

Barnabas Summit, Excerpts from Survey Data: *The Multigenerational Marketplace*

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A Communication Perspective on Creating Value

In preparing to write *The Multigenerational Marketplace*, I sought not only the current research in the field but also the pulse of the demographic entering the workforce. I have worked with the next generation for over 20 years, and my life's work is helping them discover and pursue their calling. I was grieved to learn that much of their poor behavior in the workplace was largely the result of multigenerational-interpersonal miscommunication, and I am hopeful that education will provide the necessary impetus for change.

In this chapter, I provide data and quotes from focus groups and surveys targeting Millennial and Gen Z workers. As I share this data from the focus groups and surveys, reflect on what you've learned so far about differences and how these findings might currently be impacting your workplace environment for better or for worse. After we assess the feedback in this chapter, we will look in depth at the eight core competencies for addressing disengagement in the workplace.

Responding to Queries: What's a Reasonable Response Time for Email Communication? In our communication study, I wanted to look at expectations on response times for internal communication. The rationale for this question came from several organizations I worked with in communication audits, where employees complained that their emails were not being responded to in a fair and equitable timeframe. From tracking these conversations through the organizational levels, we found that the younger generation tended to expect immediate or at least same-day responses, whereas the older generations tended to wait a day or two before responding (though sometimes the roles were reversed). In looking at the broader realm of data, a Yahoo study in California and Spain (2015) found that 2 million users exchange 16 billion emails over a few months, with 90% responding to the email within a day and 50% responding within 47 minutes. The youngest users took only 13 minutes on average to respond to an email. A MailTime study of 1500 users (2015) showed that 1/3 of employees surveyed respond to emails within 15 minutes, with another 1/4 responding within 30 minutes. As Shawbel (2015) notes, email response time has the power of advancing or tarnishing your workplace reputation: "If you aren't responsive to emails, it paints a negative image of you as (being) lazy at work."

In our study, 62% of Millennials and Gen Zs expected a same day response with another 18% expecting a response within an hour, 10% expecting a response time of 1-2 hours, and 10% expecting a next day response. Given these numbers, it's easy to see the cause of frustration for many organizations. If one generation expects to receive, on average, a response in 2 hours, and

if another generation assumes that the email needs a response within the week, we have a clear disconnect on communication expectations.

Though no one in our surveys chose the final response (“I’ve given up on expecting anyone to return my email”), this was a frequent response in our focus groups studies. Employees at more than one organization said they felt devalued when their emails were ignored over periods of time. Eventually, they said, they just stopped trying to communicate with others in their organization. This is tragic! We will talk more about the concept of communicating value in a later chapter, but for now, suffice it to say that not responding to an email is akin to ignoring another person. Ignoring someone is not acceptable behavior in the workplace.

Dealing with Conflict: When you have an interpersonal conflict in the workplace, how do you tend to respond? In this next question from the survey, we wanted to assess how people typically respond when they have an interpersonal conflict in the workplace. Again, people will often answer how they should respond rather than how they most often do respond, but in talking with our focus group participants, we found that many tended to either talk with another person about the offense or ignore the offense in the hopes it would go away. Neither of these approaches is productive from a socio-emotional or Scriptural perspective. Though there are certainly times when we should just ignore and offense, utilizing this pattern of behavior over time with the same group of people will invariably lead to bitterness, which will negatively affect both the individual and the workplace itself. Later in this book, I will provide some strategies for dealing with offenses in the workplace.

In our survey, we found that 41% of our youngest respondents said that they normally go to the person to talk it out. Knowing that Millennials and Gen Zs have been raised in a sociocultural environment of non-confrontation, this statistic is more likely to be representative of what they know they should do. However, even if 41% do take this healthy course of action, it still means the majority, 59%, do not: 18% said they usually try to ignore the conflict, 14% said that they talk about it with someone else (commonly known as workplace gossip), 13% marked “other,” and 14% said they never interpersonal conflicts. This last group may be the most concerning of all. Working with other human beings in an office setting, in a marriage, in a church—or in virtually any type of vision-driven environment—will produce conflicts of some sort. As marriage authors Balswick and Balswick (2016) note, if we say we never have problems in our relationships, it’s either because we are oblivious to our problems—or because we are dead.

Feeling Valued in the Workplace: Which of the following actions communicates the most value to you as an employee? In the next question, we wanted to assess how people understand the concept of being valued. This came from one of the communication audits I mentioned in Chapter 1, where a younger manager felt like his only recourse for demonstrating value was giving a raise. We found the data from this question to be quite eye opening: The majority of respondents (30%) said they felt more valued through receiving interpersonal affirmation than through receiving a raise! I was so surprised by this response that I had to ask it again to another group of survey respondents to make sure I didn’t have a crop of outliers here. Though the second numbers were a bit lower, 24%, interpersonal affirmation was still a statistically valuable response for creating value.

Now, let's not assume that we can just throw out all pay scales and raises—these are still an important part of the reward system. However, it is clear that we have other tools we can utilize to help our employees feel valued. After interpersonal affirmation, respondents said salary/raise was the next most important communicator of value (27%), followed by more flexibility in scheduling (24.5%), and more open communication (15.5%). A small percentage (3%) marked other, noting that they appreciated specific types of workplace recognition like giving the worker more responsibility, listening to his or her ideas, using kind words, and creating a positive atmosphere. What does all of this feedback tell us? Warm interpersonal communication, the subject of Chapter 7, lies at the heart of a culture that communicates value to its employees. Additionally, the responses tell us that even when our organizations may be facing economic downturn or the occasional downsizing—in other words, when money is tight—we can still demonstrate value to one another outside the financial realm. To put it bluntly, a lack of finances is an excuse, rather than a true limitation, for creating a culture of value.

Organizational Reflection: Before we move on to the next set of responses, take a moment and evaluate your organizational culture in light of these findings. How does your organization hit or miss the mark on this generational need regarding the following topics: response times, interpersonal conflict, and creating a sense of value?

Response Time: Consider the rapidity of responses for internal communication. Do you have a “standard response time” in your organization? Does it seem to be working for everyone?

Interpersonal Conflict and Affirmation. What are your organizational culture's methods of negotiating conflict? Do employees seem open with one another, or does bitterness seem to reign? Do employees feel like they can talk with others openly when there is a conflict? What is the level and frequency of interpersonal affirmation from employee to employee? From supervisor to employee?

Internal Channels of Communication: What type of communication channels do you regularly use in your organization? Are these effective? How do you know?

Scheduling Flexibility: How flexible are employees' schedules? Is there enough margin for workers to share hours, to split start times, to work at home or in other locations?

Raises and Promotions: Though organizations obviously can't give a raise every time someone performs excellent work, we should have a clear structure of raises and promotions within our workplace culture. Reflect on the raise/reward culture in your company. Do raises and promotions happen fairly regularly? Do employees have a sense of hope that they can earn a raise or a promotion?

Valuation Data from Fill-in Segments

If you're feeling overwhelmed at the responses we've just reflected on, don't worry. We will be addressing these in manageable weekly goals in the chapters to come. Next, though, let's look at the fill-in data. This segment is most impacting, I think, because this is voluntary content with no lead questions. The trends here are striking.

For the first question, we wanted to give an open-ended opportunity (that is, a survey response where participants could write any statement that they felt answered the question). Again, the trends here are striking. The first question deals with the feeling of being valued. Though there were one or two outliers (at most!) in each section, the data all seem to point to the same basic set of needs. Read over the responses and reflect on how these play out in your organization:

When do you feel most valued in the workplace?

- When I'm encouraged and all my questions are answered.
- When my work is recognized
- When my work is acknowledged
- When I'm heard and given feedback
- When I'm allowed to use my knowledge, skills and expertise to their fullest extent.
- When I'm trusted to do my job without micro management
- When my opinions are listened to and respected, when I'm asked for my opinion, when my experience and education is respected
- Questions get answered. Opinions get heard.
- Recognition or praise during the week.
- When your employer knows the work you are doing.
- When I am complimented on the quality of my services
- Getting verbal praise from my boss or a supervisor
- When people notice and comment on my hard work
- When my work, ideas, and contributions are appreciated, noticed, recognized.
- When I get validation
- When a coworker or my boss takes the time to acknowledge when I am doing a good job or am working hard.
- When I am treated with respect
- Receiving unsolicited verbal praise for a specific accomplishment.
- When I am rewarded and acknowledged for hard work.
- When I am contributing toward a greater goal and feel that my strengths and talents are being utilized.

Data Analysis: When we look at this type of open-ended data, we're looking for observable patterns of thought or behavior. To have such similarity of responses in an open-ended survey is really quite striking. Some of the patterns that emerge are as follows: Millennials and Gen Zs need feedback on their work, and they need this feedback to be regular. They need to feel heard, trusted, validated, acknowledged, respected, and praised. Now, that is not to say that every generation doesn't need to feel heard or acknowledged in the workplace, but the frequency and

the absolute necessity of praise is important here: External praise is the mechanism needed for younger generations to experience a sense of value on the job.

This can be a challenging mindset to grasp at first. For older generations, the task of completing a monumental project or orchestrating an innovative plan often creates a sense of value—the sheer sense of completion and contribution to the greater good—brings its own reward. In fact, for many employees from older generations (Gen X, Boomer, Builder, Silent), an intrinsic sense of propulsion, a desire to complete tasks, drives them on. This is not necessarily the case with Mills and Zs. They need our feedback, and they need it frequently. In short, if they don't get feedback, they don't feel valued.

Now, let's look at the opposite responses, the feeling of least value, and then we will analyze the data and reflect on our own organizational outcomes.

When do you feel least valued in the workplace?

- When I don't know what I should be doing or what the goal is
- When my work is never acknowledged, or only acknowledgments are correction based.
- When I don't seem to be noticed. No conversation etc.
- When my knowledge, skills and expertise are discounted or ignored.
- When hard work is not recognized
- When my opinions are dismissed, when my education and experience are treated as immaterial or irrelevant—pretty much always
- When I am trying my best and asking for help, but management is not offering any assistance and they are being very critical of my work.
- Questions or opinions get ignored
- My opinion does not matter. Only managers can change workflow guides or offer feedback.
- Getting thrown under the bus
- When people ignore the effort I've put forth or don't listen to me
- When upper management will pawn assignments to me because they know I will get it done. When I'm paid less than people who work 60% less than I do.
- If they hire more people for my position
- When raises aren't forthcoming.
- When I have worked really hard at something and my boss doesn't acknowledge the time or effort, just immediately critiques what is wrong with it.
- When I am not heard
- When I am verbally dismissed or ignored.
- When I am ignored, overlooked, or not appreciated for my skills and talents.

Data Analysis: In reviewing the data, three clear patterns of belief and behavior emerge. First, Mills and Gen Zs need to feel heard and not ignored. If they are ignored or not provided with enough positive feedback, they will not feel valued in the workplace. Second, they need to feel like their work is being noticed. As we noted in the last segment, it's not enough to think that a "job well done is its own reward." The youngest generations need regular, positive feedback for

the work they are accomplishing. Third, they need clear directions. Our focus group participants said again and again that they needed a sense of the big picture before they felt comfortable beginning a task.

Organizational Reflection: Evaluate your organizational culture in light of these findings. How does your organization hit or miss the mark on this generational need? Are you running the risk of “ignoring” your youngest workers by not offering regular feedback on their performance? Are you providing clear directions for the tasks at hand? We will unpack some of these strategic communication techniques in a later chapter, but for now, take a moment to evaluate your workplace and its frequency of feedback on everyday tasks. Next, let’s look at some feedback on when Millennials and Gen Zs feel most engaged on the job.

When do you feel most engaged at work?

- When I’m encouraged by my boss
- When I love what I am doing and know how it fits in the bigger picture
- When working with others for a common goal
- While working in collaboration or cooperation with others to accomplish a goal or objective.
- Lunch with the team or quick team meetings in the hallway.
- When I engage with coworkers even when there isn't much work to be done
- When I'm able to live in autonomy and do what I need to do to get it done.
- After a positive review
- When solving problems
- When I feel like the work I’m doing has a great purpose/everyone is striving for a common goal.
- When I can use my gifts
- When I am given a task I both desire to complete and know I have the capacity to do.
- When I am doing meaningful work
- When I’m surrounded by others
- When I receive encouragement
- When I’m in a lighthearted atmosphere
- When I have tasks to do and can do them at my own pace
- When I am interacting with people
- When others around me are engaged
- When the environment is organized
- When my boss has rewarded me or given me praise for something I have done well
- When I’m learning new things that align to my purpose and future
- When I’m brainstorming and problem solving
- When I am able to create something
- When I receive affirmation
- Working with people who are motivated and inspiring
- When I’m recognized for accomplishing something difficult that had a noticeable impact

- When someone told me they saw God living through me
- When my partners affirm my work
- When I'm completing big projects
- Working in a motivated team
- When the boss tells me I'm doing great
- When a project has meaning
- When I get compliments
- When I can see my work completing something bigger
- After receiving good feedback
- When I feel like my work is being recognized
- When I'm leading
- When I get positive feedback
- When I'm in charge
- When I'm working with a team for a common goal
- When there's a challenge
- When I'm engaged in a project I'm passionate about
- When I can manage a task list and delegate tasks
- When people take the time to talk things out
- When my boss says thank you
- When there are strong interpersonal connections
- When a great difference was made, an impact
- When I'm needed on a team
- When I'm fulfilling my purpose and advancing the kingdom of God
- When my boss compliments me
- When my boss is pleased with me
- When I hear "good job"
- When I'm working with a team
- When I receive encouragement from my manager
- When my boss shows appreciation
- When I'm being complimented on my work
- When I get good feedback

Data Analysis: Clearly, to feel engaged on the job, Millennials and Gen Zs need a number of external supports. They need to be working in a team environment, they need to hear regular, positive feedback (preferably from a boss), and they need to feel like the work they are doing has purpose, meaning. They need to care about it. Many of these success factors are dependent on us, their leaders. We can create team environments. We can provide regular, positive feedback for their performance, especially in the area that is easiest to overlook—the everyday, seemingly trivial objectives. We can also help them connect their work to a bigger purpose, and we will cover this objective in greater detail in the values segment.

Organizational Reflection: Evaluate your organizational culture in light of these findings. How does you hit or miss the mark on this generational need for engagement? Are you providing team environments where employees can work together toward a common goal? Realistically, of course, not every project can lend itself to team-orientation, but can we regularly reassess our input and our impact in this regard.

Next, let's look at engagement and disengagement in the workplace. As we saw in Chapter 1, the statistics on the younger generation's levels of engagement are concerning. Let's see what specific attributes of the workplace are keeping them from engaging to their fullest potential.

When do you feel least engaged at work?

- When leadership in the organization does not communicate and there is a sense of a lack of leadership
- When I'm not updated on what I need to know
- When I am confused and don't understand my work
- When there is no specific task at hand, just busy work
- When I'm doing a repetitive task
- When bureaucracy reigns supreme.
- At any and every staff meeting I've ever been in
- When there is very little communication from manager
- Being pulled in a ton of different directions
- When I am ignored and overlooked
- When I'm expected to take on more work in unfair circumstances. When I have I work with people who can get away with murder and never be penalized for it
- When the work I am doing feels pointless and everyone at work doesn't care about the work that is being done.
- When I am asked to do something outside of my strengths
- Doing menial, repetitive work (especially on a computer)
- When I'm doing busy work that has no purpose
- When I'm not with others
- When tasks are presented as busy work instead of work that will benefit the company
- When I feel that the employer is telling me to do something just to keep me busy
- Sitting through irrelevant meetings
- When I'm being rushed
- When I'm secluded in my own area
- When I'm doing busy work
- When my hard work gets overlooked
- When I feel like I'm not doing something right
- When I don't have a goal
- When given small responsibilities
- When I get minimal feedback
- When the boss yells at me

- When nothing is organized
- When there is no community
- When my work is too easy/repetitive, and have too much free time
- When I simply do what I'm told and can't do anything else
- When I'm alone/working independently
- When I'm not needed
- When I'm excluded from things
- When I don't know the expectations
- When a project seems like busy work

Data Analysis: Like the data on feeling valued, we see some clear trends emerging here. Mills and Gen Zs do not feel valued on the job when they have to work alone, when they feel ignored, or when there is a lack of clear communication. Contrary to some assessments of “slacker” behavior, Mills and Gen Zs don't like to have free time or down time at work. This is interesting in light of the stereotypes many have held about the youngest generations as being lazy or unmotivated. Instead, it seems that they just don't consider the next step or the next task unless they are specifically told to. Most likely, all the overscheduling in childhood left them unable to think up their own work; that is, they need to be told—and told clearly—what to do. We were surprised by the responses on down time in the focus groups, as many respondents said they were frustrated by down time at work. Mills and Gen Zs need structure and very clear guidance. They may not necessarily think of what the next task at hand should be, but they are willing to do it if someone points it out.

As we saw in the engaged segment, Mills and Gen Zs need to feel heard, not ignored, and they need to be provided with regular, positive feedback as well as clear directives. If they understand what is expected of them, and they are reassured that they are doing a good job, they will be committed to the task.

Organizational Reflection: Evaluate your organizational culture in light of these findings. How do you hit or miss the mark on this generational need? Is your organization providing opportunities for younger workers to feel heard? Are you giving them enough structure and clear directives?

Next, let's look at motivation on the job. Again, we saw some clear patterns emerging from the majority of our respondents. Less than 1% focused on salary or financial gain as their biggest motivation at work.

When do you feel most motivated at work?

- When I'm given important tasks to do and trusted with more responsibility
- When I feel valued and given the resources I need to perform the job well
- Knowing I'm making a difference

- Spending time with coworkers
- Learning and gaining new skills
- Working alongside a team with a common goal that communicates well
- Work environment
- Meaningful tasks for a purpose that impact the company positively
- Healthy environment with willing teammates/coworkers
- When I'm producing something useful
- Purpose. The chance to do something great
- Being part of something great
- Having a team that works hard and works well together
- Learning new skills
- Not being given busy work
- Having fun with boss, manager, and employees
- Having good relationships
- Positive feedback and salary
- When the employer listens to my ideas
- Learning new techniques
- Being treated fairly
- An encouraging manager
- A well organized boss who has a clear vision for the future
- Effective leadership
- When my supervisor appreciates my work
- When people say I'm doing great work
- Making a difference
- Affirmation / Getting recognized
- Having fun
- Encouragement from my employer
- When the work group validates each other
- When I'm being encouraged by my managers
- Supportive and fun environment (not too uptight)
- Happy people with a good work ethic
- When the work I'm doing is appreciated
- Having purpose
- To know that what I'm doing gets noticed
- Knowing I'm impacting others
- Affirmation from coworkers or boss

Data Analysis: Imagine working with an organization full of highly motivated people. What could your corporation do with all that energy and enthusiasm? Human motivation does depend on a number of factors, but in dealing with Millennials and Gen Zs, we see some trends emerging from the data. Our youngest workers want to feel that their work makes a difference. They want a workplace that is encouraging, validating, enjoyable, a place where they can grow and learn new skills. In fact, our focus groups said learning new skills on the job made them feel like the company was investing in them personally. This aspect of ongoing training offered a sense of value and, as we see here, served as a source of motivation.

Organizational Reflection: Evaluate your organizational culture in light of these findings. How does your organization hit or miss the mark? Reflect for a moment on your workplace culture.

Are there projects that younger workers could engage in that would help them feel like they are making a difference? Is your organizational culture encouraging, validating, enjoyable? Is training offered to younger workers, helping them feel like they are worthwhile investments?

Next, let's look at some of the greatest frustrations Millennials and Gen Z feel in the workplace environment. Unpacking these organizational irritants can help us understand the specific needs of the next generation of employees.

What frustrates you at work?

- Lack of communication or ineffective communication
- Lack of conversation amongst employees
- The absence of clear, concise or correct communication
- When my boss drops the ball and leaves me to figure it out. Lack of communication.
- Incompetence of managers that should know better. This could be technical skills, management skills, or interpersonal relations.
- Gossip, negativity, poor leadership
- The "good old boys" club: when people who play the politics get the ear of the administration because they play the game.
- People who don't take their work seriously
- Working harder than co-workers and they get paid more than you. Co-workers who are late, leave early and waste time on their cell phones.
- People who are less skilled having a better salary or job title
- When people take credit for my work
- Workload is high
- Professional incompetence, rudeness, and a basic lack of interpersonal skills
- Managing personnel conflicts
- Not having a solution for a task I've been given.
- When I'm not utilized to my full ability and am given lame excuses for the reasons why
- Micro management
- Employer not being flexible
- Management that punishes the masses versus the individual
- Not being perfect at it
- Doing tedious work that doesn't have an impact on the company
- Undercommunication and assumptions
- Not being organized, and hierarchy being abused
- When I feel like I'm doing something pointless
- Inefficiency and busy work
- Getting taken for granted
- When people are disrespectful
- When the manager is rude and treats you poorly
- When you stay longer to work but don't get paid for it
- No communication
- Coworkers who have no authority over me trying to boss me around

- Not being able to show my full potential
- Feeling undervalued
- An ungrateful boss
- Failing
- Not being recognized for my work
- Lack of relationships with bosses or coworkers
- Lack of leadership
- Not understanding/being unclear on a task
- Lack of communication
- People who are poor communicators
- When it feels like the work you're doing is pointless
- Messing up/doing something wrong
- Miscommunication
- Inflexibility
- When I get negative messages from doing a good job
- When the boss is on a power trip
- Inconsistency/when expectations are not verbalized

Data Analysis: By far, the biggest source of frustration registered in both our online surveys and our focus groups was the lack of clear communication. Millennials and Gen Zs need a line of open communication in the workplace environment. The perceived lack of equity in treatment among workers was also a clear source of frustration. Let's remember that these are generations who were raised in sports and performance environments where everyone got a trophy, regardless of skill or performance. As the research and responses show, the youngest generations also dislike the hierarchical nature of business. They want everyone to be equal. They also resent being micromanaged, even though they do clearly need extra guidance and team support.

Organizational Reflection: Evaluate your organizational culture in light of these findings. How does your organization hit or miss the mark in these arenas? Are you fostering an environment of open communication? (We will talk more about the importance of this topic in a later chapter.) Are employees treated fairly and equally in your organization? In our focus groups, younger workers told stories of their frustrations when other employees were allowed to "get away" with certain behaviors while others were chastised for the same behavior. These included coming in late, not working hard enough, and using cell phones while on the job. While none of us probably enjoy favoritism, generations who were raised in the everybody-gets-a-trophy idealism will be most resistant to a demonstration of unfair treatment on the job.

Next, let's look at the greatest fears Millennials and Gen Zs experience on the job. Of all the responses we received from surveys and focus groups, this topic was, for me, the most fascinating one. For a generation who comes across as though they don't really care what others think, their primary fears are extraordinarily other-centric. And again, these surveys were open-ended, meaning there was absolutely no guidance or prompting for respondents to answer in any

certain way. The similarities of response across the board demonstrate a clear pattern of behavior, belief, and expectation.

What are your biggest fears or concerns about your job?

- That I won't be able to accomplish what is needed
- Not being perfect
- Being bored and doing work that doesn't matter
- Failure or not doing a job well enough
- Doing something incorrectly
- Not knowing how to do something
- Feeling inadequate
- Not knowing what to do
- Not being able to accomplish with perfection what I am supposed to do
- Big mistakes and missed expectations
- Failure to reach and exceed expectations
- Doing something that isn't significant
- My manager thinking I don't work hard
- Making a mistake and letting the team down
- Poor performance
- Stress, anxiety, and making a mistake
- Making a mistake that isn't easily fixed
- Not reaching expectations
- Being underappreciated
- Not knowing something and causing something to fail
- Not learning or developing
- Not doing a good enough job
- Making a mistake / Failing
- Displeasing my superiors
- That I lose my passion for the job
- Doing something wrong
- That I won't be given grace as I'm learning
- Being treated unfairly
- Being unable to advance or move up
- Letting down or disappointing my boss or coworkers
- Doing something wrong that could damage my reputation
- Being incompetent
- Not doing a good job
- Not being the right person for the job
- Performing worse than I'm expected to
- Not meeting superiors expectations
- That I'm not making a difference
- That I'm a robot with no significance
- Messing up in front of my boss
- Getting yelled at by others
- Messing up
- Having enough skills and experience
- Making a fool out of myself in front of the boss
- Not getting along with coworkers
- Letting my employer down
- Doing the job incorrectly
- Not being valued

- The fear of not being good enough

Data Analysis: The roots of perfectionism and people-pleasing clearly run strong in this analysis. They don't want to disappoint, let others down, or make a mistake. They feel pressured to be perfect. Somewhere along the line, this generation has been conditioned to embrace an unrealistic view of perfection and a need for the constant approval of others. Whether this is an offshoot of the media-centric society they were thrust into from childhood or the social media world they willingly subject themselves to daily, some outer expectation has created an unrealistic view of self. Our focus groups showed that Millennials and Gen Zs experience intense anxiety when they think they've made a mistake.

As Stanford professor Carol Dweck once put it, the focus is on proving themselves instead of simply improving themselves. This mindset will make the inevitable fall from the horse a much more painful and humiliating one.

Though it could be said that all of us need approval, the Millennial and Z generations have grown up in a world with significant differences from the previous generations. They have been researched, marketed to, and fawned over in ways that have dramatically impacted their sense of self. And, as the data is showing, this intense self-focus has not made them more confident and self-assured. However, the fact that they care about pleasing their supervisor, that they care about not making a mistake and being the best version of themselves, these are powerful impetuses for excellence. Would we rather have disengaged, disinterested employees who just clock in and clock out? This desire to please one's superiors can become a foundation for a healthy drive toward performance excellence if we are careful to steward it and not to trample it or take advantage of it.

Organizational Reflection: Evaluate your organizational culture in light of these findings. How does your organization hit or miss the mark on this generational need? Do your employees feel that they have the "freedom" to make a mistake and learn from it, or do they feel paralyzed by perfectionism? When an employee does fail, are you able to communicate a sense of value and worth about the person and the learning process itself? Does your organization have systems in place to help correct and retrain employees when they do make mistakes? Is there grace for growth?

Finally, in the last segment of data analysis, we asked what our respondents wish their employers knew about them. Some of the feedback was very telling—clearly, many of the young respondents in our surveys and focus groups are working in organizational cultures where they don't feel affirmed or even known. For most, their commitment to an organization of this nature will be short-lived.

What do you wish your employer knew about you?

- That I can do more than they think. Push me in the right way and I will help the business grow
- My work ethic when no one is watching (I.e. How much I do when he/she is not around)

- That I need step-by-step guides. I like to have everything understood before I start something.
- My desire to disengage from work during non-working hours.
- How hard I work
- My ability to communicate with people
- How hard I work and I wish I was paid for the work I did compared to others.
- That I need affirmation to feel valued
- I'm loyal and know more about interpersonal processing than they probably will ever know
- That I don't mind a challenge and would prefer to be busy than being paid to sit and do nothing.
- That I am a strong leader with more talents than are currently being used in the workplace
- I wish they trusted more. Putting me in a position of leadership is just lip service if my views are not respected and I am micromanaged.
- I will do whatever it takes to be a professional aviator
- How efficient and committed I am
- I don't like being bored at work
- That I need my boss to be more available
- I want to be engaged in a managerial process and decision making process
- I appreciate validation
- I wish my employer knew how to be better organized
- I have health struggles and need flexibility
- My hard work mentality
- That I like nature
- My academic achievement
- That I'm creative
- I am dedicated and willing
- I'm quiet but I'm a hard worker
- That I'm shy at first
- That I'm not a child
- That I have a passion for creativity and a desire to make good systems better
- My passion to help
- That I'm not very outgoing
- My work ethic
- That I have a passion for events and creativity
- That I can be trusted
- That I have dedication and integrity
- I want to be given a task and achieve it myself
- I want feedback and more transparency
- I have ideas
- That I'm passionate about what I do
- That I care about other people
- I have a lot going on

- My effort inside and outside the job
- That I will always give my best
- I love to challenge myself
- I work hard even when no one is looking
- I have a huge heart and put 110% into everything
- That I have a competitive personality
- I'm in college and may have to pick up another job
- I wish they knew what motivates me and what I care about
- I'm a hard worker and will always be there to help when possible
- I wish they knew and respected my experience more
- That I'm a hard-working and fun individual
- I want my employer to encourage me and trust me and know I'll work hard
- That I'm hard working and motivated
- That I sing and play piano
- I may get mad but 'm still going to do my job correctly
- That I work hard
- That I don't care about the money
- That I am close to leaving because I don't feel valued enough!
- My life story

Data Analysis: From our surveys and focus group feedback, as shown here, we see that Millennials and Gen Zs want you, their employers, to know that they are hard workers, that they are creative, that they want to be trusted, and that they care deeply about the work. They want you to know not just about them; they want you to know them, who they really are. They want to be understood, individually known. For some, the lack of validation is at the breaking point; as the next-to-last respondent stated, "I'm close to leaving because I don't feel valued enough." If we want to attract and retain the next generation of employees, we will need to learn how to demonstrate value.

Organizational Reflection: Evaluate your organizational culture in light of these findings. How does your organization hit or miss the mark on this generational need? Do you demonstrate trust with the types of projects you give your younger workers? Do you utilize their budding wisdom where possible? Do you know their creative side and what motivates them? Do you recognize not only the work, but the person behind the work? What type of margin exists in your corporate structure that would allow for more interpersonal exchanges?

Think back to the organizational communication study I mentioned earlier, where a Millennial supervisor thought the only way he could value his employees was with a raise. What does the data show? Are there other ways we can create value? The answer is a resounding yes. We can establish cultures of value and engagement in our organizations, environments that demonstrate trust, support, encouragement, and an openness to creativity. The bottom line is this: For many Millennials and Gen Zs, effective interpersonal communication is more personally impacting than a raise.

Let's look at this construct now through a communication perspective. How do we create a culture of value and engagement that will both attract and retain the next generation of employees? We know that our youngest workers want flexibility, relationship, and ongoing encouragement. They want an open communication format that allows them to feel believed in and that it's okay to make mistakes. They need lots of affirmation. They like working in teams rather than working alone. They want community. They need to feel valued for their contributions, and most often, they want this to come from a supervisor or boss. Peer praise helps as well, though. They want to be trusted with responsibilities—and they know when we are just pretending to trust them. They want a sense of purpose—the feeling that they are connecting to something bigger, something important. These are actually all great qualities!!

What steps can we take to deliver on this? How do we engage all generations in the workplace? How do we create a culture of value and engagement that attracts and retains great employees? First, let's define our terms. Value is a way of showing consideration and appreciation to others. It means noticing and validating their work, their efforts, their character. It means creating a culture that sees its employees as more than cogs in a machine. In a culture of value, people are supported and encouraged rather than being used, abused, and taken for granted. Engagement means creating a culture where synergistic exchanges fuel new and creative methodologies, products, and services, a culture where everyone uses his or her gifts and talents for the good of the bigger picture. Engagement is a workplace where no one is sitting on the sidelines.

In his book *Developing the Leaders around You*, Maxwell writes that as organizational leaders, we must become thermostats instead of thermometers. One is passive, simply recording the environment. The other is active, assessing, addressing, and impacting the environment. As a leader, you're called to be a thermostat. So, let's assess and address these organizational needs in order that we might have a direct, prosocial impact on the cultures in which we work. If, as Kruse (2012) noted, engagement is measured by our emotional connection to our organization, we would do well to engage fully and authentically in this realm.

From the research and focus group data, I've put together eight core competencies for developing a culture of value and engagement. We will spend the next eight chapters examining each of these competencies in great detail, and then we will come back together in the final chapter for some proactive steps you can take to create a culture of value and engagement in your organization.

Personal Reflection: Reflect on your feedback from the survey data in this chapter. Do you see some of these patterns at work in your own organization? Do your youngest (and oldest) generations seem to feel valued? To be heard? To be engaged? What are some of the ways your organization might be helping or hindering the growth of employees at present?

Weekly Assignment: This week, assess your organization's rate of turnover and engagement. Are your employees "all in" on the task, or do they seem adrift or unfocused? Look for ways to make meaningful conversations with a few employees over the next five days. Try to get to know them individually. Look for ways their skill sets might bring unique strengths to the organizational culture.