In 2015, millennials surpassed 53 million workers, becoming the largest share of the American workforce. Those numbers are continuing to rise as more and more enter the workplace, and they are expected to peak at a level even higher than those achieved by the baby boomer generation. What does research tell us about millennials, and how can we use this information to keep our current and future workforce engaged and productive?

Like every generation before it, millennials, the generation born between 1981 and 1997, have a style of their own. Paradoxically, while many are attracted to government work because they want to feel like they’re giving back to the community, some quickly leave when they feel caught in a mire of forms and red tape. While they might feel comfort in the availability of a career ladder, they are jarred when faced with government’s tendency to reward longevity more than high performance. Millennials, who are most comfortable with achievement-based awards like college admission, expect to work hard and be rewarded for their efforts. When bureaucracy gets in the way, they sometimes choose to leave.

Unfortunately, the public sector often does not afford millennials careers that validate their self-worth (at least when they’re just beginning their careers). Many government jobs are quick to strip young adults of their individuality, from a long and formal hiring process to strict dress codes, making workers feel more like a number than a person.

Based on surveys and research, what do millennials look for in the workplace?

- **Better Work-Life Balance.** Thanks to new innovations in the remote workforce, and emphasis on a healthy work-life balance, organizations may need to change current practices to allow more flexibility in office policies, work scheduling, and telecommuting.

- **To Contribute.** Opportunities to give back via work-life balance are important for millennials who are typically well-informed on social issues. They respond well to organizations that donate to charity, hold regular fundraising efforts, and offer organization-wide volunteer work.

- **To Work for an Ethical, Innovative Organization.** Surveys found that 50% of millennials wanted to work specifically for an organization with ethical practices. They also expect their organizations to do more for their community, particularly improving unemployment and income equality.

- **A Casual, Social Workplace.** The days of suit-and-tie dress codes are under serious challenge by a super-casual wave of millennials coming into the workforce. As highly social beings, they appreciate opportunities to collaborate, share, and socialize with their colleagues, which is why organizational social networking, regular social events, and more casual working relationships are becoming the norm.

- **Promotional Opportunities.** Millennials are unyielding in their quest for management roles. In surveys, 40% of them expect to be in a management position within two years.

- **A Leader They Can Respect.** With millennials, loyalty and respect must be earned. They tend not to respect authority just because of a title. But when that respect is earned, it is given fiercely and leads to loyalty and longer stays.

Millennials have distinct needs. Their desires challenge many long-established practices. But they also present opportunity. Looking for ways to meet their desires in the workplace can lead to a healthier and more productive workforce.