

**g**en**the**edge



leverage **millennials** with a  
next **generation** mindset

**ryanjenkins**

nextgenerationcatalyst

## WHY READ THIS?

We are on the verge of a historical tipping point. History is littered with events and innovations that have been catalysts of change. For example, the automobile led to the creation of the suburbs, and the Internet was a catalyst for the proliferation of accessible knowledge and a demand for customization. Tomorrow's culture, workplace, and leadership will change due to Millennials becoming the largest surge of employees into the workplace since the Baby Boomers. **Change is inevitable, but the development of this energetic and talented generation must be intentional.**

Millennials are the largest and most technologically enabled generation on the planet, and they are already revolutionizing how we connect and communicate, and the changes won't stop here. **With technology and social media becoming the great equalizers, it has become irresponsible to not use these tools to leverage the shifting trends.** Are you going to be the one who leverages and capitalizes on the Millennials' unique skill set, or will you deny their impact and be left behind? I implore you to learn how to leverage them and gain the relevant edge that will allow you to thrive during these turbulent times. Find your GenEdge.

## INTRODUCTION

*We're living in an age of networks, not hierarchies; knowledge & wisdom is distributed rather than concentrated among gray hairs. ~Fast Company*

You may be thinking...

"Those damn Millennials! And oh great, now one of them even wrote an ebook about the entitled punk kids."

There is a ton of strife and misconstrued perspectives towards the Millennials. I was never oblivious to this friction, but once I immersed myself in learning more about the myriad of generations represented in the workplace (especially my own generation, the Millennials), I soon discovered that many people have a deep rooted frustration surrounding the productivity and mindset of each generation.

The problem is that most of this friction and frustration is born from ignorance, limiting beliefs about one's own organization, and/or one's leadership ability. It is born from fear of the unknown and becoming irrelevant in society. So it's imperative today to spot the relevant culture shifts and thrive thru them. Or how I like to call it...**gain the GenEdge!**

Now, more than ever before, age doesn't matter. **The school of thought that experience is what is needed to lead, create, and connect is permanently expelled.** There are 12 year olds who are creating successful mobile apps for goodness sakes! Also, there are 15 year old nuclear physicists who speak on TED stages and believe with every fiber (pun intended) that they can and will change the world. Since technology is evolving so rapidly, we need to **leverage** those

who are closest to it and who will be most affected by it later...the Millennials. It's not a question of "should" we adapt and leverage the Millennials but "how." Uncover the how...now.

I applaud your hunger for understanding this generation and I hope to applaud and encourage your application of the ideas and insights that lay ahead of you in this short ebook. Whether you are a Millennial, leading one, working alongside one, parenting one or coaching one, I believe this ebook and your continued mastery of today's culture shifts will serve you incredibly well.

## WHATS A MILLENNIAL?

*Each generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it. ~George Orwell*

First things first, what's a generation?

Generations are defined as cohorts of people who were born in the same date range and share similar cultural experiences. Generations have typically spanned 20 years, but as the Internet, apps, and technology become faster, the exposure to cultural experiences from around the world become a 24/7 feed directly into the front pocket of your skinny jeans. This increase in exposure is cutting the 20 year generational span drastically, and its only going to continue to shrink.

**Younger generations are becoming more behaviorally and culturally diverse.** If you currently experience the pinch of today's generational gaps and communication miscues - just you wait - the pinch will quickly turn into a right hook to the jaw because the gap is only going to deepen as these highly diverse generations enter the marketplace.

The current generation that is really shaking up the marketplace are the Millennials. These are individuals born between 1980 and 1999. They are 80 million strong and are the largest generation on the planet. In 1993, *Advertising Age* was credited with creating the term Generation Y, which has since been replaced with Millennials. William Strauss and Neil Howe, influential authors of American generations, used the term Millennials because the members of the generation did not want to be associated with their predecessors, Generation X. Further solidifying the term, Millennials, *Advertisers Age* recently threw in the towel conceding that Millennials is a better name than their coined Generation Y. **Millennial simply refers to the generation who came of age during the 2000 millennium.**

Here are a few other names that tried to label this generation: Echo Boomers, Net Generation, Me Generation, Generation Next, Generation We.

Here is my best shot at answering wtf is up with the Millennials (wtf stands for "what the F\*#!" for those behind on their acronyms):

**The Millennials are a smart, over achieving, innovative, self-possessed, and optimistic bunch of peeps doing their best to operate within the established rules set forth for them while practicing their calling of saving the world.**

You may not agree with that statement....yet. However, hopefully by the end of this read you'll have a renewed perspective. I choose to focus specifically on the Millennials for a few reasons:

1. **They are the largest generation on earth.** Their sheer numbers should warrant your attention. As the Baby Boomers taught us, the larger the generation, the greater the influence over norms, expectations and behavior.
2. **Most of the questions and tension surround the Millennials.** I witness this when I speak to audiences. I ask the audience for their thoughts on "today's generations," and knee-jerkly, regardless of their age, they focus on the Millennials. Even though I specifically say "*today's* generations" (tricky right?). This focus always prevails and confirms that the majority of friction is caused by the Millennial surge.
3. **By studying the Millennials, you inadvertently learn about other generations.** If I'm a Boomer learning about the preferred communication techniques of a Millennial, I either relate to it or not and can adjust my communication tactics and expectations with my Millennials.
4. **The better you understand the Millennials and generational trends, the quicker you can position your brand for future success as the next generation beyond them will have similar tendencies.** Like the Great One, Wayne Gretzky would say "Skate to where the puck is going to be not where it is."

Full disclosure - I am a Millennial and have a burning passion and endless optimism about how my generation can be **the catalyst to unlock the new economy**. This belief is not rooted in my allegiance as a Millennial but rather my full throttle belief in people (of all ages) and their unique capacity to do extraordinary things. **People are and forever will be the greatest resource this planet has.** Invest the time to learn from each other, adapt to trends, and grow with each other.

## **GAINING THE GENEDGE**

*Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change. ~Stephen Hawking*

It was if I had buyer's remorse for my own life.

Just like when you roll off the car dealership lot with a brand new convertible; you are so amped for the new experience the new car will bring, but you can't help but think...did I pay too much for it? Can I really afford it? What am I going to tell my wife? What else could I have invested in that would have a greater return or impact? All of these internal and silent questions are known as buyer's remorse. I wish my buyer's remorse was over something as fleeting or materialistic as a car but no such luck...it was my life.

I felt duped. My high expectations for “the real world” came crashing down. So hard that I wanted to flee to the only world I knew - 3am nights, beer pong, video games, cigars on the roof with the fellas, studying for pointless exams with all the free time in the world and yet still thinking I was busy in my bubble that I called...college! I had just emerged from the “4 best years of your life” and was immediately slapped in my unassuming face with a job I hated.

I know, I know...I should “be grateful to have a job” but to me and my fellow Millennials that is not good enough anymore (sorry grandmas and all other older generations who see big, cushy corporate jobs as having “arrived”). We get one shot at this life. We live in the most enabled and tech savvy world that has ever existed. **You cannot expect the Millennials to find satisfaction with a 9 to 5 job that has zero reach and zero impact.**

### *the new web*

I’m also not naive enough to know that this buyer’s remorse that I had for my life is exclusive to Millennials. In fact, the Baby Boomers and Gen Xers had these same feelings, but there is a new gun slinger in town, and its name is social media. **Social media has become the great equalizer.** Social media has expanded our networks, our exposure to other industries, jobs and opportunities, and it provides everyone with a ripe platform to build a brand or business. **Social media provides options.** Options that were non-existent when the Boomers and Gen Xers became fed up with jobs. Thus they dug in for the long haul and committed to finding their identity with their employer.

Social media has shaped the Millennials due to their dependency on it while growing up. **Never before in the history of the world has it been easier to launch a business or brand and gain immediate exposure with the tools of social media.** This option alone will force organizations to create better environments because you only get one chance to recruit and retain the next generation of top talent. Never before have so many leaders and organizations been exposed and nudged to become more transparent. Companies are now put on display for high scrutiny, bad or good, since the global acceptance of the social web.

There is no denying that social media has forever changed the way we do business. You are pressed to find a commercial or advertisement that does not include a social media button or link. We will talk about social media to some extent but what I am really interested in, and what I hope you gain a new appreciation for, is the consumer and employee behavioral changes induced by social media. **Social media has pushed business and leadership into the new era, and the primary catalyst of social media are the Millennials** (heck - social media was built for Millennials by the Millennial, Mark Zuckerberg). Therefore, **understand and leverage the Millennials and you will thrive in this new frontier.**

### *lost loyalty*

I considered myself uber blessed to have the job I had right out of college for two reasons. First, it was a great eye opener to the flaws and un-evolved practices of a large corporation. Secondly, it provided a means for me to survive as I built my business. I brought to work a new breed of talents, perspectives, aspirations and willingness to hustle to make an impact, just like most Millennials, but what I was sold by the recruiters and leaders of the organization was very different from what was actually experienced once I was on the payroll. Thus, just like the convertible car example, buyer's remorse had set in for my own life. Did I pay too much for it (i.e. no more summer, no more travel, no more childhood friends, no more parents)? Can I really afford it (i.e. will it be worth forfeiting my dream or will the job fill my internal meaningful meter)? What am I going to tell my wife (i.e. will my family, my parents or future kids be proud of what I do)? What else could I have invested my time in that would have a greater return or impact (i.e. a second degree, travel to gain new perspectives, my own start-up business or brand)?

I often wonder how many of my friends I would have willingly recruited if my employer delivered more than I expected. Or how much my company loyalty would have grown during a well run orientation.

**The corporate environment is the place where my aspirations of serving others and changing the world died.** My talent and optimism about the future was dimmed as the lights of the corporate world began to flicker on the lame reality of sitting in a cube. And as more and more young hopefuls came behind me, I could sense they had the same disappointment. So much talent and energy....wasted. What a shame.

So many individuals are quick to point to the Millennials as lazy without an ounce of work ethic in their blood. But the true reality is that work must evolve and **most organizations internal structures are not cutting edge enough to win over the focus and loyalty of the next generation.** When the new era of tech savvy workforce enters the old fashion corporate culture, it stifles their innate innovative abilities. **Creativity and innovation will define the new era of business, so make the necessary shifts to net the next generation energy rather than squandering it.**

I grew resentful of my employer and its leaders. I had to go outside of work to social media and outside associations to find ways to develop my unique strengths and brand. This proved a lose-lose situation. My employer could not benefit from my full participation, focus and energy. And I became exhausted serving two masters, growing more resentful at every situation where work consumed my precious brand development time. I wonder what I could have contributed if my employer equipped me with the development opportunities I so craved?

Unassuming organizations that fail to innovate and create dynamic **cultures will collapse due to the Millennials pursuit of the side hustle** (passions outside of work) where they can be innovative and have an impact. Don't be a victim of the side hustle. Channel the Millennials energy and thirst for growth.

*time to get legit*

This is exactly why now is the time to get legit. **It's time to get relevant and approach work, leadership, and marketing in a new way that moves your mission forward.** If you are not legit in the eyes of the largest generation on the planet, you will be sucking wind trying to innovate. You'll be like Blockbuster or Borders who had an epic fail due to their lack of a pulse on what's next in the marketplace. Millennials will continue to do as I did and take their future in their own hands and leverage social media to build a business or brand that they can be proud of.

Too many organizations and insecure leaders have chosen to stay the course and ask the Millennials to sit on the sidelines and wait their turn. I believe that choice is monumentally detrimental. Organizations and leaders need to take the opposite approach and use the Millennials as an indicator or signpost of the changing times and **CHOOSE to change.** Change so you won't lose loyalty and the-much-needed innovation you need to survive in this ever-changing marketplace. If you do not have a Millennial strategy, consider this ebook the empty-light on your fuel gauge of your car, and it's not only flashing at you but it's blinding you!

Please do not change FOR the Millennials but rather for the future vitality of your organization. I'm asking that you **become an early adopter of the fresh capabilities the Millennials bring to the table.** Your late or lack of adoption of the next generations will leave you scrounging for the crumbs off the table of those that got legit. Do more than survive. Thrive. Get legit.

What if they do become "the next great generation" (as some folks have labeled them) and your organization has a plethora of them? Or your brand is positioned flawlessly to meet their 80 million wants, needs and desires? Then, you win AND they win.

The purpose of this ebook is to shift your perspective to **ensure that the next generation of leaders, workers, entrepreneurs, parents, doctors, heroes, and do-gooder's talent and pure aspirations for a better life, culture, and society are amplified and not squandered under the thumb of a stale corporation or leader.**

*gain the edge*

If you are so bold and wise to choose to get legit, **you will need to regain a relevant mindset.** I use "regain" because there was a point in all of our lives that we were agile in our thinking and learning. This may have happened in your moldable years as a kid, your state of learning to be a parent or when you launched your business during the dot com boom. You had a relevant and open mindset that was bent on absorbing and acting. I'd like you to **experience a lasting reunion with that mindset.**

Many people point to “generational divides” as an excuse why they can’t or won’t think as nimbly as before, but I think there is a better explanation. We are all unique and human and all have a little different perspective on life from the next person. Since we are all different, that puts us in the same boat and the only divide I see is the one in our mind. It’s a psychographic divide instead of a demographic one. Besides, **age is really only a mindset anyways** (Ka-ching! Big time brownie points from my parents and grandparents on that one!).

What if you could develop a mindset that thrived on a constant state of flux? Flux meaning a constant state of change. What if you had a mindset that could edge out your competition? Wouldn’t that rock!?! Everyday there seems to be new culture and social norms that shift unexpectedly and without warning. To be equipped with a mindset of flux would enable you to adapt and leverage changes, accept the differences, and see the unseen. **It’s crucial to find that edge today.**

As stated in the introduction, no longer is it acceptable to judge generations, Millennials especially, based on old data, old paradigms, or old beliefs. Rules are being rewritten every day. Expectations are in a state of flux. **Embracing a flux mindset has become crucial to surviving the flux of the market you serve or employees you lead.** With flux you gain the edge.

This has happened before as cities grew to be the center of American culture. Those accustomed to the growing season and sunrise to sundown work had to adapt fast to the faster ways of the urban manufacturing world. Today, technology, social media and globalization creates an unhinging of the expected, from employment to markets to corporate leadership. **How you react depends on what you have to gain versus what you have to lose.**

Get legit with a GenerationEdge (GenEdge) mindset. **An open mindset of flux that will give you the much needed edge during these turbulent times.** An edge that will allow you to re-tweak your work environments to effectively recruit and retain the next generation talent. An edge that will equip you as the new breed of leaders that will usher in the strongest economy to date. An edge that will allow you to cut through the clutter to market to the Millennials in the most meaningful way.

A majority of corporations, work environments, leaders and marketing messages are not built for flux. And **with the flood of the Millennials, change will be the only constant element of your business and team.** It doesn’t matter who you think they are or are not because soon they’ll be all that matters. They’ll be your leaders, your politicians, your customers and **your legacy.**

“Sheesh, how do you really feel, Ryan!?” is what you may be thinking, but I’m not here to write another fluff piece on depicting the Millennials but rather paint the picture of how rapidly old paradigms are changing and culture is shifting due to the Millennial movement.



Much like entrepreneurs, Millennials demonstrate a flux mindset well. After all, they grew up with their tools (Facebook) and technology (mobile phones) constantly changing and evolving. Entrepreneurs have to be up on the latest trends to gain the edge on their competition and to ensure their niche market is protected. Millennials welcome change and thrive well in a state of flux. They too need to get legit in order to make sure they stand out in the highly competitive and saturated talent pool of their peers. **To get legit, one must gain the GenEdge.**

It is my sincere hope and true desire that by embracing GenEdge, you become a more adaptive Millennial, Manager (leader) and Marketer. **A GenEdge mindset will elevate you from the pithy underbelly of sidelining Millennials to thinking of innovative ways to leverage Millennials' unique strengths to unlock the new economy.**

### **THE MILLENNIAL LANDSCAPE**

*Approximately 10,000 Millennials turn 21 every day in America & by 2025, 3 out of every 4 workers globally will be Millennials.*

Here are the hard-hitting facts of why you are an absolute rockstar for taking the time to understand the Millennials. These numbers should alleviate any suspensions you may have surrounding the importance of gaining a GenEdge.

To all of my left brain, analytical friends...eat your hearts out!

#### Millennials and Leadership:

- In the next 5 years, 50% of U.S. executives will be eligible to retire.
  - Will you or your Millennials be ready to fill the gaps?
- 3 out of 4 Millennials want to be mentored by a leader.
  - How sound is your mentorship program?
- Only 20% of Millennial women say that they want to follow in the footsteps of the female leaders in their workplace.
  - Are you a leader worth following?

Leading across four (soon to be five) generations is not easy. Everyone communicates differently and has varying aspirations and expectations. Gaining the relevant GenEdge mindset will allow you to remain nimble in your thinking and help you to connect in a meaningful way across the generations.

#### Millennials and Work:

- 90% want their workplace to be social and fun.
  - What does your team do for fun?
- 71% want their coworkers to be like a second family.
  - Is your corporate culture family-friendly?

- 93% want a job where they can be themselves.
  - How creative and emotionally healthy is your team?
- 92% of surveyed Millennials (21-24 year olds) felt entrepreneurship education was vital in the new economy and job market.
  - How will you harness their entrepreneurial spirit?
- 64% ask about social media policies during interviews.
  - How flexible and cutting edge is your corporate social media policy?
- 70% are planning to change jobs once the economy improves.
  - Will you net or lose the next top talent?
- 79% rate a positive work environment as more important than the size of their paycheck.
  - Is cultivating rich culture a priority at your workplace?
- 46% want to start a biz in the next 5 years, while 35% of Generation X & only 21% of Baby Boomers.
  - How will you harness their side hustle?
- 84% would agree to take a lateral move to gain beneficial work experience.
  - Are you equipping your team with the desired transferable skills needed to thrive tomorrow?
- 62% of Millennial women don't want to repeat the approach their mothers often took to corporate jobs.
  - Do you still force your team to drink the company loyalty kool-aid?

Doesn't it make sense to begin tweaking your corporate culture to entice the future workforce? Wouldn't it make sense to cultivate a rewarding career for a Millennial top performer that will eventually lead the company? Yes! On all accounts.

#### Millennials and Culture (Social):

- By 2017, Millennials will have the most spending power of any generation.
  - Are you positioned to cash in?
- 9 out of 10 Millennials indicate that they feel responsible to make a difference in this world.
  - Will you harness their optimism?
- Millennials switch between devices and forms of media an average of 27 times per hour.
  - Are you challenging them enough?
- Millennials are on track to become the most educated generation in history.
  - How will you quench their thirst for learning?
- 43% have liked more than 20 brands on Facebook.
  - Is your brand a favorite?
- 91% make their Facebook Places & foursquare check-ins public.
  - How will Millennials share their experiences with your brand?
- 84% rely on opinions of friends before making a purchase.
  - How likely are your young customers to refer you?

Even if you do not manage or have direct contact with Millennials on a routine basis, chances are good down the road that they will be your customer in one form or fashion. Get the GenEdge and make it a priority to be social with your customers.

## WRAP UP

*Action expresses priorities. ~Gandhi What are yours?*

**Bottomline:** A GenEdge mindset will elevate you from the pithy underbelly of sidelining Millennials to thinking of innovative ways to leverage Millennials unique strengths to unlock the new economy and thrive.

- Leverage their shortcomings as teachable moments for yourself.
- Leverage their energy to get more done.
- Leverage their naivety to expose your blind spots.
- Leverage their optimism to soften your heart and to push through your organization's doubt.
- Leverage their "entitlement" to give them more responsibility.
- Leverage their digital savvy-ness to penetrate new markets.
- Leverage their lack of experience in order to practice mentorship.
- Leverage their bent on life vs. work as a reminder.

### How to Cultivate the GenEdge:

- Evaluate your current mindset.
  - Do you fear change or becoming irrelevant?
  - Are you naturally curious?
  - What are you learning daily that is stretching you?
- Change your mindset.
  - Find 3-4 other people that are more savvy or knowledgeable in a particular area and ask them what they know that you should know.
  - Listen.
- Sustain your new mindset.
  - Read blogs, listen to podcasts, attend conferences and stay curious.
  - Ask your team or leaders to keep you accountable to your regained mindset.
  - Continue to ask Millennials for their insights and thoughts.

### Particular Perspectives:

Millennials - It's crucial that you continue to embrace and sharpen a GenEdge mindset as the generation behind you (iGen) is going to bring with them, different ideas, new ways of doing things and conflicting perspectives. Also, the GenEdge mindset will serve you well if you need nimble thinking to adapt to the older generation's traditional thinking or previous ways.

Managers - GenEdge is a must in order to lead your team, company or family to higher ground during the flood of Millennials into the marketplace. It takes a mindset bent on uncovering what's not there in order to be a true visionary to your followers.

Marketers - Let's face it, your customers aren't just moving targets any more, they appear for a few seconds, vanish and then reappear again behind you. A GenEdge mindset allows for a 360 degree thinking pattern that will help you to identify all the opportunities to reach and influence your customers in a meaningful way.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Stay legit and cultivate the GenEdge with Ryan's weekly insights on the Next Generation Catalyst blog: [www.ryan-jenkins.com](http://www.ryan-jenkins.com).

If you'd like to have Ryan deliver a speech or workshop to help your team better position their leadership or brand for the next generation, contact Ryan at [rj@ryan-jenkins.com](mailto:rj@ryan-jenkins.com).

Props to you for getting to the end of this writing. You surely will be one of the next generation leaders with the edge.

Stay legit and thrive my friend!  
The world awaits...