"Millennials feel this way..." "Millennials think this way..." "Millennials want..."
Do you hear these statements often? I myself am a Millennial in the workforce and I am here to [hopefully] shed some light on some of these common questions and assumptions about my generation. Since I do not directly work in the distribution industry myself, I asked other Millennials who do work in the industry some questions about their jobs and employers. Of course, there is no way I, or my cohorts interviewed for this story, can speak on behalf of an entire generation of 80 million people, but hearing it from "actual" Millennials, instead of people who have studied/observed Millennials, might be a breath of fresh air!

Millennials are under a microscope, more now than ever. Why? Because we are quickly becoming a large portion of the workforce. By the year 2020, Millennials are expected to comprise over 50 percent of the entire workforce and by 2030 Millennials will outnumber Baby Boomers by 22 million. Therefore, the folks that comprise the generations currently employed in the industrial distribution industry are wracking their brains and zoning in on Millennial behaviors in order to be prepared for this imminent day. Employers will need to understand these mysterious Millennials in order to effectively recruit, hire, onboard, manage, work alongside and quite possibly even work for a member[s] of this generation.

RECRUITING MILLENNIALS

Millennials are a generation that grew up with Internet access and social media. To us, it’s all normal, second nature, not a big deal. With Google, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, we are always ‘in the know’ when it comes to the lives of our peers. Because we share so much, if we’re being completely honest, Millennials tend to be attracted to job positions that are noteworthy – we want to have a role that makes our peers say, “Oh, look what so-and-so is doing now..." In general, the industrial distribution industry flies under the radar. And when asked why they love their jobs, the Millennials I interviewed in the industry all responded with generally the same answer: “Industrial distribution is everywhere.” One responder specifically said: “Industrial distribution supports and has a large effect on all the things we use in our everyday lives, from the food we eat, to the clothes we wear, and even the cars we drive. I think that’s a pretty cool thing to be a part of.”

So why aren’t other Millennials applying for jobs in the industry? Because most of us have no idea just how cool the industry is!

According to Industrial Careers Pathway, 85 percent of “right-fit” Millennials surveyed are not familiar with the industrial distribution industry. It is incumbent upon employers to spend some time communicating how great it can be to see your products playing a role in some pretty spectacular projects. Not only will this raise awareness of the industry, but also it will intrigue Millennials.

Then, companies need to focus their recruiting efforts on the idea that distribution workers are “playing a part in something bigger.” Millennials love to be part of something important, so show them just how cool your industry is. For example, telling someone you supply bearings doesn’t necessarily sound all that glamorous. But telling someone you supply parts for military jet planes or amusement park rides sounds pretty cool! If your company supplies cleaning products, explain how important these products are for your customers for keeping the environment safe and meeting regulations. We like to know the big picture.

RETAINING MILLENNIALS

When I asked Millennials in the industry what they want most from a supervisor they listed these characteristics:
 Millennials need to feel their employers respect their time by allowing flexible work schedules and sufficient time off to spend with friends and family. Overall, Millennials will be unhappy with their jobs if they feel overworked and under-appreciated. This can cause them to look for employment elsewhere.

WHAT MAKES MILLENNIALS SO DIFFERENT?
First of all, we find it somewhat comical that other generations want to know so much about us. We don’t feel any different from you; we are simply a product of our surroundings. Just like any other generation, we think, feel and act the way we do as a result of the contemporary culture of which we are a product.

The world Millennials know is a world in real time. When things happen, not only do we know about it, but we expect to know about it. Why? Because society has shown us we can. What does that mean for managers and coworkers? Well, Millennials aren’t necessarily the most patient of people. But, this can be a good thing! We love to see projects come to life — and even more — we love to be a part of the process in getting things done. Give your Millennials a project they can work through from beginning to end and be proud of the results. Then don’t forget to appreciate the efforts they spent doing so.

All in all, Millennials are often misunderstood. Previous generations tend to view many of this generation’s characteristics in a negative light, but in reality, we are pretty much the same as you, but a little different. And different can be better. In fact, it can be exactly what your company needs in order to get to the next level. Accept untraditional ideas and techniques, regardless of generational differences. Be open to things like social media, which can be a huge marketing asset.

More than anything, we Millennials just want to be viewed as a valuable member of the team. Our goals for the company are the same as yours, even though we may take a different road to get there.

Amber Siple is the marketing assistant for PTDA and Industrial Careers Pathway (ICP) in Chicago. ICP is a cross-industry initiative supported by American Supply Association (ASA), Industrial Supply Association (ISA) Education Foundation, National Association of Chemical Distributors (NACD), National Association of Electrical Distributors (NAED), NAHAD – the Association for Hose and Accessories Distribution, NIAB – the Belting Association and PTDA Foundation. Subscribe to the ICP Talent TipSheet, which Amber helps to write, at www.industrialcareerspathway.org/Tipsheet.