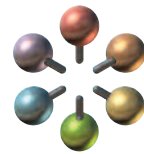# A STUDY OF MILLENNIAL LEARNING & COMPREHENSION OF LOSS PREVENTION, HEALTH & SAFETY IN THE WORKPLACE

Focus Group Report

## 2009

Conducted & Facilitated by Millennial:

## Trevor Scott

B.B.M. – Griffith University

Gold Coast, Australia

**Core**Culture Inc.

Leveraging **Your** Culture
To Elevate Results

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# Introduction

CoreCulture recognizes the importance of creating and implementing Loss Prevention, Health & Safety programs that will capture the minds of Millennials. The need to better understand the media, languages and the comprehension of their thinking and perceptions as it relates to safety and honesty in the workplace, inspired the implementation of a Focus Group Study involving Millennials. The following report will outline the research findings from the Focus Group study.

## *Research Objectives*

The study aimed to answer and gain a better understanding of the following items:

- Communication Preferences of Millennials
- Perceptions of Safety & Honesty
- Training Preferences
- Characteristics of an Effective Millennial Leader

## *Who are the Millennials?*

The Millennial generation was born in 1982 and consists of a group ranging in age from 8 to 27 years of age. (Howie & Strauss, 2004) The Millennial presence is strong in the retail landscape as they work the front lines of retail establishments all across the world. Millennials are also known as the Echo Boomers or Generation I. This group was shaped by their parents, technology and the tragic events of this era such as 9/11.

Unlike their parents, Millennials grew up in the computer age and soaked up all that was offered. Millennials overindulge in new technologies such as: cell phones, instant messaging, iPods, video games, satellite television and all that the internet offers. The Fortino Group conducted a study that reported 1/3 of the 10-17 year old population's lives will be spent on the internet. This overindulgence moulded Millennials into a tech savvy group that crave a wide array of learning stimulus to keep them interested. Computer technology has also changed the complexity of how Millennials communicate as outlined in *Figure1*.

Millennials value respect and therefore respond and improve their performance when given positive reinforcement, positive feedback, positive corrective action, accolades, shout outs and attaboys/attagirls.

Millennials can be summarized as being young, optimistic, self assured employees who are driven to succeed, and are confident that they, as "valuable" employees, deserve to have their voices heard and their demands met. (Chordas, 2001) Not only is the group driven to succeed by their own accord, Millennials value working as a team and have instilled a "leave no one behind" mentality. (Zemke, 2001) They prefer working and learning situations that rely upon collaboration, equality of effort and group and team evaluation over those that promote competition and individual recognition and reward. (Donnison, 2004)

Much of what was found when researching the Millennial population mirrored what was shared by the focus group participants in this study. The following paragraphs will further explain the group of Millennials that were chosen at random to participate in this focus group study.



Figure 1: Millennial Hierarchy of Communication Model

# Focus Group Study

***Methodology***

Three focus group sessions were administered and a different research objective was explored in each of the sessions. Subjective questions pertaining to the objectives were created before each session. A copy of the questions for each session can be found in Appendix A of this report. The sessions were approximately 1 hour long. The questions were given orally to the participants and each focus group member had a chance to answer and provide an opinion to each question asked. It was crucial that each participant was able to give his/her feedback and that one person was not dictating the flow of the conversation. The environment encouraged a free flow of opinions and ideas. Participants to the focus group were given limited information about CoreCulture and were only told that the company created Loss Prevention, Health & Safety programs for retail establishments. The sessions were recorded on tape and notes were taken Trevor Scott, the focus group facilitator.

# Findings

The following information was collected during the focus group sessions and reflects the opinions and feedback given by the focus group participants and not of CoreCulture.

# Communication Preferences of Millennials

Message boards/communication centers in break rooms prove to be an effective tool in communicating messages to employees and managers. Along with the message boards it was brought up by the participants that they would like to be able to post their feedback or comments on the board anonymously. Millennials have a multitude of feedback to provide their employers with, and they feel their voices are rarely heard. If unheard for too long hostility towards management sets in and they feel that they are no longer part of the team. Severed communication to management is a consequence and Millennials are less likely to contribute their ideas in the future.

If message boards were to be replaced by bi-weekly e-mails the group stated that they would only open the e-mail if they were interested in the topic. The group had no problem with providing their employer with their personal e-mail address if they knew why it was required. Internet is a popular tool of communication for this generation because of its 24 hour accessibility and the fact that information is readily available via high speed search engines.

As mentioned earlier in the report, Millennials utilize the internet as a quick way to find information and spend much of their free time on the web. Their time is spent on web pages such as: Facebook, Kijiji and Hotmail. These sites are appealing because they offer personalization and are very easy to access

information by using their search functions. In a Loss Prevention or Health & Safety application, the group would find a tab on their company's webpage useful if they needed to find specific information. However, their time on the site for general interest purposes would be minimal, only browsing for a 10-15 minute span.

When capturing the millennial audience it is important that a variety of learning tools be utilized to keep their interest peaked. Being on the move and changing location freshens and re-energizes their minds. The training sessions can run for long periods of time but it is suggested that a change in environment or teaching style should be done every 30 minutes. Training sessions should refrain from delivering too much printed content causing information overload.

Various learning activities were brainstormed with the group and are provided in the list below:

- Hands on activities - would like to be shown proper methods and then would like to try those themselves under supervision

- Wide array of visual materials (pictures of past accidents or short video clips). When asked about memorable posters in the past the group recalled ones with steps or a process

- Scenarios/role playing

- Games (Jeopardy, crosswords, word search, board games and Family Feud)

- Job site tours showcasing potential workplace dangers

- Group learning in groups of 3-4 (keep the group small). This tactic would aid in preventing participants taking a nap during training

- Online interactive quizzes. The answers should be provided as soon as the quiz has been completed as they would like to know what was done wrong. Advice should be given for the questions that were incorrect. If the test was a failing mark, it was requested that personal coaching should be done by their employer discreetly, at a later date, offline.

One participant went on to explain his positive online learning experience when he was trained in WHMIS. The experience proved to be positive because the answers and results were provided after the online test. The majority of the group had not participated in online testing but the idea appealed to this audience.

Yearly refresher courses should be conducted provided that  a condensed version of the training is administered. If an accident happens on site then training should be conducted in the area in which the accident occurred. To avoid embarrassment, the employee involved in the accident should remain anonymous but should be given discreet, one-on-one training. All surrounding locations should be notified about the accident but the location of the accident should not be named to possibly avoid embarrassment.

Communicating Loss Prevention, Health & Safety information has been done poorly in the past as outlined by the group in their discussions. The negative experience factors are listed below:

- Outdated movies with monotone narration and dated music

- Long handouts

- Poor teaching and leadership skills from management/instructor (monotone voice and lack of energy or passion about the topic). Methods to improve this

negative factor are outlined in the Characteristics of an Effective Millennial Leader section of this report.

- Information was presented in dark rooms which made it enticing for people to take naps, resulting in the group being poorly stimulated. The group felt as though they were getting paid to have a nap

- Poor timing of training sessions. The training was usually conducted in the evening when they were tired from learning in school all day. It was recommended that training should be conducted before the store opens or done one night when they were not working and the store was closed

The negative factors mentioned above close the lines of communication, and much of the Loss Prevention, Health & Safety messaging is lost with this current process. It is crucial that Millennials are given a multitude of learning tools and the lessons must be sold to them and not lectured into their minds.

# Perceptions toward Honesty

### Ethics

Millennials look to their superior or their manager to set the tone for ethics in the workplace. Millennials also place high value on job titles and feel that influential powers and credibility are given with a professional title. However, the superior or manager must have a hard working, consistent work ethic in order for this effect to take shape.

The study established who Millennials look to in order to establish their ethics in the workplace. What does honesty mean in the workplace? Words used to describe honesty were: trust, living by the rules and being professional. Part of their understanding of honesty seemed to be linked to playing by the rules, which means coming to work with a hard working mentality. Honesty is compromised very easily when discussion shifts to Internal Theft, and more specifically when a co-worker is a friend outside of work.

### Theft

It was openly admitted that reporting theft and being honest to their employer comes with many variables and exceptions. The first of these should be the price of the item being stolen. It was suggested that an item that is $40 or less should not be reported. However,  if this becomes a common occurrence the co-worker/friend will be warned not to do it again or they will be reported to their manager. The second factor is the frequency of the occurrence: if the threshold is surpassed, a warning conversation should take place.  The warning comes at a time when it is too late, 2 or 3 occurrences must take place before an employee has a serious discussion with their co-worker/friend  about theft.

The Millennial group does not grasp the big picture when it comes to Internal Theft. They feel that their situation is an isolated incident and does not occur at other retail locations. The group neglected to look at the big picture and realize how low cost items add up quickly when other store locations are taken into consideration. The group stated that they have not witnessed many, if any, cases

where a co-worker has been caught stealing from the company. It's fair to assume this is why they feel that if they see a co-worker/ friend shoplifting it is an isolated incident, therefore, it is not a cause for concern.

In cases where the group had witnessed an employee being apprehended, the employee was always fired on the spot. There is a zero tolerance policy for theft in the workplaces where the group members are employed. It was a group consensus that this punishment fits the crime and they feel this is a serious issue. However, the severity of the punishment and the fact that they are aware of the consequence might make this group leery about reporting their co-worker/friend.

When the group was asked to whom they would report a theft to, their first choice would be a manager that they feel comfortable with. The annonomys hotline would also be another method of reporting Internal Theft. The group liked the idea of having a business card to keep in their wallet or purse with the contact information.

An immediate tangible reward is not desired for reporting internal or External Theft. Personal praise or the hope that this action will be remembered at raise or promotion time is the recognition that this group feels they deserve.

# Perceptions toward Loss Prevention

Loss Prevention is viewed in a whole different spectrum than Health and Safety. Loss Prevention was seen as something that did not directly benefit the group. Recognition should be given because they are aiding their employer and not themselves. A goal should be set for Loss Prevention and if it is attained they are awarded store gift cards or a group dinner.  Much discussion was generated when the group was asked what thoughts came to mind in regards to Loss Prevention. The obvious notables mentioned were: damaged items, Internal and External Theft as well as fraud. Further discussion on the topic found that this group was very apprehensive about their ability to make a positive impact on Loss Prevention.

### Fraud

Fraud was a major concern, and it was a general feeling that they were not properly trained or not trained at all in detecting fraudulent activity. Time was felt to be a factor. With long lines at the check-out they felt they didn't want to hold up the customers by validating cards and cash.

Managers need to lead by example and they would follow. Managers must be more vigilant and also properly instruct their staff on how to detect a fraud and also conduct periodic checks. The Millennial group felt they lacked authority to stop or catch a fraud or shoplifter. The group said they would go to their manager first but they thought it might be too late once their manager arrived on scene. Code words and referring to the item the shoplifter put into their bag or shirt would be a good deterrent but it isn't the solution to the problem.

### Discount Policy

Upon receiving a job, Millenials like to brag about the products they will be working with. Friends immediately line up and ask for discounts if they come by to visit them at their place of work. An underground, black market effect seems to

take shape as a trading frenzy is created. The pressure to give friends a discount is a factor for Millennials to contend with in the retail environment.  This pressure mounts in a workplace where "big ticket" items or "hot items" are present. A method to deflate the pressure which  was agreed on by the group was to have the store hold a friends and family day on a monthly basis. Shoppers Drug Mart presently holds a policy that if the employee is present with the friend or family member their company discount can be shared.

   Methods of transfering discounts to friends or family have been deployed when retailers don't have a friends and family discount in place. A technique used by the group was that they would put an item on hold that their friend wanted. At the end of the night the employee would purchase the item for their friend or family member or it will be purchased as a "gift". If the discount given to friends and family is not as much as the employee discount, the group said they would take advantage of that discount offering and honor the policy.

### Damaged Goods

Some grocery chains offer a discount on damaged goods and it was witnessed that co-workers would damage a product on purpose to obtain the discount. Employees were not the main culprits in this discount scam. Customers also knew about the discount and were caught doing the very same activity. Another damaged goods dilemma was the simple fact that perishable items such as fruits and vegetables were being improperly displayed which resulted in a large loss and waste of food items.

   Lack of education and employee confidence in the area of Loss Prevention is clearly something Millennials need some assistance with.

### Slacking

Much of the Millennial concern for safety takes place backstage. However, "slacking" was a topic of discussion which occurs on both the front stage and backstage of the retail environment. Slacking is referred to as lacking in diligence or due care or concern; negligent. When this occurs, all safety and concern for others is disregarded making the retail environment unsafe. A brainstorming session ensued upon talking about slacking in the workplace. As a result, *Figure 2* illustrates what fuels slacking and the end result of slacking in the workplace.

# Perceptions toward Safety

The majority of the focus group participants did have formal Health and Safety training offered upon being hired. The training received was very basic and bland. Information was presented to them in boardrooms that were dimly lit which made it enticing for them to take a nap. The group members felt they were not stimulated during these sessions and it felt as if they were getting paid to have a nap.

   Although the group was not generally impressed with their Health and Safety training, one participant spoke up about his positive experience at Foodland. The participant conducted some hands on one-on- one training with his manager. This individual worked in the meat department and said that the manager was thorough

**WHAT FUELS SLACKING?**

Excessive Talking

Boredum resulting from lack of tasks or responsibility

Working with friends

Lack of store pride or motivation

**SLACKING ACTIVITY**

Horseplay

Standing around doing nothing

Throwing product around

**RESULT OF SLACKING**

Unaware of customers in the store therefore losing out on potemtial sales

Workplace injuries

Reflects poorly upon the campany's image or reputation

Figure 2: Slacking Process

and walked him through all of the equipment they used in the department. The one-on-one training allowed him to use the equipment under his manager's supervision and expertise. The outcome of this training was positive and the participant became confident and qualified to operate the dangerous equipment.

Not only is this group of Millennials new to one-on-one training, but safety audits have never been conducted in their workplace. The look of astonishment was cast upon the room when safety audits were mentioned. A safety audit was explained and the general consensus was that it was a great idea. The pitfall to an audit is the time factor, which is why they felt these audits never took place where they have worked. The interest was present in the group and it was felt that safety audits should be implemented but only to check major safety concerns in a list of 10-15 items. The audit should be done as a part of the closing procedures at the end of the day and signed off on by a manager. Employees could rotate their responsibilities of conducting the audit because each employee's view of danger differs.

Retailers often track and measure safety performance in terms of numbers. The numbers capture injury totals and types of injuries. This information can be seen as useful to this generation but it should be easily and readily accessible in the form of monthly printouts. The Millenials interest lies with seeing how often injuries occur, and they are not concerned about the amount of workdays lost because they work part time hours.

## Warehouse & Backroom Management

Even though the training given to this group was conducted poorly, their perception of how safe their workplace was did not get tarnished. They felt their work environment was safe for the most part but ladder training was their main concern. More specifically, the group was concerned about taking boxes down from high shelves using a ladder. They felt that their storage rooms were poorly maintained and heavy boxes were placed on high shelves. Training should be offered along the subject of backroom organization and was demanded by this group. The group elaborated further, offering a recommendation on how to improve this situation. An idea given by the group was to make stickers or labels for all the boxes in the back room stating if the box was light or heavy, or even that the box requires two employees to carry the box *Figure 3*. When asked about how retailers can get their employees to use proper lifting techniques, the group said that time needs to be taken to show employees the proper lifting technique. Posters should be displayed in areas where the most lifting is done. Building on the sticker idea, the group felt that stickers showing proper lifting technique could also be placed on boxes as a reminder. The importance of proper lifting technique should be outlined and the long term consequences should be presented to employees who choose to lift with poor technique.

Furthermore, the group felt as though they were never shown the consequences of unsafe work habits. They thought it would be beneficial to have a guest speaker who had a workplace accident in an environment much like theirs to share his/her story. "Seeing is believing" for Millennials, and until they realize an issue could impact them they don't take note of the severity of the situation.

Another concern expressed in regards to ladders and boxes was the rush factor. These employees felt that they are under a time crunch. This time crunch that



Figure 3: Sticker Sample

managers attach to tasks makes safety take a backseat to speed. Meeting sales projections and pleasing the customers is at the forefront of these managers' priorities and speed of service is a catalyst to achieve these goals.  Both are highly important areas to be concerned with, but safety should be their main concern and should not be compromised.

The group realizes the importance of safety in the workplace. When it comes to managers "walking the talk" in regards to Health and Safety, the group felt that they were very inconsistent. Safety is compromised by getting the job done quickly and that seems to be their top priority as outlined.

As mentioned, backroom management and upkeep should be taught and was demanded by the group. The group pointed out many cases where boxes, equipment and pallets were thrown around in the backrooms and in the warehouse. These become huge obstacles and most of the group participants had witnessed lots of their fellow co-workers trip over these obstacles, narrowly avoiding a serious injury. This kind of act occurs because the group feels that their co-workers lack respect for one another. Co-workers may knock over boxes from a display in a department away from theirs and they don't clean up because they feel it is that particular department's job to keep their area neat. Thinking only about himself/herself, this employee neglects to think about his/her fellow employee or customer who may get injured from the mess that was made.

As stated, the group understands the importance of Health and Safety which is why they require no tangible rewards or recognition for their safe acts and practices. Health and Safety is their responsibility in order to stay alive and healthy.

To summarize some of the findings, many patterns have been discovered in the learning style of Millennials. Variety is a must in delivering the message as well as a variety of teaching environments. Millennials have the "leave no one behind" mentality but they want to know why they are learning what they are learning and how it impacts them specifically. It was mentioned that training should touch more on incidents that occur most often in the environment they work in.  Millennials feel that Health and Safety is their responsibility and does not need to be rewarded.

## Characteristics of an Effective Millennial Leader

Typically, Health and Safety as well as Loss Prevention have been presented to this group as serious issues that have been forced upon  Millennials. Although both are serious, a more laid back, approachable and knowledgeable leadership style should be called upon. The group made it clear that they did not want to feel like they were being lectured.

Age is not a factor when it comes to the "Millennial Leader" but they would prefer someone their own age that is enthusiastic and well trained to 'sell' them on the topics. Loss Prevention and Health and Safety should be taught by two different individuals. Both individuals should specialize in the topic and become an expert in order to gain credibility with this generation. The person should be given a designation but it should be lightly promoted within the workplace. An example would be a simple break room poster with their picture on it.

Extra training and tests should be administered to the "Millennial Leader" and the group stated that they would participate in the extra training in order to

acquire this position. The group expected to be paid their regular rate of pay for the extra time put into the training. It was seen as a good idea and was something that they could add to their resume.

The Millennial group is not a difficult group to lead if they are provided with a variety of learning tools. This demographic have become effective, self taught individuals via their University/College education, internet learning media, and even courses that are now readily available through correspondence.  These learning structures encourage independent learning.

# Recommendations for Future Research

The information obtained through this study will aid in shaping a whole new learning package catered to Millennials. A better understanding of how material should be presented to this demographic was gained.  Areas of concern or areas to focus on in Loss Prevention and Safety training were addressed and serve as a valuable foundation for newly formulated content.

In future, research learning tools created by CoreCulture should be tested by Millennials and feedback should be given to see if effective learning is obtained through newly created learning tools. A rating system could be generated to capture the favourite educational media and methods of teaching.

Although the test group who worked with CoreCulture is eager to further their research with the company, another group of Millennials should be selected for the future research. A new group would allow for more breadth and depth feelings and opinions which can lead to further improvements.

As requested by our current test group, the individuals would like to be kept up to date on how their contributions aided in improving Millennial learning in the Loss Prevention and Health and Safety environment.