

How Your Boss Probably Perceives Young People

In June, the NFL's San Francisco 49ers announced significant changes in the way they run their meetings to better accommodate millennials. After consulting experts from Stanford University and reviewing scientific research, they broke their meetings into half-hour chunks, because young people have shorter attention spans, and included breaks for players to use their phones. All team communications are sent digitally to reflect their players' preferred communication styles.

Traditionally, NFL teams are incredibly conservative workplaces. However, today's professional athletes are young and, NFL players are almost entirely millennials and therefore have a significant impact on the culture of individual teams and the league in general.

If, unlike the gifted athletes of the NFL, an older worker can replace you, then it's unlikely your boss will change the workplace culture to suit you. Instead, your co-workers are likely comparing their perceptions of your behavior to millennial-bashing articles like Time's "Me Me Me Generation" or The Atlantic's "Millennials: Greatest Generation or Most Narcissistic?"

If you're the youngest one in the office, your coworkers don't see you, they see a young person. And young people often act like the office is beneath them. Young people also sometimes refuse to dress in a manner that is considered appropriate, fail to put their phones away and generally don't try to "fit" into most office cultures.

If you want to get ahead at the office, show your boss that your job matters to you. Show up early on Mondays, always be prepared and on-time for meetings and dress appropriately. Most importantly, when you're in the office, put away your phone, even if others regularly check their mobile devices. It may not be fair, but millennials are more harshly judged for using their phones.

Because it's known that millennials get married and have children later than any other generational group did, there may be an unspoken assumption that young people who haven't settled down are unconcerned about their futures. Articulating your desire to get married, have children or own a home can demonstrate that you take your life and your job seriously while reminding your coworkers that you share their deepest values. If you have a picture of your spouse, your children or a niece or nephew, put it on your desk for others around the office to see.

Underneath the external differences, your generation is really not that different from your coworkers' generations. Unfortunately, as we get older, we forget what being young is like and we therefore hold young people up to an impossible standard. Instead of objecting to the injustice of the situation, rise above it, and you'll get ahead in no time.

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