

TRENDICATORS INSIGHTS REPORT

# FIVE MILLENNIALS CRITIQUE THEIR RECENT CANDIDATE EXPERIENCES



**TRENDICATORS**

HR Research & Insights by Engage2Excel™



# WHAT DO MILLENNIAL CANDIDATES REALLY WANT?

## INTRODUCTION

Trendicators is the research division of Engage2Excel, a leading provider of employee recognition, engagement survey and talent acquisition solutions. Trendicators provides original research along with reports on insights and best practices from industry leaders and experts.

**HR leaders and recruitment professionals face a difficult challenge. The CEO outlook for revenue growth in the coming year is exceptionally high, while unemployment is at its lowest level in six years. Attracting and retaining the talent that will enable growth has become a mission-critical priority across nearly all business sectors.**

Millennials, who represent three-fourths of active job seekers, will comprise 50% of the workforce by 2020. However, millennial candidates have more employment choices today, possess fundamentally different expectations of employers during the recruitment process and are more likely to seek employment elsewhere if their job expectations are not met.

In Engage2Excel's *2017 Trendicators Talent Acquisition Survey Report*, we summarized results from a survey of 1,500 job seekers. Our goal in that report subtitled *What You Need To Know About Today's Job Seekers*, was to better understand differences in perception and preference between demographic groups during recruitment, pre-boarding and onboarding processes.

**Fundamental Differences:** The most significant contrast in expectations between millennials and baby boomers showed up in answers to questions about the candidate experience. When asked about the importance of RECOGNITION in the pre-hiring process, 81% of millennials said it was either important or very important, compared with 39% of baby boomers. An equally significant gap exists regarding

## INTRODUCTION

*continued*

the perceived importance of SOCIAL INTERACTION during the pre-hiring process, with 81% of millennials indicating this was important or very important, compared with only 32% of baby boomers.

**What do millennials really want?** To better understand the personal mindsets and motivations behind these significant differences in expectations, we conducted one-on-one interviews with millennials who had recently accepted a new job.

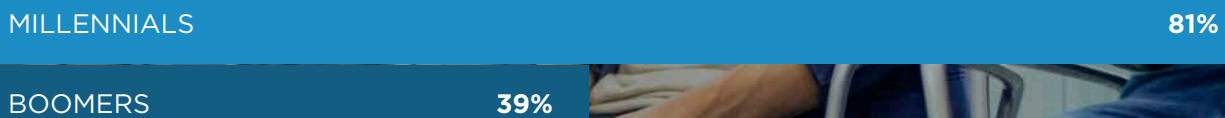
**Encouraging Candor:** We encouraged interview subjects to discuss positive and negative experiences, and to provide critical feedback on their own recruitment experiences that they thought would be useful to HR leaders and recruitment professionals. To facilitate candor, we promised participants that their real names or photos and the names of their employers would not be used in this report.

**Featured on the following pages are profiles depicting the recent candidate experiences of two experienced professionals, one entry-level professional and two hourly employees. Although these professionals' stories reflect very different circumstances, the profiles collectively provide important insights into how employers, from a start-up to a leading global brand, are successfully creating more personalized candidate experiences to compete more effectively in today's talent-driven economy.**

**FIGURE 1:** Differences in the perceived importance of recognition and social interaction between millennials and baby boomers during the pre-hiring process. Based on a 2017 Trendicators survey of 1,500 job candidates.

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### IMPORTANCE OF **RECOGNITION** DURING THE PRE-HIRE PROCESS



### IMPORTANCE OF **SOCIAL INTERACTION** DURING THE PRE-HIRE PROCESS





“I felt overqualified, so I shared the opening with my network. Then the CEO reached out, which ultimately led to my joining his tech start-up.”

**CANDIDATE PROFILE:** Brian’s advancement as a product manager was impressive, with increasingly important roles at two previous companies. He wasn’t looking to change jobs.

CareerBuilder estimates that 81% of millennials are always looking for a new opportunity. This was not the case with Brian, who was passionate about his work as a product manager and deeply committed to his employer. Brian came to his current position with extensive training and six years of experience at two Fortune 100 companies. However, when his company announced a deep cut to the R&D budget, Brian knew he had no choice but to brush up his resume and begin looking for another job.

One of the first opportunities Brian noticed on LinkedIn was in product management at a nearby tech start-up. The three to five years of required experience led Brian to believe he was over-qualified, so he shared the opportunity with others in his network.

Less than a week later, Brian received an InMail message from the start-up’s CEO, who requested a phone call. Having already “downsized” in accepting his current position, and concerned about making the right next step in a promising career trajectory, Brian was initially cold to the idea of working at a start-up. Yet just eight weeks after his first call with the CEO, Brian joined the company as head of product management.

How did a small company manage to recruit such a highly qualified candidate, despite his predisposition toward working at a larger firm?

Brian pointed to four factors that led to his current job, which he thoroughly enjoys:

- **The CEO:** “From our first conversation, I was impressed by the CEO, who made it clear that I had the skills and experience he wanted on his team. He exhibited an honesty and openness to new ideas that was extremely motivating.”
- **The Product:** “I had previous experience in the solution space and had a feeling this would be a winner. Further due diligence bore this out.”
- **The Process:** “After two lengthy and rather intense interviews, I was given an assignment and had to do a major presentation to the entire team. This enabled me to get to know my peers and vice versa, and it got me directly involved in—and excited about—the challenges ahead.”
- **The Openness:** “All of my many questions were answered. I also spent two hours with a board member, which was very enlightening.”

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

Smaller companies can compete effectively for top talent by creating compelling candidate experiences.

Under the right circumstances, giving candidates an assignment can be mutually insightful and rewarding.



“The job I have now and the one promised in the interview are completely different. As a result, I’ll start looking again soon.”

**CANDIDATE PROFILE:** Sarah had a degree in communications and two internships under her belt when she began her search for a full-time position as an advertising copywriter.

For many college graduates, internships have become a necessary step on the road to employment. Unfortunately, neither of the two internships that Sarah completed after graduating from a highly regarded communications school turned into job offers. So, armed with solid references, a strong portfolio and well-honed interview skills, Sarah launched an aggressive search for work as a full-time copywriter.

Ideally, Sarah wanted to remain in New York. But when a friend from college contacted her about an opening at the Midwest ad agency she’d joined a few weeks earlier, Sarah jumped at the opportunity. Less than a week after submitting her resume and portfolio, she had an encouraging, hour-long phone interview with a recruiter from the 500-employee agency. The on-site interview followed just a few weeks later.

Sarah could not have been better prepared for the day of the interview, having researched the agency’s clients and campaigns, as well as the work histories of senior creative personnel.

To her surprise, none of this preparation was necessary. Everyone Sarah encountered that day acted as if she already had the job and spent much of her interview time promoting the agency, its culture and the merits of the position.

Six weeks later, Sarah began her new job. However, after just five months, she’s ready to start looking again because her actual job is not what was described in the interview.

Sarah shared the following thoughts on her recruitment experience:

- **Perception:** “I remember how impressed I was with the agency and their pitch on what a great opportunity this was for me. I left feeling certain that a job offer would follow, but something seemed slightly off.”
- **Reality:** “The woman I replaced had been in my role for three years. Afterwards, I realized that she needed me to accept the job so she could move up in the agency.”
- **Environment:** “I’ve made several attempts to understand how to get more of the types of assignments I expected but have been told to be patient—and to not rock the boat.”
- **Lessons Learned:** “In my next search, I will ask more questions and talk to more employees to learn about the job and the work environment.”

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

The disconnect between candidate expectations and job realities can be mitigated with peer-based socialization during the recruitment process and better follow-up to ensure the right fit before an offer is made.

Mentoring can play an important part in helping new employees adjust to their roles and find ways of making more meaningful or rewarding contributions at work.



“Sitting around a table with other applicants in a group interview was inspiring. We read questions to each other and felt a real connection with the brand.”

**CANDIDATE PROFILE:** For Ashok, getting a job at his favorite tech retailer was simply a matter of patience and persistence. The experience was even better than he had imagined.

Ashok got his first job in retail to help cover the cost of tuition at his local community college. Working the floor in the electronics department for a national chain suited him. He built his first PC at age 11, and he loved the feeling he got when helping shoppers decide which TV, printer, laptop or phone would best suit their needs. A year and a half later, when the store he worked at was closed, Ashok was offered a similar position with another electronics retailer. Before accepting the offer, he thought about trying for his retail dream job but decided instead to gain some more experience.

Now, with nearly four years of relevant work experience, Ashok began his quest for the position he really wanted. Having read up on what to expect, Ashok knew that he had to be patient and persistent. Unlike the hiring process for his first two positions, which consisted of an application, an online test and an in-store interview, Ashok knew there would be several “gates” and many other applicants competing for each available position.

The first gate, after he applied to one of three stores near him, was to be invited to a hiring seminar at a local hotel. He made it this far not once but twice, without making it through to the next gate. The third time, as the saying goes, was the charm. Ashok advanced to a group interview and then three single interviews before finally receiving an offer letter.

Looking back on his candidate journey, Ashok shared these recollections:

- **Digital Experience:** “From the clarity of the job description to the online application and recruiting videos, the digital experience was beyond exceptional. It was inspirational.”
- **Group Dynamic:** “Unlike my previous hiring experiences, which seemed haphazard in comparison, every step in the recruiting process was carefully orchestrated. The enthusiasm at each event was genuine. I attended group interviews for three different stores and walked away from each one feeling good about myself and the brand, even when I didn’t proceed to the next step.”
- **Differentiation:** “At every touch point over the course of my three-month journey; I was reminded that what made this company different was their fanatical devotion to creating great products that people love.”

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

If hourly employees are important ambassadors for your brand, rethinking your candidate and onboarding experiences could help strengthen your competitive advantage.

Your employer brand can be a powerful tool for attracting top candidates, but only if it is authentic, emotionally compelling and truthful.



“I was so confident this was the right place for me that I declined another opportunity—even before the actual job offer came through.”

**CANDIDATE PROFILE:** Tanisha started out in customer service but took two years off to work as a live-in nanny. She was nervous about finding the right place to restart her career.

After four years of working in customer service, Tanisha felt she just needed to try something different. She was tired of the daily grind and having difficulty making ends meet. When a family friend told her about a live-in nanny position, she interviewed for and got the job, caring for two young children whose mother was re-entering the workforce. Now, two years later, Tanisha was ready to restart her career. She wanted to get back into customer service but was worried about finding the right opportunity.

Tanisha found quite a few openings for high-paying customer service jobs in her area. During the first week, she submitted six applications. Three led to phone interviews, one of which seemed promising. Then a friend called about a customer service opening with her employer in the real estate industry. Soon after submitting her application, Tanisha got a call from a recruiter.

“This interview was different,” Tanisha reported. “I really felt that the recruiter was genuinely interested in me. She asked a lot of questions and was very patient in explaining what the job would entail and in providing details about the company.”

The in-person interview went equally well and was followed by an online test, where Tanisha was asked to diagnose a browser problem with two managers looking over her shoulder. Nervous and unfamiliar with the particular browser, Tanisha stumbled at first but quickly recovered, finding the fix in an online support community post.

Eight months into her new position, Tanisha reflected on her experience as a candidate:

- **First Impression:** “The recruiter took the time to get to know me and was well informed about the position, the company and what I could expect at later stages in the process.”
- **On-Site Experience:** “It was pretty intense. They asked a lot of questions about what I would do in various circumstances, and we did role-plays with my interviewers taking turns as the customer. Then they let me spend 20 minutes on the floor listening to calls on a headset. By the end of the day, I knew this was the right place for me.”
- **Onboarding:** “We went through a four-week, very hands-on training program. Some of my classmates didn’t make it all the way through, but those of us who did really bonded.”
- **Culture:** “What I was told in each of my interviews turned out to be true. The people I work with every day care about solving our customers’ issues.”

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

Demonstrating respect and engaging candidates early on in the recruiting process are critical.

Behavioral interviewing and rigorous onboarding programs can reduce voluntary turnover rates in high-stress job roles like customer service.



“My wife wanted me to go with the larger company. But I was put off by their lack of openness in discussing strategic direction and my opportunities for growth.”

**CANDIDATE PROFILE:** Jared faced a critical juncture in his career as an HR solutions specialist. He wanted a more entrepreneurial role, but with a company he could believe in.

It was early December when Jared realized he was ready to close his best year ever in sales. Finally, after four years of building relationships with key accounts, the contracts were starting to come through. Then Jared learned that the division he worked for was up for sale. The information came from a friend who worked in M&A for an investment bank.

Just after the holiday break, it was announced that Jared’s division had been sold to a European company that he had competed with on one of the deals he just closed. When several discussions with the team managing the acquisition failed to provide clear answers about the company’s U.S. plans, Jared accepted an account management role in another division rather than transition with the divestiture. A year later, Jared realized that he needed to get back to sales, and he began reaching out to his extensive network of contacts.

In no time, Jared was engaged in serious discussions with two companies that could not have been more different. One was well-known in the HR field, and the other was a mid-size company with private equity backing that was starting up a new division.

Jared’s dad and his wife encouraged him to go with the larger firm, but he just didn’t feel right about it. Jared said, “I wasn’t getting straight answers to my questions about strategic direction or opportunities for growth within the company.” Despite the risk, Jared accepted the position as VP, HR solution sales with the smaller company.

Happily ensconced in his new role, Jared shared these insights into his hiring experience:

- **Leadership Team:** “The recently hired CEO and president are both industry veterans who built successful divisions from scratch for a very large company. Their energy and passion were contagious.”
- **Shared Vision:** “At our first meeting, my boss rattled off a list of pet peeves he wanted to change in our industry—the same ones I have been complaining about for years. With his experience, I knew we could make a difference.”
- **Recognition:** “What impressed me most is that they took the time to understand what motivates me personally and professionally. But no punches were pulled in interviews. I got straight feedback—positive and negative—on several presentations I shared.”

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

When competing for important hires against larger firms, bring out the big guns. Your C-suite’s experience, vision and passion are your most valuable assets.

Praise and constructive criticism are forms of recognition that can increase engagement and build trust during the recruiting process.





## SUMMARY OF KEY TAKEAWAYS

# 10 Ideas for Improving Your Company's Candidate Experiences

All but one of the individuals profiled in this eBook accepted positions for which they were well-suited at companies they plan on being with for several years. Although the individuals' circumstances may be anecdotal, their outcomes challenge the assumption that millennials are less loyal than other generations. Rethinking the experiences your company creates for candidates can lead to better-qualified hires and improved retention rates.

- 1** Smaller companies can compete effectively for top talent by creating compelling candidate experiences.
- 2** Under the right circumstances, giving candidates an assignment can be mutually insightful and rewarding.
- 3** The disconnect between candidate expectations and job realities can be mitigated with peer-based socialization during the recruitment process and better follow-up to ensure the right fit before an offer is made.
- 4** Mentoring can play an important part in helping new employees adjust to their roles and find ways of making more meaningful or rewarding contributions at work.
- 5** If hourly employees are important ambassadors for your brand, rethinking your candidate and onboarding experiences could help strengthen your competitive advantage.
- 6** Your employer brand can be a powerful tool for attracting top candidates, but only if it is authentic, emotionally compelling and truthful.
- 7** Demonstrating respect and engaging candidates early on in the recruiting process are critical.
- 8** Behavioral interviewing and rigorous onboarding programs can reduce voluntary turnover rates in high-stress job roles like customer service.
- 9** When competing for important hires against larger firms, bring out the big guns. Your C-suite executives' experience, vision and passion are your most valuable assets.
- 10** Praise and constructive criticism are forms of recognition that can increase engagement and build trust during the recruiting process.

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