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What Millennials Want Most: A Career That Actually Matters

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(http://blogs-images.forbes.com/forbesleadershipforum/2012/07/03/barry-salzberg_170x17012.jpg) This article is by Barry Salzberg, global chief executive officer of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu

The Occupy Wall Street movement may have faded in the past few years, but its core beliefs have stuck with tomorrow's talent.



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It's tempting to think that these grass-roots sentiments will run their course, but my interactions with young professionals around the globe, as well as our own research, tell me there is something larger at work, and that business

leaders need to pay attention.

Occupy's core issue, damaged trust in business, remains strong with millennials—strong in interviews, strong on college message boards, and strong on social networking sites. This fundamentally different recession has created a potentially fundamentally different generation.

As digital natives and emissaries from the future, the millennials hold the keys to unlocking the secrets of tomorrow. Researchers predict (http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/capitalbusiness/apps-head-to-the-office/2012/04/13/gIQAJhQtJT_story.html) that this year there will come to be more mobile devices than humans on the planet. We need this digital generation to join us in unleashing the potential of all that mobility and access to information. And they will, but only if they believe our organizations can offer them careers that, well, actually matter. Given that Deloitte's member firms will recruit 250,000 people around the world over the next five years, this obviously resonates with me. And I believe it matters to any leader thinking about the future.



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The good news is that business as a whole has a good record to point to, an all-true story about the many things we do to make the world a better place. Jobs and homes. Opportunity and security. Breakthrough new ideas like the iPad. The works.

Never mind the still sluggish job market. In their insistence on social principle, many millennials are not driven by money or success in quite the way their parents were. This generation wants to know what your organization stands for in improving society, what it stands for in action, as opposed to blowing smoke. Millennials want to know how they will make a positive difference in the world if they join your business, not by wearing a colorful T-shirt on a special project once a year but in their actual work.

Did I mention that this media-savvy generation is also jaded and suspicious? Unimpressed by title, well-traveled, and immune to P.R. in the old sense? To anyone who imagines their heartstrings can be nimbly plucked, good luck.

In August 2011, for example, students at top American schools—Yale, Harvard, Dartmouth, Stanford—were complaining about their peers going into finance and consulting, professions in which 25% of Yale grads launch their careers. They called such choices a “brain drain,” or “a tragedy of wasted minds,” as one Dartmouth undergrad put it. Deloitte signed up some 49,000 minds last year, so naturally this got my attention.





We did some original research and discovered that these attitudes, conflicted as they can be, also reflect remarkable optimism and resilience, including an admirable willingness to tackle, head-on, society's biggest issues. A slacker generation this is not.

My organization examined the opinions of 1,000 millennials at Deloitte member firms regarding the impact of business on society. We found that more than half of them believe that in the future business will have a greater impact than anyone else in solving society's biggest challenges. And 86% of them believe business will have at least as much potential as government to meet society's challenges. Clearly, taken as a whole, millennials do not see business as a waste.

Yes, employment remains a challenge, in the U.S. and especially in parts of Europe suffering from double-digit unemployment, such as Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Greece. True, more needs to be done to align education and training with today's jobs, and my organization, among many, is striving to do just that. But to be realistic, it will take the bulldozer of business, going at full throttle, to get us out of the ditch. To do that effectively, business needs to move past the denial stage and get everyone on board, including the new generation of workers, with all their energy, curiosity, new skills, and passion.

Indeed, if you heed the details of this research, tomorrow's leaders are telling us that they believe they can actually change the world, fiscally and socially —operating *within* the system. They want to play a part personally, not just in pro bono work but through the work they do every day.

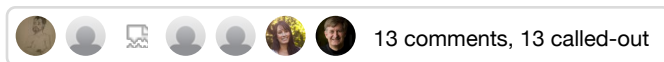
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In an effort to do just that, our member firms' professionals are fully engaged. For example (http://www.deloitte.com/view/en_GX/global/about/corporate-responsibility/approach-to-reporting/fcae0f66758f3310VgnVCM2000001b56f00aRCRD.htm), in Korea they are creating new efficiencies in the nation's IT infrastructure and thereby helping a developing country use inexpensive technology to create micro-businesses. In South Sudan, after a long civil war, we are helping create social structures from taxation to governance that support peace and stability.

Another part of the picture is the large number of women now in the global workforce: fully half (http://www.forbes.com/forbesinsights/diversity_2012/index.html), driven by better education and aided by the steady wind of social forces. Businesses are hungry for this talent.

In turn, greater economic equality between men and women has been shown to reduce poverty rates, boost GDP, and lead to better governance. That kind of social change, driven as much by business as by government or nongovernmental organizations, is bringing major benefits to the next wave of emerging economies in the Middle East, Africa, India, and elsewhere.

In short, we need to do more to connect the dots for millennials, showing them the deeper global dynamics of the business enterprise. Damaged trust in business is one side effect of the events of recent years. Like all our stakeholders, our digital natives need to know that they can trust us with their future, and that, like them, we're ready to keep changing the world.

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