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# Motivating Millenials: Improving Practices in Recruiting, Retaining, and Motivating Younger Library Staff

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# Motivating Millennials: Improving Practices in Recruiting, Retaining, and Motivating Younger Library Staff

by Sara D. Smith and Quinn Galbraith

Available online 31 March 2012

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**Working with younger staff and student employees can be a challenge for library supervisors in a multigenerational workplace. Because members of the Millennial Generation have different work expectations, managers need to adjust to best meet their needs. By surveying its five hundred student employees, Brigham Young University's Harold B. Lee Library has learned ways to avoid miscommunication due to generational differences and to better supervise and motivate student employees. The purpose of this paper is to explore the library survey results and results from other national surveys, and to share what was learned from student employees about the Millennial Generation within the library community.**

## INTRODUCTION

For the past few decades, libraries and other organizations have been preparing for the Millennial Generation to enter the workforce. And now they are here: the oldest Millennials are settling into their careers, and more will continue to do so as high school and college students graduate and start working. Today's libraries are becoming increasingly multigenerational workplaces. Most academic librarians already work side-by-side with Millennials on a daily basis—current undergraduate and graduate students are members of this generation, as are library student employees and assistants. As more Millennials enter the workforce, libraries anticipate hiring and working with younger professionals.

Millennials, both as young professionals and as library student employees, are supervised primarily by Baby Boomers and Gen Xers. The library profession is currently dominated by Baby Boomers, particularly in management positions; according to the US Bureau of Labor Department of Statistics Current Population Survey the median age in the profession in the United States was 49.5 in 2009.<sup>1</sup> The same report suggests that forty-nine thousand library workers are Millennials, while 107 thousand are Boomers (and fifteen thousand are over age 65). Even with so many approaching retirement age, it is likely the Boomers aren't going anywhere for a while. The economic recession, along with "longer life spans [and] changing societal views of retirement," means that older workers are delaying retirement or rejoining the workforce.<sup>2</sup> So it is not likely that libraries will cease to be multigenerational for some time.

Multigenerational workplaces create a need for library managers to understand generational differences and how to best manage each generation—and, in particular, how to work with Millennials, who are quickly filling both staff and student positions and bringing with them expectations and values that differ from those of their Boomer and Xer supervisors. Singer (2006) wrote in *American Libraries* that "changing generational expectations and experiences affect younger librarians' attitudes toward the profession and toward traditional practices in many library workplaces."<sup>3</sup> Summarizing the main points of *Grown Up Digital*, a book written by Dan Tapscott about what makes Millennials different from older generations, the *New York Times* wrote,

"They prize freedom; they want to customize things; they enjoy collaboration; they scrutinize everything; they insist on integrity in institutions and corporations; they want to have fun even at school or work; they believe that speed in technology and all else is normal; and they regard constant innovation as a fact of life."<sup>4</sup>

Of course, this is not to say that members of older generations do not value these same things—but these may not be top priorities for

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Boomers or Xers. Discussing the *Times* quote, Janes (2009) wrote in *American Libraries* “So, OK, they are different from me, a very-late boomer. I like having fun as much as the next guy; integrity is cool, as is collaboration; but I can’t say that these norms speak to me in a deep or personal way.”<sup>5</sup> Millennial values may be different enough that they may not be intuitively recognized, understood, or shared by older generations.

The values of the Millennial Generation affect what they look for in a job, what will keep them working, and what will motivate them to work hard. The generation gap may pose a challenge for many library supervisors, who may not understand how to tap into these generational values to better recruit, retain, motivate, and communicate with younger employees. The Harold B. Lee Library of Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah employs more than five hundred student employees. Including both student employees and full-time staff, Millennials make up about 77 percent of the library employees at Lee Library. Patrons, including students, professors, researchers, and community members, interact primarily with student employees, who become the face of the library. Student library jobs are prestigious on campus, but student jobs naturally have high turnover rates, and the Lee Library recognizes that students have other options that may pay more, work better with their schedules, or be more relevant to their majors. Lee Library administrators want to recruit and retain as many young employees as possible, and to help them work hard and feel satisfied in their work.

For the past few years, the Lee Library has been surveying its student employees to understand their preferences and learn how to better work with them and how to supervise them more effectively. Based on these results, the library made several changes, including restructuring the student pay program and developing a student recognition program. An analysis of the survey results, combined with the results of several national surveys, provides some interesting insights into the values of the Millennial Generation. The purpose is to share these insights, which may help library supervisors better avoid generational miscommunications and conflict at work, as well as better understand how to recruit, retain, and motivate younger employees. This paper is not meant to be comprehensive—the topic of managing the Millennial Generation is very broad—but it will provide insight about the motivation and best management practices of Millennials as student workers to the benefit of the library community.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Experts disagree about the exact birth years used to define each generation. For the purposes of this paper, Baby Boomers will be defined as those born between 1946 and 64; Gen Xers as 1965–80; and Millennials as 1981–2000. Several books and many articles from various fields, including library science, have been published about how to work with the Millennial Generation. Surveying all of the literature on this topic would be difficult and time-consuming—such an endeavor may merit its own publication—but a few notable works will be discussed. A decade ago, Howe and Strauss predicted in their oft-quoted book, *Millennials Rising*, that “today’s kids [now today’s college grads] are on track to become a powerhouse generation, full of technology planners, community shapers, institution builders, and world leaders, perhaps destined to dominate the twenty-first century.”<sup>6</sup>

Several books, many based on interviews and focus groups, discuss the management Millennials at work. Alsop’s (2008) *The Trophy Kids Grow Up*<sup>7</sup> and Tulgan’s (2009) *Not Everyone Gets a Trophy*<sup>8</sup> play off of another nickname for Gen Y: The trophy generation, which refers to the Millennials’ “coddled” upbringing in which each child was told he or she was “special,” and all players in the soccer or t-ball league were given a trophy whether or not the team or player was successful. Alsop and Tulgan refer to several characteristics of this generation that

are often quoted or repeated in articles and popular literature, including the need for regular feedback, feelings of entitlement, desire for both independence and direction, and the desire to customize their lives and careers. Tulgan noted that “for Generation Y, customization is the holy grail...From the first day they arrive in the workplace, they are scrambling to keep their options open...and wrap a customized career around the customized life they are trying to build.”<sup>9</sup> Sujansky’s (2009) *Keeping the Millennials: Why Companies are Losing Billions in Turnover to this Generation* argues that Millennials are sought-after employees because of their energy and technology skills, but many companies are unable to retain these young professionals. Unless organizations adapt to the expectations unique to this generation, “they risk losing billions of dollars to unwanted turnover and lost productivity.”<sup>10</sup> Just as in the library profession, recruiting and retaining Millennials is important to the future of business organizations as they prepare for the anticipated Baby Boomer retirement.<sup>11</sup>

Many books written about this issue draw data from interviews, focus groups, and the authors’ experience. Twenge (2010)<sup>12</sup> reviews the results of several time-lapse and empirical studies of generational differences in the workplace (those interested in more scientific studies of this topic would find this article useful). Twenge’s (2010) review suggests that Millennials “rate work as less central to their lives, value leisure more, and express a weaker work ethic than Boomers and Silents [Traditionals].” Twenge recommends that to recruit Millennials, companies should “focus on work-life balance issues and flexible schedules,” while programs based on “volunteering, altruistic values, social values, or meaning in work” will be no more (or less) effective for Millennials than for other generations.<sup>13</sup>

The library literature discussing how to work with younger generations primarily discusses Millennials as young professionals or as patrons, but not as student employees. Some library literature discusses motivating and supervising student employees, but nothing discusses these topics by examining the unique characteristics of the Millennial Generation. McDonald (2006)<sup>14</sup> and Sweeney (2005)<sup>15</sup> examined the changes that libraries need to make in services and culture to accommodate Millennial patrons. McDonald argues that there is a gap between library culture and Millennial values, and Sweeney notes that because Millennials have such different needs both as employees and patrons, “libraries are being forced to rethink and redesign library services, technologies, and buildings.”<sup>16</sup>

Martin (2006) discussed the implications of generational diversity in libraries, arguing that because four generations now work side by side, “library managers will have to learn about the different generations in their library and manage each one properly.”<sup>17</sup> When managers understand what members of a particular generation value, they can better motivate employees. This issue of a multigenerational library is even more relevant now as more Millennials enter the workforce. Cleyle (2004) argued that with the increase of Millennial library employees, “librarians, administrators, and systems managers will shift their focus and approach to systems implementations by taking advantage of the changing demographics of library personnel.”<sup>18</sup> Adapting to Millennial employees and their skills will help libraries move into the future as libraries “take advantage of these new hires in previously unimagined ways.”<sup>19</sup> Cleyle refers particularly to how Gen Y’s technology skills can assist with systems and technology projects. Guevara (2007)<sup>20</sup> discussed the assets Millennial employees bring to libraries, including technical skills, eagerness and energy, desire to learn, flexibility, and innovative thinking.

More recently, Barnes (2009), a workplace training consultant, identified traits of Millennial employees and discussed how managers can best work with these traits. According to Barnes, Millennials do not value traditional leadership hierarchies based on titles or seniority, but instead prefer leaders they can trust who can “give them the opportunity to produce good ideas and quality results.”<sup>21</sup>

Millennials, even after graduation, maintain strong ties to their hovering “helicopter parents,” which Barnes says could translate to the workplace: “Often, Generation Y anticipates and can benefit from a ‘surrogate’ parent in the form of a company coach or role model from whom to learn the ropes and assist with problem solving.”<sup>22</sup> Barnes also discusses the importance of feedback, open communication, and teamwork.

Library literature extensively discusses the role of student employees or assistants—the *Journal of Library Administration* published a volume about this topic in 1995—but again, there is little mention of these subjects within the context of Millennial Generational values. Articles in the 1995 *Journal of Library Administration* issue entitled “Libraries and Student Assistants: Critical Links” explore how to recruit, supervise, train, and motivate student employees, as well as how to more effectively use them in an academic library setting.<sup>23</sup> In this issue, Clark emphasized the importance of recognizing and rewarding students: “Discerning libraries and astute librarians have...provided training as well as suitable motivations and rewards for the talent and industriousness of student workers.”<sup>24</sup> Some of her ideas, such as bookplates, receptions, and awards based on seniority, may be a little outdated and ineffective in motivating Millennials, who tend to prefer more frequent and easily-attained feedback and recognition.

In motivating students, Borin (2001) emphasized the importance of providing daily feedback and regular meetings, as well as improving retention by increasing pay and adding additional responsibilities “based on the students’ abilities, experience, and interests.”<sup>25</sup> Slagwell (2003)<sup>26</sup> also noted the importance of informal, daily evaluations in addition to formal evaluations each semester. To recognize and motivate students, Slagwell suggested low-cost gestures such as cards, candy bars, or employee appreciation parties. Choteau and Heinzman (2007)<sup>27</sup> noted that student jobs tend to be boring and repetitive—shelving, for example—so students are not always motivated by their work. These authors discussed efforts at the O’Keefe Library of St. Ambrose University to promote an atmosphere of positive work behaviors.

Articles based on observation and experience are valuable in understanding how to work with Gen Y, but even more valuable are data collected from the Millennials themselves. Several national surveys have been conducted to analyze the work preferences of the Millennial Generation. In 2006, the Hudson Employment Index interviewed and surveyed two thousand US workers about what they expect from their managers in terms of feedback and communication. Survey respondents were categorized according to their generation, including Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and Gen Yers or Millennials.<sup>28</sup> Robert Half International conducted a national survey in 2008 of more than one thousand adults aged 21 to 28 years regarding work preferences of young professionals.<sup>29</sup> More recently, the Pew Research Center surveyed about two thousand adults in early 2010 to explore differences between Millennials, Gen Xers, Baby Boomers, and members of the Silent (or Traditional) Generation.<sup>30</sup> The Pew study looked at a wide range of differences, including those relating to workplace interaction and preferences. Findings from all three of these national surveys will be integrated into this paper and compared to the survey of student employees at Lee Library.

## METHOD

For the past five years, the Lee Library human resources department has been actively seeking to improve methods of recruiting, training, and retaining student employees. The Lee Library is unique among academic libraries in its number of student employees—five hundred are currently employed. In order to seek student input on methods to improve hiring and management practices, student employees were surveyed every year for the past five years. Approximately two

hundred students responded each year. For each survey, all respondents remain anonymous.

This paper will focus primarily on the most recent survey, which was administered to both student employees and their supervisors in April 2010. Unless otherwise identified, all data and conclusions come from the 2010 survey. This survey was created using Qualtrics survey software and was available for about two weeks via a link emailed to students and supervisors. All supervisors were asked to complete the surveys and to encourage their student employees to do the same. Both groups were told those who completed surveys would be entered in a drawing to receive a gift, and students who completed the survey were given a candy bar. Of five hundred total student employees, approximately 202 responded to this survey, and 185 completed the survey. Not every student responded to every question—the number of responses is indicated in the figures representing survey results. Fifty-seven supervisors of approximately eighty responded to and completed the survey, but again, not every question received a response. Students were asked about work preferences, what they value in jobs and in supervisors, and about generational differences they notice in the workplace and in general. Supervisors were asked similar questions, and they were also asked to predict how they thought their student employees would respond to the same questions. Some questions were free-response, but most were multiple-choice. Some questions allowed students and supervisors to select two responses. Responses were discarded in which more than two options were selected, contributing to the varying numbers of responses.

Survey results are limited in that they accurately represent only BYU student employees. However, many of the results are similar to those of national surveys conducted among young professionals. The Lee Library’s surveys help improve understanding of the preferences of student employees, and these results, along with information from the literature and data from national surveys, can give managers and supervisors at other libraries a glimpse of the values and preferences of today’s student employees. And as these employees graduate and enter the workforce, they will carry these values with them, making this information relevant to a discussion of how to manage younger library staff and professionals as well.

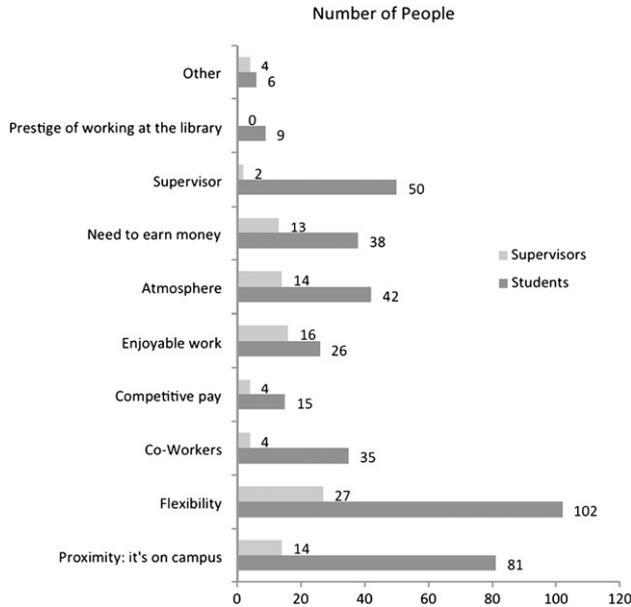
## RECRUIT AND RETAIN

When it comes to finding Millennial employees—and convincing them to stay—many library supervisors do not believe they can offer competitive pay or pay raises. This is certainly a concern in light of recession budget cuts: many libraries simply cannot motivate Millennials, either as student employees or young professionals, to work for them based on pay alone. But exactly how important and motivating is pay to the Millennial Generation? The survey results suggest that pay is certainly an important factor—but it is only one of many factors that Millennials value in a job, and, in many cases, it is not the most important.

For example, students were asked to pick the top two factors that motivate them to stay at their library jobs (see Fig. 1). The top choice (selected by 59 percent) was flexibility. This choice was followed by proximity (43 percent), enjoyable work (29 percent), and work environment (27 percent). Only 8 percent selected pay. Students were also asked what they look for in a potential job, and again were asked to select two options (see Fig. 2). Fifty-three percent selected meaningful work, 43 percent selected pay, and 20 percent selected growth opportunities. A similar question asked students what motivates them to work hard (see Fig. 3). While not referring directly to recruitment or retention, this question offers some insight into what the Millennial Generational values. The top choice for this question was personal satisfaction (50 percent), followed by pay (43 percent) and meaningful work (41 percent). Interestingly, when supervisors were asked to predict the student responses to this question, the top choice was pay (43 percent).

**Fig. 1  
Retention**

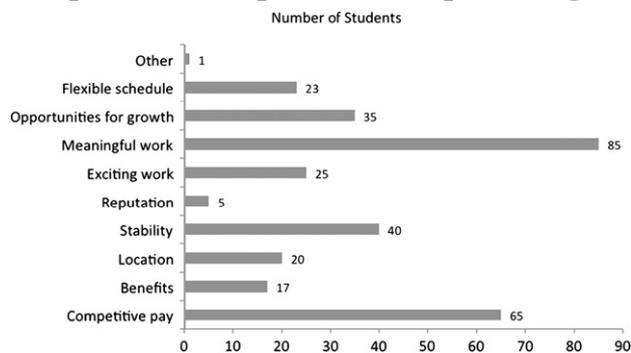
**Students: What most motivates you to stay at your current job? (n = 121)**  
**Supervisors: What do you think most motivates your student employees to stay at their jobs? (n = 49)**  
**Both were asked to pick top two responses. Responses are represented as percentages.**



These results show that Millennials do value competitive pay—but again, it is not the only factor, nor the most important one. If library supervisors have no control over pay, then in order to recruit, retain, and even motivate Millennial employees, they should instead focus on what they can control. Supervisors have a lot more influence on their

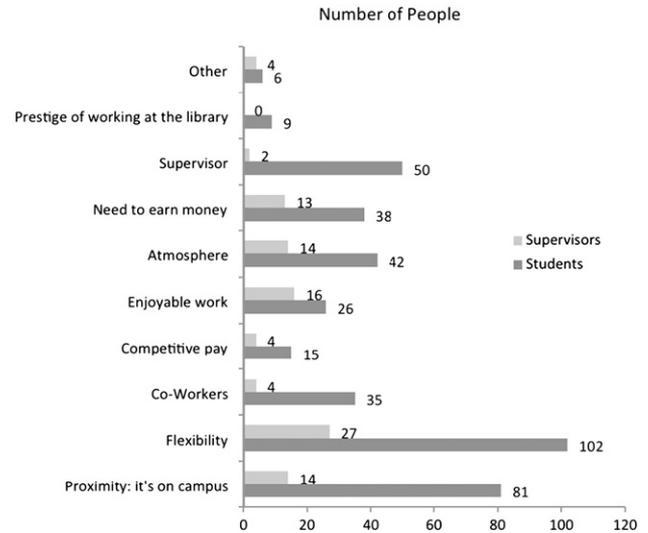
**Fig. 2  
Recruitment**

**Students: When considering potential jobs now and in your future careers, what is most important? (n = 121)**  
**Students were asked to pick top two responses. Responses are represented as percentages.**



**Fig. 3  
Motivation**

**Students: What motivates you to work hard in your job? (n = 121)**  
**Supervisors: What do you think motivates your student employees to work hard? (n = 49)**  
**Both were asked to pick top two responses. Responses are represented as percentages.**



Millennial employees than they realize: Thirty-three percent of students surveyed said that their supervisor is one of the top two factors keeping them at their jobs—but only 9 percent of supervisors predicted that their student employees would select this response (see Fig. 1). The influence of the supervisor extends beyond pay and can affect employee performance and satisfaction. Supervisors can help retain Millennials by offering what this generation values: flexibility, personal satisfaction, meaningful work, and growth opportunities.

### Flexibility

Sujansky and Ferri-Reed's (2009) *Keeping the Millennials* describes a situation that may be common in many organizations: An office manager announces that an evening of overtime was required to finish a project, and is shocked when "a new member of the team, a 22-year-old recent college graduate, told him that he couldn't stay because he had concert tickets that evening."<sup>31</sup> Millennials value flexibility because balancing work and their personal lives is very important to them, and they want the flexibility to make and keep personal and social commitments. This is especially important to student employees who also struggle to balance class and school along with work and their social lives.

In a survey that the Lee Library administered to student employees in 2007,<sup>32</sup> 70 percent said that flexible work hours were important or very important. On that same survey, 96 percent said they would prefer to work fewer hours for less pay to "have more time for personal life" than to work more hours for "great pay." The Half study also emphasizes the importance of flexibility and balance: On this survey, 73 percent said they are "worried about balancing professional and personal obligations."<sup>33</sup> Library supervisors can attract—and keep—more Millennial employees by offering flexibility, even if they cannot pay more than other institutions or on-campus jobs.

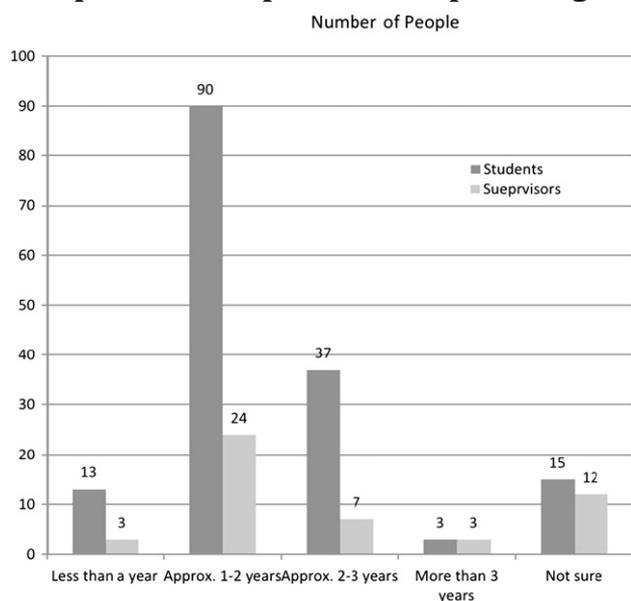
## Personal Satisfaction

Millennials value jobs that offer personal satisfaction and meaningful work. The 2010 Lee Library survey showed that one of the top three factors that motivate students to work hard was knowing that they are “doing something meaningful or contributing to the library” (see Fig. 3) and the top factor they look for in a potential job is meaningful work (see Fig. 2). Millennials believe they can change the world, and they want a job where they feel like they are doing so. Supervisors can capitalize on this value by helping their Millennial employees understand the importance of their job. Supervisors can explain how an employee’s specific job contributes to the library as a whole. Doing so can make the job more attractive to potential employees, or can show appreciation for and help motivate current employees.

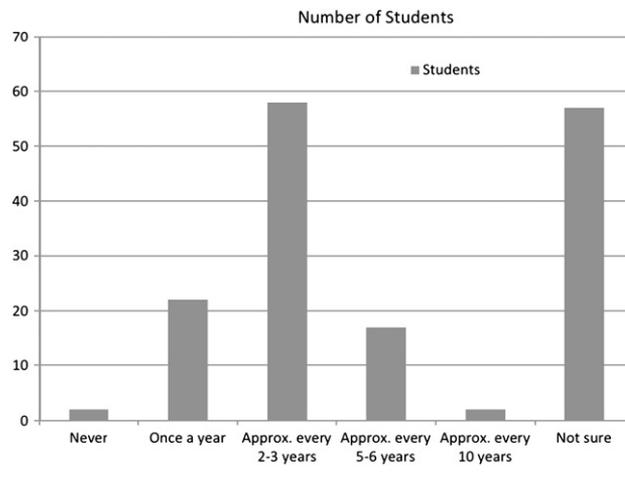
## Growth Opportunities

The Lee Library survey results also indicate that 20 percent of students believe that growth opportunities are an important factor in potential jobs (see Fig. 2), that 58 percent believe that professionals should spend one to two years in entry positions (see Fig. 4), and that, in their future careers, 22 percent expect promotion opportunities every two to three years (Fig. 5). On top of that, 72 percent of students surveyed said that members of their generation get bored easily (see Fig. 6). On the Half study, more than half of the respondents said they expect to remain in entry-level positions for only one to two years.<sup>34</sup> According to the Pew Research Center, about 75 percent of employed Millennials say that it is likely they will switch careers, compared to 55 percent of Gen Xers and 31 percent of Baby Boomers. In fact, almost 60 percent say they have already switched careers. Many Millennials see their jobs as stepping-stones to other positions and expect to be working somewhere else soon.<sup>35</sup>

**Fig. 4**  
**“Paying dues”**  
**Students: How long do you think professionals should have to spend in entry-level positions? (n = 188)**  
**Supervisors: How long do you think professionals should have to spend in entry-level positions? (n = 57) (129)**  
**Responses are represented as percentages**



**Fig. 5**  
**Promotions**  
**Students: In your future career, how often do you think you will expect promotion opportunities? (n = 188)**  
**Responses are represented as percentages**



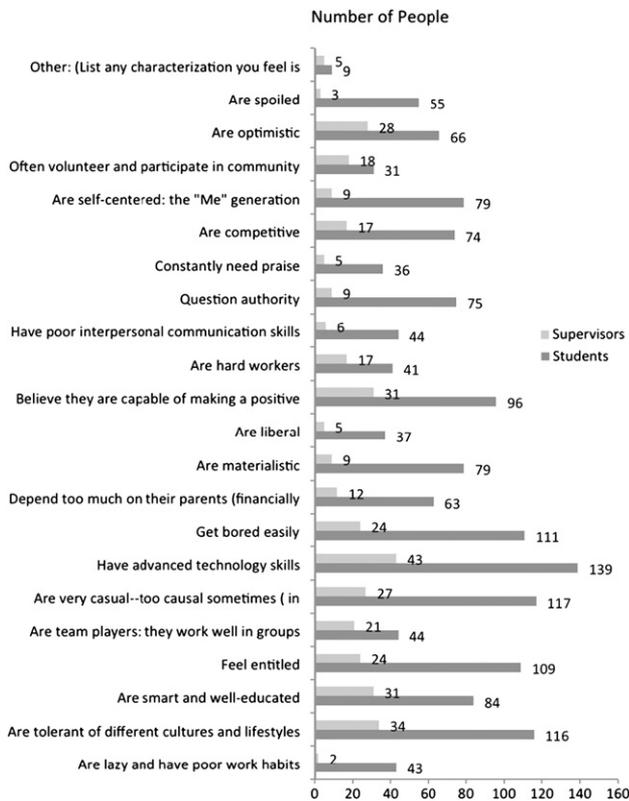
This tendency poses a challenge for supervisors in terms of retention, but it illustrates an important characteristic of this generation—they are mobile, and they want to move upward. Millennials expect to grow and change; they don’t want the same position or tasks day after day, year after year. Library supervisors, especially in the case of those working with student employees, may not be able to promote Millennial employees. But they can help employees learn new skills, give them new tasks and responsibilities, and even change their job title. Millennials want to grow and learn—and anything supervisors can do to help employees feel they are moving up may increase job satisfaction and, potentially, retention.

## COMMUNICATE

Generational differences can cause occasional miscommunication or misunderstandings in the workplace. Lee Library student employees and their supervisors were asked to indicate how often they noticed these kinds of miscommunications (see Fig. 7). About half of both students and supervisors (64 percent and 51 percent, respectively) felt that generational differences never caused miscommunications at work, but of those who did notice these miscommunications, 26 percent of students and 47 percent of supervisors indicated that miscommunications happened occasionally. It is interesting to note that, overall, supervisors noticed more generational conflicts than the students. While generational miscommunication is not a daily problem at the Lee Library, it is certainly a workplace issue that supervisors need to be aware of—especially if they are the ones picking up on the differences.

In order to avoid or address conflicts due to miscommunication, it is important to understand what may trigger generational miscommunications. Again, the survey sheds some light: both groups were asked to list generational differences that they notice in the workplace. Most of the comments (for both students and supervisors) fell into the following categories: communication, work habits and ethic, and technology use. Students also commented on differences in how they and their supervisors value flexibility and deal with change. Several students commented that they had difficulty understanding or following their supervisors’ instructions, and others said they struggled to explain problems to their supervisors, especially

**Fig. 6**  
**Perceptions of the Millennial Generation**  
 Both students (n = 179) and supervisors (n = 56) were given a list of stereotypes of the Millennial Generation and asked to indicate which they agree with or have observed. Both groups were asked to check all that apply. Responses are represented as percentages



regarding technology. For example, one comment reads, "it's often apparent that our supervisor doesn't understand what we are trying to say because they're not as familiar with tech jargon...I can easily explain a problem I'm having to a fellow Millennial coworker, but my supervisor doesn't quite grasp it."

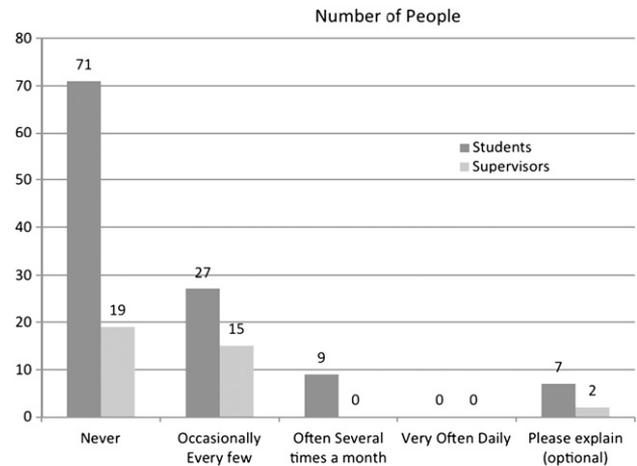
Millennials are also much more casual in communication. Several students noted that they felt comfortable joking and talking about their personal lives with co-workers, but not with their supervisors. Supervisors, as one student noted, tend to keep "work things and private things separate." Millennials tend to mix their personal and work lives—this may be related to their desire for flexibility and balance—and so they will often talk about personal matters at work. When they do so, it is not necessarily a sign that they are getting off task; it is a characteristic of their generation and a way to build solidarity with co-workers.

Workplace misunderstandings are often the result of differences in generational values or characteristics. Millennials are known for proficiency with technology; this is one of their most defining characteristics. They use communication technologies in different ways than previous generations—and this translates to personal communication in the workplace. The survey asked students and supervisors to indicate if they felt it was appropriate at work to occasionally make or answer cell phone calls, send text messages, check personal email, or visit social networking sites (see Fig. 8).

**Fig. 7**  
**Generational miscommunications**  
 Only students who have supervisors who are Gen Xers or Baby Boomers (n = 130) and only supervisors described themselves as Gen Xers or Baby Boomers (n = 42) were asked to respond to this question.

**Students: How often do generational differences cause problems or miscommunications between you and your supervisor?**

**Supervisors: How often do generational differences cause problems or miscommunications between you and your student employees? Responses are represented as percentages.**



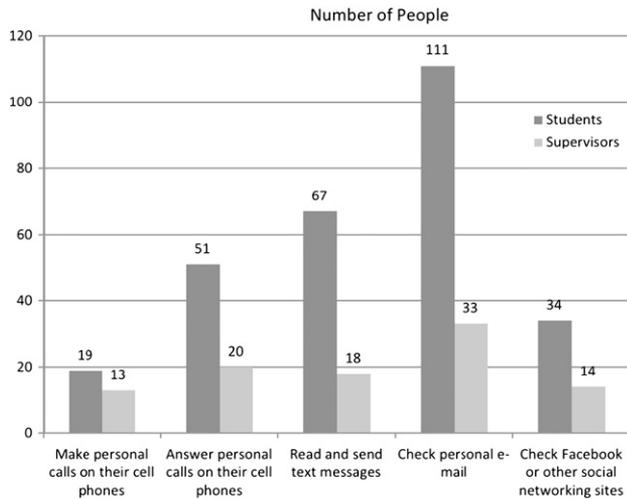
Despite the popular stereotype that Millennials are glued to their cell phones—which is, incidentally, supported by the Pew study's finding that 83 percent of Millennials said they sleep with their cell phones close by (6)—more supervisors than students felt that it is appropriate to make phone calls at work. Only 17 percent of students felt it is appropriate to make personal cell phone calls, while 36 percent of supervisors felt this was appropriate. The same trend holds for answering personal calls: 39 percent of students and 69 percent of supervisors felt this is appropriate. Millennials feel that texting is more appropriate than both answering and making personal cell phone calls at work: about half (53 percent) of the students felt that text messaging was appropriate, and only 28 percent of supervisors agreed.

These results suggest that supervisors feel that cell phone calls are more appropriate in the workplace, while students feel that texting is more appropriate. There may be several reasons for this difference: some supervisors may not use text messaging or may not communicate with people who text message. Millennials may feel that texting is less disruptive at work, or maybe they simply are more accustomed to communicating in this way. Whatever the reason, these results identify a generational difference in the way in which Millennials and their supervisors use technology. Because supervisors tend to prefer cell phone calls to texting, when they see their student employees texting at work they may see it as a disruption or a problem—when, in fact, the employee may be trying to avoid being disruptive. This is an example of how generational miscommunications can cause conflict or misunderstanding in the workplace.

**Fig. 8**  
**On-the-job technology use**  
**Both students (n = 154) and supervisors**  
**(n = 45) responded to this question:**  
**While on the job, do you feel it is appropriate to**  
**occasionally:**

**Both were asked to check all that apply; there was no option for “none apply,” so those who felt none of the options were appropriate did not respond to this question.**

**Responses are represented as percentages.**

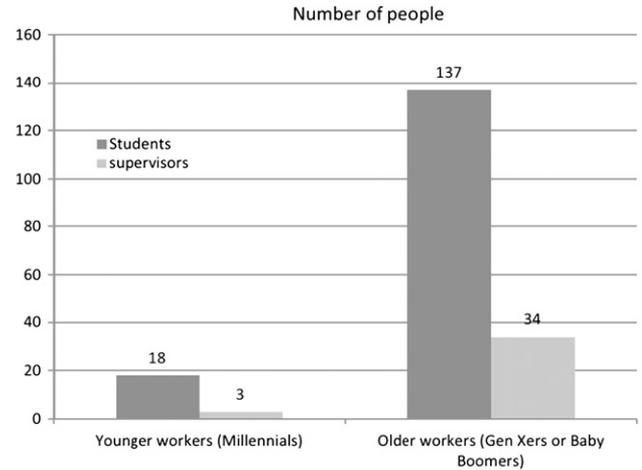


Supervisors can avoid these and other misunderstandings by setting clear expectations for their employees. Many Millennials may assume that occasional texting and e-mailing are appropriate at work—and if this is not the case, supervisors need to communicate this to their employees. Clearly setting the expectation that employees should not text or email at work could avoid misunderstandings. The same idea extends to other issues. For example, Millennials tend to be more casual in dress as well as in speech—In the Half study, respondents preferred business casual or sneakers and jeans to business attire by a wide margin (41 percent favored business casual and 27 percent favored sneakers and jeans).<sup>36</sup> Because of this preference, it may be necessary for a supervisor to explain dress standards, as well as how to politely address patrons or other library staff. When supervisors deal with these issues before they become problems, they can avoid conflict with Millennial employees.

## MOTIVATE

When the survey asked supervisors to comment on generational differences that they noticed at work, many mentioned differences in work ethic. Several supervisors expressed that student employees are not as dedicated to their jobs, that they lack initiative, and that they have shorter attention spans. Supervisors were asked whether older workers (Gen Xers or Baby Boomers) or younger workers (Millennials) tend to have better work ethics, and the majority (88 percent) selected older workers. And it seems that Millennials agree: when student employees were asked the same question, the majority (90 percent) also selected older workers (see Fig. 9) The Pew Research Center's 2010 survey asked members of the four generations to name a characteristic they believe best defines their generation, and the survey report lists the top five most frequent responses for each generation. Of the four generations surveyed, only the Millennial

**Fig. 9**  
**Work ethic**  
**Both students (n = 182) and supervisors**  
**(n = 43) were asked whether older or younger**  
**workers have a better work ethic.**  
**Responses are represented as percentages.**



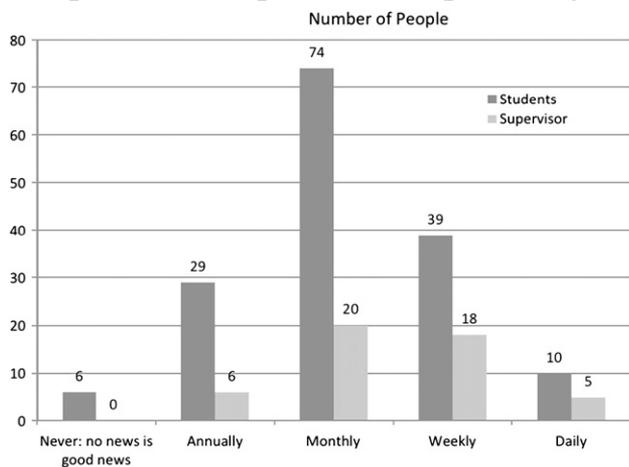
Generation did not list work ethic as a defining characteristic.<sup>37</sup> The Pew Research Center issued a press release suggesting that Millennials are the first generation that does not define itself by its work ethic. The participants instead listed technology use, music, tolerance, intelligence, and clothes.<sup>38</sup> In a 2009 Pew study, nearly 60 percent of Millennial respondents indicated that work ethic is a major difference between younger and older generations, and about 75 percent said that older people have a better work ethic.<sup>39</sup>

The Lee Library survey, along with these Pew studies, suggests that that work ethic is not a defining value or characteristic of the Millennials—they, themselves, willingly concede that their grandparents, parents, and supervisors work harder. But this should not suggest that Gen Yers do not work hard—it just means work ethic is not as important as other values. Millennial employees may not be as motivated as other employees are by a strong work ethic or by a desire to work hard. Instead, they may be more motivated by other factors, such as flexibility, meaningful work, their relationship with their supervisor, growth opportunities, etc.

Along with offering employees flexibility and growth opportunities as previously discussed, library supervisors can motivate Millennial by offering regular feedback. Millennials crave feedback; they want to know how they are progressing and if they are meeting expectations. Forty-six percent of Lee Library student employees said they want formal feedback monthly, and 26 percent want it weekly (see Fig. 10). Results from national surveys show similar results—on the Half study, six in ten Millennials said they prefer to hear from their supervisors at least once a day.<sup>40</sup> The Hudson study found that Millennials are more likely than older workers to expect regular feedback: about one quarter of Millennials expect feedback weekly or daily.<sup>41</sup>

Millennials, especially students and recent graduates, are accustomed to receiving regular, even instantaneous, feedback: In school, teachers and professors give them feedback on assignments, and letter grades and GPAs each semester let Millennial students easily track their progress. Barnes (2009) noted that because the “trophy generation” is accustomed to receiving immediate feedback or praise, “silence is often seen as a negative response and has the potential to

**Fig. 10**  
**Feedback**  
**Students: How often do you prefer direct feedback from your supervisor? (n = 199).**  
**Supervisors: How often do you think student employees prefer to receive direct feedback? (n = 57)**  
**Responses are represented as percentages.**



impact performance.”<sup>42</sup> They don't necessarily expect letter grades from their supervisors, but they appreciate knowing how they are doing. As discussed, 29 percent of Lee Library student employees are motivated by the desire to please their supervisors—so they want to know when they have pleased their supervisors and what they can do better.

Employee recognition is also important. Survey results suggest that Lee Library student employees tend to view their generation more negatively than their supervisors do. As part of the survey, both students and supervisors were given a list of twenty-two common stereotypes about the Millennial Generation (see Fig. 6). This list was compiled based on articles and websites found through a quick, simple Google search of the terms “Millennial stereotypes” and “Generation Y stereotypes.” Both positive and negative characteristics were mixed together, and the list included descriptions such as “lazy,” “smart,” “very casual,” and “tolerant.” Students and supervisors were asked, while recognizing that these terms were generalizations, to indicate which descriptions they agreed characterized the Millennial Generation as a whole.

Interestingly, the students were a lot harsher on their generation than the supervisors were. For example, 28 percent of students said Millennials are lazy, 54 percent said they are self-centered, and 71 percent said they feel entitled; however, only 9 percent, 20 percent, and 49 percent, respectively, of supervisors felt these terms described the Millennial Generation. In a similar question, students were asked to indicate how they think Millennials are viewed by older generations, and 46 percent selected “somewhat negatively,” while only 22 percent selected “somewhat positively” and 16 percent selected “very positively” (see Fig. 11).

Student employees at Lee Library tend to view their own generation more negatively than their supervisors do—and they believe that older generations view them negatively. This is an important idea to remember when working with Millennials: they have observed and have been told negative stereotypes about their generation, and they carry these perceptions with them into the workplace. The reality—at

least at the Lee Library—is that supervisors don't see Millennials as negatively as the students think they do; the supervisors don't observe the stereotypical behavior in the Millennials, or at least they don't observe it any more in this generation than they observe it in their own generations. This shows library supervisors the importance of encouraging and mentoring Millennials and giving them positive feedback so they can overcome negative stereotypes instead of adopting them.

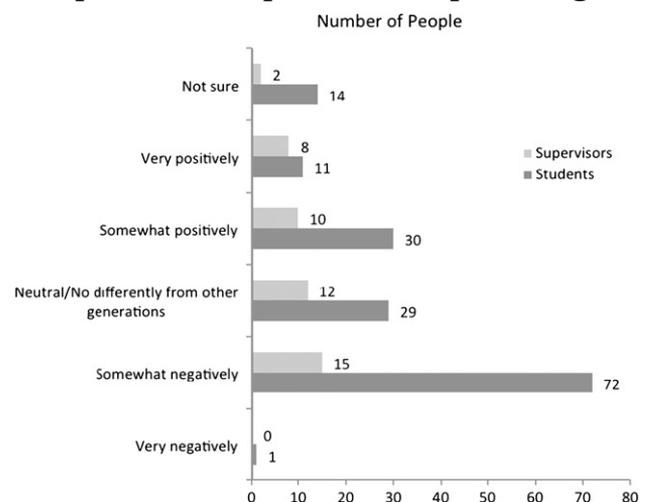
Clark (1995) suggested that in motivating young employees, “the methods of recognition used for staff and donors are also suitable for students,” and suggested recognition programs that include “book-plates, receptions, certificates, and external publicity.”<sup>43</sup> Clark described programs rewarding and recognizing students for seniority by giving them awards based on how many semesters or hours they had worked. As discussed in the literature review, this advice is outdated and reflects the values and desires of Gen Xers rather than today's student employees. Millennials want frequent, instantaneous feedback; they want to please their supervisors and want to be recognized for their daily successes. So an award for working for five consecutive semesters is not as effective as a simple expression or token of gratitude on a monthly or weekly basis. Recognition does not have to be elaborate or expensive to be effective—words of praise or gratitude, a card, candy bar, or department bagel party can be recognition and motivation enough.

### CHANGES AT THE LEE LIBRARY

Again, recognition and feedback does not have to be elaborate or expensive. Based on what the Lee Library has learned about Millennials and by surveying student employees, the Lee Library has implemented several simple programs to better recognize and motivate student employees. For example, supervisors were given candy bars and tickets to the local dollar movie theater to give to student employees whom supervisors felt were working hard.

The Lee Library also revamped the student pay program by introducing semester-by-semester pay increases. Student employees now receive formal evaluations from their supervisors each semester and have the opportunity to receive a 20 cent pay increase. Surveys conducted following the implementation of this pay structure showed

**Fig. 11**  
**Perceptions**  
**Both: In general, how do you think older generations view the Millennial Generation?**  
**Students: n = 184**  
**Supervisors: n = 55**  
**Responses are represented as percentages.**



that student employees responded positively to this change: 63 percent agreed and 35 percent strongly agreed that the evaluations and raises were highly motivational (181 students were surveyed about the pay raises in 2007). The pay program was evaluated again in 2009 with a survey sent to student employees, 237 of whom responded. Students were asked if they would prefer a) a higher starting wage with one 50 cent raise each year, or b) a slightly lower starting wage with three 20-cent raises each year. About 80 percent preferred option b), even though they would be making less money at the end of the year. This result affirms that pay is not the most important motivating factor for Millennials, and it shows that Millennials prefer regular, consistent feedback and recognition.

Another change implemented because of the Lee Library's efforts to better understand student employees is a staff-wide training for library supervisors about how to better work with student employees. This training focuses on supervising student employees in terms of their generational values, using data and conclusions gathered from student employees in the Lee Library. A similar training, also using survey results from library student employees, is now used by the University to help supervisors across the campus be more aware of the Millennial Generation and potential generational miscommunications.

### CONCLUSION

The results reported and discussed in this paper represent what the Lee Library has learned about student employees and about the Millennial Generation as a whole. Understanding the values of student patrons and employees is important to the day-to-day operations and the future of the library—and of the profession as a whole.

Other academic libraries may use the results as a starting point to better understand their own student employees and younger staff, and from there carry out their own surveys and focus groups to discover the values and preferences of Millennial employees in their own libraries. It is important for academic libraries to understand the needs and preferences of their patrons—but it is just as important to understand their employees, especially their student employees and younger staff. The up-and-coming Millennial Generation is not going to fade away, and characteristics and preferences they exhibit now are not the transient trends of adolescence, but the values they will carry into adulthood and the workforce. Libraries need to better understand this generation in order to meet their needs as patrons—and in order to recruit, retain, and motivate new staff members who will gradually replace the Baby Boomers.

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