Identifying Traits & Values Associated with the City of Austin’s High-Performing Millennial Employees

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Human Dimensions of Organizations, The University of Texas at Austin

Introduction

While X Gen X has been waiting in the wings to take their places, they are significantly smaller than Boomers in number. Therefore, organizations will need to rely on high-performing Millennial workers to fill critical gaps. While Millennials make up 1/3 of the labor pool they are only participating at a rate of 25% in the public sector. This means governments must maximize the use of a smaller population to fill key positions.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews with 6 high-performing Millennial employees at the City of Austin. High-performing is defined as working in a position above the organizational norm for their education and experience level. Qualitative vs. Quantitative – Allowed for a more probing and interrogative approach to concretely identify traits and values and allowing an understanding of the “why” behind the “what.”

Results

Experimenters: Open to – and actively engaging in – new experiences. Each interviewee ended up in government by abandoning other career paths.

“I’ve lived about three lives. In cat terms I still have a few left.” – Betty, 29 yrs old

Resilient: The ability to adapt and cope with adversity both professionally and personally

“People just don’t realize it. They’re like, ‘if you failed once you’re a failure or if you succeeded once you’re a success,’ it’s like, that’s just not the way it works. – Sally, 34 yrs old

Traditional Benefits: Pensions, Healthcare, and stability are highly desirable.

“When I started it was kind of cliché, ‘oh, the City of Austin has great benefits. I had come into the city because of school. I kind of stayed for a long time – just because I loved the work I was doing - but from the benefits piece of it that became important.” – Isaac, 34 yrs old

Non-Traditional Benefits: Flexible schedules, collaborative environments, merit promotions.

“I feel that assigning someone based solely on seniority doesn’t promote innovation or opportunities for growth. I don’t think the person that’s been here seven years should get promoted just because the other person has been here two years.” – Linda, 29 yrs old

Conclusions

Recruit:

• Seek to promote government careers as an option for Millennials
• Expand the recruitment pool by looking in non-traditional sectors
• Place greater emphasis on skills over experience in position posting and design

Retain:

• Encourage experimentation and innovation throughout the organization
• Consider reorganizing to create more collaborative and fluid work environments
• Protect traditional benefits such as pensions, healthcare, and paid vacations
• Expand flexible scheduling and teleworking opportunities across the full spectrum of job classifications

Develop:

• Don’t punish failure. Seek instead to train and mentor
• Teach resiliency at all levels
• Establish advancement systems that emphasize merit and performance over time & experience

Acknowledgments

The PDO Staff: Amy Ware, Gaby Bonevac, John Cunningham, Prisca Markman, Ken Henderson, & Ken Hou

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My Interviewees (names changed for anonymity): Isaac, Sally, Betty, Linda, Isaac, 34 yrs old, Betty, 29 yrs old, Linda, 29 yrs old

My CPO Team: Oogd McInnes, Allen Cleer, Beryl Benavides, Andy Tate

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4 Million Baby Boomers retire every year

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