

The Millennial Myth

By Eva Chase



Since graduating with my bachelor's degree in 2016, I've been the youngest staff member in every office I've worked in by, let's just say . . . more than a few years. My current position as sustainability coordinator at Black Hills State University (BHSU) is no exception.

When I first entered the full-time workforce at 21, I saw my youth as something that I needed to overcome. If you've ever read a news article on Facebook, you must know that all millennials are lazy, entitled,

and single-handedly killing thousands of industries ranging from breakfast cereals to fabric softener. Due to this perception of my generation, I started out attempting to conceal my age for fear of losing respect (which didn't work because I still look 16). However, I quickly realized I was looking at my age as a limitation, when instead it could be my most valuable asset. I was neither lazy nor entitled. Like most of my peers, I was the opposite.

My peers and I place a high value on both formal and informal education, we're passionate about our career fields, and we're excited by change and helping an organization move into the future. All of these characteristics are beneficial to any organization or company and make millennials like myself a great hire. Apparently, the facilities services hiring team at BHSU agreed.

In my current position with BHSU Facilities Services, I advise three student organizations and supervise 8-10 student employees. Yes, I sigh when I get asked what my major is on a weekly basis, but I still see my age as one of my greatest attributes, and one that helps me to be more effective when working with these students. It was just a few years ago that I was in their shoes. I remember the stress and chaos of being a full-time student, but I also remember what I gained from being involved on campus outside of class.

In addition to learning your field, college is also a time to learn how to be successful in a workplace and as part of a team. When you bring student workers into your department or advise a club, you teach them something they can't learn in a classroom, but which is just as important as any classroom experience. You don't have to be a professor to have a huge influence on a student's life and career. I truly believe I've made an impact on the lives of the students I've had the privilege of working with so far, and my relatability as a millennial has helped me do that.

In addition to my age being an asset when work-

ing with students, it has brought a different point of view to our team. My mindset and experiences as a millennial truly set me apart as a facilities team member, and that becomes apparent when I'm the youngest person in the meeting by 20-plus years. Working at a smaller university in an even smaller town, you find yourself surrounded by colleagues who have been a part of the university for many years. These coworkers, their commitment to their jobs, and their knowledge of the university's history are an invaluable resource, but I often hear them say things like, "Well, that's the way it's always been done." This is when I step in to say, "That doesn't mean it always has to be done this way." Because a solution may have been the best one in the past doesn't mean there's not a better one now. I'm not referring to change for the sake of change, but to change for the sake of efficiency and progress. When your workplace lacks diversity, it can also lack the kinds of discussions that cultivate creative solutions.

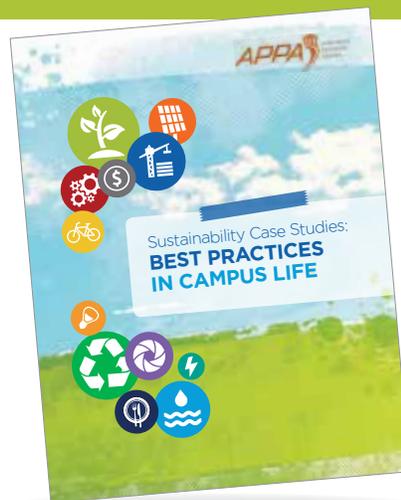
The "millennial myth" has held many of my generation back from getting a position we were qualified for or a promotion we deserved—but the fact of the matter is it's just that, a myth. According to a Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, millennials will make up nearly 50 percent of the U.S. workforce by 2020 and 75 percent by 2030. In a survey of millennials published by the University of North Carolina Kenan-Flagler Business School, 52 percent said "opportunities for career progression made an employer attractive," and 22 percent said "training and development [is] the most valued benefit from an employer." Furthermore, the same survey revealed more millennials prioritized "meaningful work" over high pay.

Millennials are our next workforce leaders. We're passionate and dedicated to our careers, and

we want the opportunity to work with older generations and learn from them. Give us the opportunity to bust this myth. ☺

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