

This requires understanding exactly who millennials are, what might attract them to senior care and the best practices to keep them in the industry. By shifting certain policies and approaches to adhere to millennials' desires and perspectives, senior care providers can stay ahead of the curve when the brunt of the labor shortage strikes.

World Population by Generation

Worldwide and in the U.S., millennials are the largest generation yet - some 2.3 billion strong. (U.S. Census Bureau)

Builders
Boomers
Gen X
Millennials
Next Gen

2015   2020   2025   2030
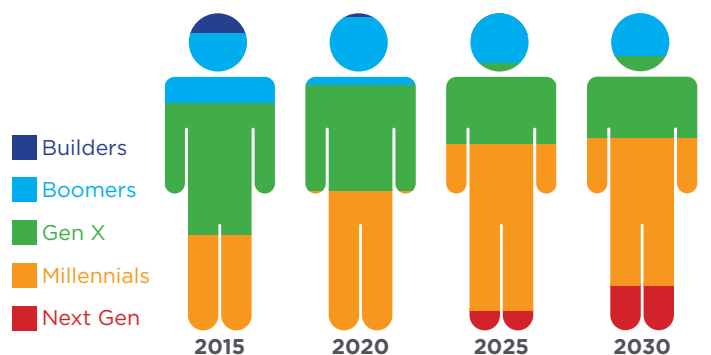
Figure 1: World population by generation according to the U.S. Census Bureau

[1] National Center for Assisted Living's Vacancy, Retention, and Turnover Survey, 2013
[2] American Health Care Association 2012 Staffing Report

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Who Are the Millennials?

While it's not a best practice to generalize an entire generation, a multitude of studies and research have identified some distinct millennial characteristics, preferences, attitudes and habits as compared to other generations. These qualities carry over to the way millennials function in the workforce. To draw millennials to senior care and establish an environment they'll thrive in, providers should first get a sense of exactly who they're working with.

- Millennials make up the cohort of Americans born between 1980 and the mid-2000s.
- They are the largest generation in the U.S., comprising one-third of the total population in 2013, according to a White House report on millennials.
- They are considered the most diverse and educated generation in American history.
- Their childhoods are marked by access to technology and the Internet.
- The millennial generation is known for delaying traditional life milestones, such as getting married, starting a family or buying a house.

When it comes to the workforce, millennials are interested in maintaining work-life balance, obtaining jobs that reflect their passions, and earning competitive salaries and benefits. Millennials are also deemed job-hoppers, though the White House report indicates this phenomenon isn't as drastic as some might believe.

"Millennials are sometimes characterized as lacking attachment or loyalty to their employers, but in fact, contrary to popular perceptions, millennials actually stay with their employers longer than Generation X workers did at the same ages," the report states.

Still, nearly two-thirds of millennials don't believe there is enough focus on leadership skill development in their positions, according to findings from The Deloitte Millennial Survey 2016, the consulting firm's fifth annual global survey. Deloitte further reveals that moving up career ladders and eventually taking on leadership roles are among the most important factors for millennials when they consider job opportunities. The findings stem from the responses of nearly 7,700 millennials from 29 countries, all of whom were born after 1982, have a college or university degree, are employed full-time and mostly work in large, private-sector organizations.

"The more diversity of opportunities, new challenges and leadership training you provide, the more likely it is that you'll be able to retain some of these folks," says Aaron Smith, President of YI Advisors, a consulting firm that works with clients to engage young people.
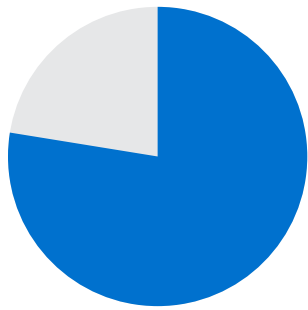
Millennials and Senior Care

Given that much of the senior care industry still follows historical organizational models, personnel policies and hierarchies, there's no question that providers are challenged in the task of bringing millennials to the industry and combating turnover. But trying to fit millennials into existing operational systems instead of adapting to be more millennial-friendly could prove detrimental.

Nearly 78% of recent hires by senior care providers are millennials, according to a survey conducted by OnShift and McKnight's Long-Term Care News. Yet 65% of those surveyed indicated that they haven't adapted their operations toward embracing millennials.

What Millennials Value in the Workplace

- **Personal development**

- **Collaborative work culture**

- **Real-time feedback**

- **Flexible work schedules**

- **Work-life balance**

- **Making the world a better place**

78% of new hires in senior care are millennials.
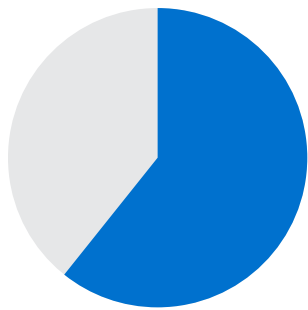
65% of senior care organizations have adapted to embrace millennials.

Figure 2: OnShift and McKnight's Long-Term Care News survey of long-term care and senior living providers on workforce initiatives.

One struggle faced by many senior care providers is maintaining resident privacy while also respecting millennials' technology use. On average, millennials spend up to 18 hours a day consuming media across multiple platforms, including browsing the Web, texting and using social media, according to data from Crowdtrap and Ipsos MediaCT (the activities are not mutually exclusive; in other words, more than one media can be consumed in a given hour).

"If you tell them they have to leave their cell phone at the door when they come in, you're probably not going to be able to hire that person," Corless says. "We need to think of ways in which we can protect the privacy of the elders that we're entrusted to look after, but on the other hand, make sure that millennials can stay connected. A lot of senior care providers struggle with that balance."

Regardless of such challenges, long-term care and senior care has much to offer that is of particular importance to millennials, and providers have the power to rise to this occasion.

5 Best Practices for Attracting and Retaining Millennials

With all of this information on who millennials are and what they want in the workplace, the task of attracting millennials to your organization and then figuring out how to retain them might seem daunting. Leverage these best practices to manage an effective workforce.

1. Focus on Technology

Surveys support millennials dependence on technology; in fact, results suggest that millennials prefer their smartphones over cars and even deodorant. This is important to put into perspective. The millennial generation is the first that has grown up with technology always at their fingertips. Krystyna Keena, Communications Specialist with Senior Lifestyle Corporation and a millennial herself, takes issue with this research. "To be fair, I can easily run out and buy a toothbrush or deodorant, but I can't buy the data and everything that's stored on my phone," shares Keena.

According to a survey by The Center for Generational Kinetics, almost half of millennials expect to be able to complete key business transactions from their mobile device or tablet.

Instead of banning technology in the workplace, try using it to the advantage of both the employee and employer. Adopt mobile technology for clinical, operational and HR systems. This can provide the transparency and information needed for managers to efficiently handle their responsibilities, their life and care of residents.

Recruiting millennials should also take into account their love for technology and social media. Consider posting sponsored job ads on social feeds like Facebook or Instagram where millennials are sure to see them. Job applications should be mobile friendly and not take more than a minute or two.

"We allow applicants to just check a box and all of their information from LinkedIn is pulled right into the online form. I love that," says Keena.

2. Maintain Employees' Work-Life Balance

Millennials prioritize work-life balance highly, and they therefore seek out work environments that do the same.

"They're not as solely driven, for the most part, by the self-worth that comes with the accomplishment of the job," Corless says. "Their view of self-worth comes from how they see themselves and others. A job well done is good, but they're looking beyond that to more of their quality of life and how they impact society."

"One tactic to ensure work-life balance is to involve employees in scheduling," says Irene Fleshner, Principal of Reno, Davis & Assoc. Inc. and Senior Vice President of Strategic Nursing Initiatives for Genesis HealthCare. "Doing so doesn't have to be drastic, but slowly and surely giving employees some say in when they work can make a significant difference." Utilizing mobile technology for scheduling, managing call-offs and shift changes, as well as communication with employees, can help engage employees further with your organization. Allowing employees to request their preferred schedule, and taking it into consideration when the schedule is built, can help employees feel like they have some control over their schedule.

With hours that sometimes stray outside of the typical 9-to-5 realm and roles that involve directly caring for seniors, the most important part of communications around scheduling is that millennials understand what's at stake while providers respect their desire for work-life balance.

3. Brand Your Organization

Being upfront and clear about who you are and what your organization stands for is key to attract millennial talent. Promote the benefits of your company across social media, such as LinkedIn and Facebook, and encourage current employees to post about their positive experiences on the job. Don't underestimate the impact of more modern social platforms like Instagram and Facebook in reaching the millennial crowd.

Keena says that sharing stories is one of the most beneficial things a senior care organization can and should do, yet it's often overlooked. "What do you want your digital value proposition to be? Learn how to communicate your stories and think about how these can be used to attract millennials. Those companies that I'd want to work for all have incredible stories. Some may be about caregiving and improving the lives of residents, while other stories may be about something funny that happened in the office. The important thing is to share these stories."

Branding could also entail "selling what you do," says Fleshner. This is because millennials' purpose-driven nature approach closely resembles the work and mission of most senior care providers. Plus, caregiving and working with seniors in general can be both rewarding and meaningful, and millennials want a company with values to reflect that. This focus extends to the entire industry.

> **"What drives me is that anything I do, every day, is helping someone's life. We are all about family values."**
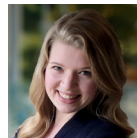
Krystyna Keena, Communications Specialist, Senior Lifestyle Corporation

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In addition, becoming more transparent is crucial. Gone are the days where a potential employee shows up for an interview with limited knowledge on the organization. Instead, millennials do their research beforehand and show up to interviews very aware of what a company is about. Keena adds that millennials "will engage with your content and move quickly to make decisions."

> ## "Most millennials think the senior care industry is where grandma lives but it's so much more than that! We need to do a better job of communicating all the great things that the senior housing industry is all about."
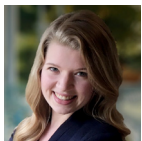
Krystyna Keena, Communications Specialist, Senior Lifestyle Corporation

Millennial job candidates will know your brand, and perception goes a long way, YI Advisor's Smith says.

"Are you an industry that's up and coming?" he says. "If you're not, then think about the perception of your industry. That's going to matter."

Consider consulting with your millennial staff members to identify the channels they get their information from and brainstorm creative methods to reveal the good work and benefits to being a part of your organization.

4. Conduct a Millennial Survey or Focus Group

No two millennials are alike, and determining company practices solely off of vast generalizations might do more harm than good. "We face the danger of talking about it with a broad brush," Fleshner says.

What better way is there to understand what millennials want and need from a workplace environment than from millennials themselves on a local level? Fleshner suggests more consistent communication and surveys to get a pulse on how your staff is feeling. This will allow providers to identify otherwise hidden causes of strife. By utilizing technology, providers can not only easily administer these surveys but also correlate results to identify if these issues are arising on a particular shift to help target a solution.

In addition, Fleshner suggests putting together a team of millennials that already work for your company and charging them with figuring out how it can become more millennial-friendly.

"This approach kills two birds with one stone," she says. "It allows current millennial employees an outlet for creativity and input, while also finding out what potential millennial workers would appreciate coming onto the job."

"It doesn't mean that millennials are dictating what the workplace environment becomes in its entirety," Fleshner says. "Rather, it fosters team-based policy and program development and opens dialogue around what appeals to millennials in that specific area."

5. Provide Regular Feedback

Millennials crave positive reinforcement and continuous feedback in their work, and that makes the typical routine of yearly reviews largely insufficient.

"If you tell them once a year at their performance appraisal that they're doing well, then you're not going to meet their needs," Corless says. "They're used to getting reinforcement on a much more frequent basis, so you need to build that into your reward and recognition programs."

That doesn't necessarily mean you need to load your schedule with monthly sit-downs with each of your employees, Fleshner says. There's room for creativity in how it's doled out.

"Managers need to find ways of giving ongoing feedback in all sorts of forms," she says.

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Providing Feedback For Millennials

Words of affirmation
Let employees know they've done something valuable, but keep it specific to tasks completed or jobs performed to maintain the feedback's effectiveness.

Performance-based incentive compensation
Give millennials some monetary motivation by providing performance-based incentives to enhance their salary.

Create an online feedback zone
Develop an outlet where employees can request or submit feedback at any time. Consider making this an open forum, for all to see and contribute in a transparent way.

Making Senior Care Millennial-Friendly

Millennials are the cornerstone of today's workforce, and they will be well into the future. Attracting and managing them appropriately now will help prevent lost productivity in the near term and down the road.

This means paying attention to who millennials are and what they want. It means working together to make senior care an attractive option for younger workers. "We are very aware of what we do and how this impacts people's lives. I want to work for a place that has a positive impact," says Keena.

"I want to know how an organization makes a difference. That's why I love working in senior housing."
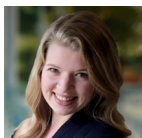
Krystyna Keena, Communications Specialist, Senior Lifestyle Corporation

Confronting challenges the senior care industry faces in attracting millennials to its labor force—and employing best practices to encourage them to stick around—need to be addressed sooner rather than later.

"It's not what's going to happen when anymore," Fleshner says. "We're here. It's now."

Staffing Success with OnShift

Take these steps to attract and engage millennial employees. A flexible scheduling system will help create a millennial-friendly environment, from staff satisfaction and lower turnover, to better care for residents. These strategies will help you to reduce overtime and meet the needs of your residents and staff every day.

The OnShift suite of products for hiring, scheding, and workforce analytics drives quality care, lower costs and higher performance by predicting needs, and keeping staff, managers all on the same page.

OnShift Schedule
- Mobile schedules for employee engagement
- Predictive overtime to reduce cost
- Labor budget management to improve care
- Online scheduling for greater efficiencies
- Staffing visibility & analysis to drive consistency
- Open shift management to ensure proper staffing

OnShift Insight
- Proactive hiring recommendations to meet staffing needs
- View staffing trends & analysis to validate hiring decisions
- Generate job requisitions to fill openings fast
- Predict Five-Star staffing rating to drive consistency and care
- Model staffing scenarios to improve rating
- Adjust labor mix to control costs

OnShift Hire
- Online talent management to improve efficiencies
- Recruit & source candidates to attract top talent
- Hiring visibility for better decisions

About OnShift, Inc.

OnShift delivers cloud-based human capital management software and proactive services to solve everyday workforce challenges in healthcare. Our suite of products for hiring, scheduling and workforce analysis drives quality care, lower costs and higher performance by empowering providers to staff consistently and efficiently. Intuitive design, predictive analytics and customer success management are why thousands of post-acute care and senior living organizations rely on OnShift. For more information visit **www.onshift.com**.