

77 Million Reasons to Give Millennials a Chance

Anders Peterson

Summary

In this short and delightful response, Anders Peterson adds his own reflections on being a Millennial.

ME!

It's not just *Reflective Practice*, everyone seems to be talking about *me* these days. When I turn on NPR (I don't own a TV), read the newspaper (online of course), or watch a free webinar or TED Talk on YouTube, I find that everyone seems to be talking about *me*; *me* meaning Millennials.¹ According to *some*, as a Millennial, I'm a *me*-craving, "entitled narcissist," so I thought I would play into the stereotype (if this wasn't a scholarly journey, I would insert a winking smiley face emoticon here).² Instead of telling you about all about me and my most recent "selfies," or how chaplaincy services departments can use Twitter to provide daily messages of inspiration and support to hospital staff, I'd like to offer a few words to ensure that the Millennial voice is properly represented in this essay series.

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WHY NOW?

Perhaps America has been taking such an interest in Millennials recently because we are *finally* getting our chance to get moving in the world. The oldest of the Millennials are celebrating their 34th birthdays this year, so we aren't some new phenomena. What is new is our increasing presence and influence in the workplace and society. The majority of us aren't kids anymore, we're your colleagues (and if you work for a start-up, maybe even your boss), and millions of us are arriving into the workforce more than half a decade late.³ Remember, the first wave of Millennials were just getting ready to take their extremely educated selves into the workplace when bam, *The Great Recession* happened—dramatically minimizing the opportunities available for the children of Boomers and early Gen Xers for years. The very children that were raised during an era of economic prosperity and taught to wholeheartedly believe that they “could be anything they wanted to be.”⁴ So when the economy took a nosedive and remained in its ghastly state for years, millions and millions of entitled, aspirational young people were hurled into a quarter life crisis they were totally ill-equipped to deal with. And even now, almost seven years later, many Millennials are still struggling to navigate their future in the wake of failed dreams, massive amounts of student loan debt, and job application fatigue.

LOVE US

I'm not trying to get you to join the Millennials' pity-party.⁵ I know that life is challenging for every generation, that our challenges cannot be compared to those of our ancestors, and that every living generation felt the impact of the economic crisis. What I am hoping to promote, especially within the CPE supervisor and field educator community, is sensitivity to the unique experience of a Millennial. We are different and will continue to be different from those who have come before us, and yet it is our relations that have made us who we are. Of course, you won't like everything about us, but I don't need to remind you that there are plenty of things about you that rubbed your elders the wrong way.⁶

As you live into your call to supervise, support, and lovingly agitate future millennial students, may you to notice when you desire to make Millennials more like how you think we should or shouldn't be, and give your attention to accompanying us as we discover who we already are and who the Divine is yearning for us to become. We are definitely going to need your

help. For example, in the midst of all the technology and hyper-connectivity we have been raised with, we are going to need help claiming what *presence* will mean for us. In our skepticism and departure from large establishments and institutions, especially dogmatic ones, we will need to be challenged to develop and articulate *theologies of pastoral care* that acknowledge our post-modern experience, while remaining connected to the rich theological legacy that has informed the pastoral role.

SOMETHING TO OFFER

We Millennials may have insight for our mentors too. We're a generation of meaning-makers. Isn't making meaning what spirituality is all about? I believe Millennials will be the generation in America to make the big transformation from the Age of Belief to the Age of the Spirit.⁷ I know that the religious institutions are very concerned about their future, and they probably should be, but rest assured *spirituality* isn't going anywhere. Have you noticed that Millennials are not making their primary life choices for money, success, or even happiness. That's because we want to live lives full of meaning, and we want our work to be a big part of it.⁸ Who knows, maybe we will become known as the great vocational generation! Finally, what's all this talk about Millennials being lazy? Is a more relaxed work ethic really a negative thing?⁹ We have the discipline that is supposed to promote self-care to a nation that prides itself in long workweeks and short vacations. Maybe Millennials will help confront our culture's workaholism and promote a healthier living.

STAY CURIOUS

In conclusion, I want to thank the other contributors for each advocating for their peers to *stay curious* when it comes to Millennials.¹⁰ There are 77 million of us out there, and there is plenty to be curious about.¹¹ I promise we are capable of doing a lot more than creating cool apps for your smart phone. We will be the generation to elect our first female president, and the second one too. We will find ways of harnessing clean energy that will completely eliminate our craving for fossil fuels.¹² Using all your hard work, we will bring an end to AIDS, cure Alzheimer's, and make cancer a thing of the past.¹³ We will also face enormous, extremely complicated challenges, many that we did not create ourselves. In the midst of all the challenges and changes Millennials will face, we will continue to need

spiritual and pastoral support as we search for meaning, seek holy connections, fear death, grieve our losses, struggle to stay true to our values, and hope for a better world.¹⁴ Søren Kierkegaard said, “Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.” I think that’s true. God’s future does abide with us, and to live into what we are called to become, we need to soak up all the present wisdom we can.

NOTES

1. A great example of National Public Radio, online news, and multiple TED Talks in one program focused explicitly on Millennials can be found here: “The Next Greatest Generation?,” *TED Radio Hour* (January 10, 2014), accessed April 25, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/2013/08/13/211713540/the-next-greatest-generation?showDate=2014-01-10>.
2. Joel Stein, “The Me Me Me Generation: Millennials are Lazy, Entitled Narcissists who Still Live with Their Parents/Why They’ll Save Us All,” *Time* (May 20, 2013): 26–34. Don’t know what an emoticon is? You should! Emoticons are a great way to ensure your sarcasm isn’t mistaken for seriousness when texting.
3. Roy O’Sullivan and Tom Allison, “We Should Be Very Worried about the Drop in Millennial Unemployment,” *YoungInvincibles.org* (August 2, 2013), accessed April 25, 2014, <http://younginvincibles.org/tag/how-many-millennials-are-unemployed/>.
4. Allison Linn, “Millennials Turn 30: It’s Not Us, It’s the Economy,” *NBCNews.com* (April 2, 2014), accessed April 10, 2014, <http://www.nbcnews.com/feature/in-plain-sight/millennials-turn-30-its-not-us-its-economy-n11451>.
5. Many Millennials were still in grade school and high school during the financial crisis. See, Derek Thompson, “The Unluckiest Generation: What Will Become of Millennials?,” *TheAtlantic.com*, April 26, 2013, accessed April 18, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/04/the-unluckiest-generation-what-will-become-of-millennials/275336/>.
6. I can say so since I completed many life inventories with elders in their twilight years during my chaplain residency days.
7. “The Age of Belief: marking a significant shift between the fourth and twentieth centuries when the church focused on orthodoxy and ‘correct doctrine.’ Age of the Spirit: a trend that began 50 years ago and is increasingly directing the church of tomorrow whereby Christians are ignoring dogma and breaking down barriers between different religions—spirituality is replacing formal religion.” Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), cover.
8. Emily Esfahani Smith and Jennifer L. Aaker, “Millennial Searchers,” November 30, 2013, accessed November 31, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/01/opinion/sunday/millennial-searchers.html?_r=0.
9. Susan E. Fox, Joanne Lindstrom, and Stephanie Croom, “Digital Natives—Ministry Immigrants,” *Reflective Practice* 34 (2014): 99.

10. Jonathan W. Ball and Amani D. Legagneur, "Of A Certain Age: Supervising the Next Generation," *Reflective Practice* 34 (2014): 82, 91. Also see, Susan E. Fox, Joanne Lindstrom, and Stephanie Croom, "Digital Natives—Ministry Immigrants," *Reflective Practice* 34 (2014): 101.
11. Pew Research Center, "The Millennial Count," accessed April 10, 2014, <http://www.pewresearch.org/daily-number/the-millennial-count/>.
12. Instead we'll take real fossils and use DNA sequences to bring extinct species back to life. See Big Think, "Can We Resurrect the Dinosaurs? Neanderthal Man?," video and transcript, accessed April 25, 2014, <http://bigthink.com/videos/can-we-resurrect-the-dinosaurs-neanderthal-man-2>.
13. See "The Future of Science 50, 100, 150 Years from Now," *Scientific American Magazine* 308, no. 1 (2013).
14. I use the Personal Spiritual Identity Model (P-SIM) for spiritual assessment and pastoral care with Millennials. P-SIM was designed by C. J. Hast, MDiv, BCC, and was originally developed as a tool for guiding assessment and care in the hospital setting. The goal in working with this model is spaciousness-restoring and enriching a healthy and spacious spiritual identity. Ideally, this spaciousness would be balanced in all four areas of the model: hope, connection, values, and meaning.