

# Millennials: Why the Next Generation Will Change the Way We Do Missions

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© December 11, 2014

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## **Introduction**

The world of missions is regularly changing. Political changes affect the development and identity of countries around the world, economic changes affect the ability of missionaries to travel and reside in other nations, and religious changes bring obstacles or open doors to ministry among various people groups. The changes that most impact the work of missions, however, are often not those external variables which alter the availability of visas, the flow of money or the receptivity of people to the Gospel. What affects missions more than these factors is the perspective of potential missionaries.

Since the beginning of time, each successive generation of people from any culture or society has had the potential to approach life differently than their forbearers. For most of recorded history, however, the factors that cause major shifts in worldview or personal values have come gradually for most societies. Though some have experienced major upheavals and consequent worldview shifts due to factors such as natural disaster or war, most societies remain largely unchanged from one generation to the next. American society, however, has experienced some dramatic alteration from this pattern through recent generations, resulting in marked differences in the way existing American generations engage with the world around them. While some tension has always characterized the interaction of the young with the old, the degree of value shifting from one generation to the next in recent American history has created such disparities as to cause distrust or even fear on the part of many older Americans toward younger Americans. This clash factors in the way established evangelical missionary agencies interact with the current generation of younger Americans who form today's primary pool of potential missionary candidates.

Leadership of most well established American evangelical missionary agencies is in the hands of "Baby Boomers" and "Generation Xers," people who were born after World War II until the period of the late 1970's. Of the sixty or so agencies of which I have working knowledge, only a few have

administrators younger than forty.<sup>1</sup> Like all generations, Boomers and Xers are generally characterized by a set of values and priorities which developed based on their collective experience and history. Because their collective experience and history is extensively different from that of the current generation of youth in America, they often express doubt and concern regarding the likelihood that the new generation will accomplish the work of missions with any degree of success. I believe that this anxiety is misplaced and unnecessary. Many dynamics of the younger generation actually make them better suited for missionary service than previous generations. Much of their value system lends itself quite favorably to the task of worldwide discipleship endeavor. The following pages will attempt to convince the reader that the next generation of Americans has many advantages for engaging in missionary service. Rather than seeking to conform these youth to the older generation's ideals and approaches, evangelical missionary agencies will be well served if they adopt strategies for incorporating college aged young people into their organizations. There is much to be gained for mission organizations by adjusting methodologically, philosophically and corporately in ways that are welcoming to the generation which will succeed us. In this paper, my aim is to make a case for how mission agencies can integrate Millennials.

## **Overview of Generations**

Before delineating characteristics of today's youth and analyzing how they can best be integrated into existing mission structures, it will be helpful to define the concept of generations and identify the ones currently contributing to missionary endeavor. In their book, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* Neil Howe and Bill Strauss define a generation as "a society-wide peer group, born over a period roughly the same length as the passage from youth to adulthood (in today's America, around twenty or twenty-one years), who collectively possess a common persona."<sup>2</sup> Different writers assign

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<sup>1</sup> This is endemically a matter of mature spiritual leadership. Similarly, according to Duke University's 2012 National Congregations Study (updated October 14, 2014), the average age of the head clergy person or leader of America's churches is 55. Chaves, Mark. "National Congregations Study." October 14, 2014. Accessed November 15, 2014. <http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/SummaryTables.pdf#page=28>, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Niel Howe and Bill Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 40.

different labels to the various living generations in America, but they tend to agree about the general timeframe for each. The following chart may be helpful.

Label	Birth Years <sup>3</sup>
G. I. Generation	1901-1924
Silent Generation (alternately called Builders)	1925-1945
Baby Boomers	1946-1964
Generation X	1965-1979
Millennials (alternately called Generation Y)	1980-2000

The majority of missionaries currently serving with American evangelical missionary agencies are either Baby Boomers or Generation Xers.<sup>4</sup> The generation in view in this paper is the Millennials, so called because they attain adulthood after the beginning of this millennium. According to Thom and Jess Rainer, the Millennial generation is the largest of any American generation so far, comprising 77.9 million persons.<sup>5</sup> Their sheer size makes them important and gives hope that, if their hearts can be drawn toward missionary service, they represent remarkable potential for making an impact with the Gospel around the world.

### Characteristics of Millennials

Undoubtedly, Millennials are different in many ways from the generations which precede them. Before examining some of the specifics of their generational characteristics, it may be enlightening to consider two very different perspectives about the Millennials and their potential. Tim Elmore, in his ominously titled book *Generation iY, Our Last Chance to Save Their Future* writes rather pessimistically:

Ready or not, they are now entering the adult world. And unless we wake up and make some adjustments in the way we interact with them, I predict rough waters ahead. We can already see several unintended consequences of this new world we've created for them - a world that allows for high speed, constant connection, sedentary lifestyles, pitiful relational skills, and a large dose of narcissism.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Some variation exists regarding specific starting and ending years for each generation, but none vary by more than several years in either direction.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the average age of career missionaries with the IMB, America's largest evangelical mission agency, is 45. The average age of short-term missionaries with the IMB is 37. Global Research IMB: Summary of Annual Personnel Report, accessed November 15, 2014, <http://public.imb.org/globalresearch/Pages/ResearchDataAnnual.aspx>.

<sup>5</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation* (Nashville, Tenn: B&H Pub. Group, 2011), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Tim Elmore, *Generation iY, Our Last Chance to Save Their Future* (Atlanta, GA: Poet Gardener, 2010), 14.

Contrarily, Howe and Strauss write:

As a group, Millennials are unlike any other youth generation in living memory. They are more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse. More important, they are beginning to manifest a wide variety of positive social habits that older Americans no longer associate with youth, including a new focus on teamwork, achievement, modesty, and good conduct.<sup>7</sup>

Both books represent a bias regarding the Millennial generation. Elmore leads a non-profit organization which seeks to develop emerging leaders. He seems to be dismayed with many of the characteristics that he sees in Generation Y (or the younger half of this generation which he refers to as iY). His perspective is largely representative of a sense that society has failed to properly prepare Millennials for their future and his book addresses solutions to correct this problem. On the other end of the spectrum, Howe and Strauss created a paradigm which envisions every fifth generation of people bringing beneficial changes to society and correcting the social ills that have accrued from their ancestor's failures. One must question whether their enthusiasm about the Millennials is based purely on valid research or is prejudiced in order to confirm their paradigm construction.

Certain well observed characteristics of the Millennials are not as liable to subjectivity as the sentiments mentioned above. For example, it is easily demonstrable that this generation is the most ethnically diverse in American history. The Pew Research Center's report *Millennials in Adulthood* states, "the Millennial generation is more ethnically diverse, including about twice as many persons of Hispanic origin (19% of all Millennials) as did the Boomer generation (10%)."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Jim Raymo asserts, "They represent the most diverse North American generation to date, with 38 percent of eighteen to twenty-four year olds coming from minority ethnic backgrounds."<sup>9</sup> They are also the most highly educated generation thus far. Chuck Bomar avers, "Between 1970 and 2009, the number of eighteen to

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<sup>7</sup> Niel Howe and Bill Strauss, 4.

<sup>8</sup> "Millennials in Adulthood." Pew Research Centers Social Demographic Trends Project RSS. March 7, 2014. Accessed October 18, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Jim Raymo and Judy Raymo. *Millennials and Mission: A Generation Faces a Global Challenge* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2014), Kindle Location 283.

twenty-four year olds obtaining more education in degree-granting institutions increased by 97 percent.”<sup>10</sup> He further reports, “Graduate level education grew 60 percent between 1970 and 1980, stabilized during the 1980s and increased again by 18 percent between 1977 and 2007.”<sup>11</sup>

The trend for obtaining more education has contributed to a widely noted phenomenon concerning the Millennials: they experience delayed adulthood or extended adolescence. They marry later, are financially dependent on their parents far longer, postpone embarking on a specific career and seem less concerned about financial stability than previous generations.

Millennials also are disposed to be very egalitarian. Their exposure to multiculturalism through media and pluralism in education has created a level of tolerance heretofore unknown in American society. Part of this trend may be traced as well to the breakdown of performance based distinctions in childhood competitions such as sporting events or music recitals. “Everyone gets a trophy” has been the expectation of this generation since their birth. Coupled with egalitarianism is a sense of entitlement. No generation of children has been as protected by their parents as the Millennials. Governmental regulations on almost every aspect of their health and safety along with cautious parental oversight have been the norm for their entire existence. As Bruce Tulgan says, “They grew up in the Decade of the Child ... Generation Y was the great oversupervised generation.”<sup>12</sup> This age segment of our society has grown up during a period of societal affluence which enabled their parents to give them more than what was possible in times past. Likewise, advertisers have focused their attention on Millennials as a lucrative target market, and have succeeded in convincing them that they deserve everything imaginable to make them happy. Bomar opines, “On the whole, college-age people have an overinflated view of themselves that lends itself to a sense of entitlement.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Chuck Bomar, *Worlds Apart: Understanding the Mindset and Values of 18-25 Year Olds* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Kindle Location 243.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, Kindle Location 260.

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Tulgan, *Not Everyone Gets a Trophy: How to Manage Generation Y* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Bomar, Kindle Location 925.

Technology has also played a major factor in the shaping of the Millennial perspective. Millennials have never known life without computers and the Internet and have grown up with the opportunity to acquire nearly limitless knowledge by executing a few mouse clicks. This produces a sense of empowerment and a high expectation that technology will continue to improve the world. Social intercourse is also highly affected by technology. Media such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, and YouTube afford the ability to engage in relationships with people far and near. Presently, around 81 percent of Millennials are on Facebook and their average number of friends is two hundred fifty.<sup>14</sup> The concept of social networking as a means of discovering opportunities and accomplishing goals is part and parcel of this generation's collective psyche.

Another characteristic of Millennials is their tendency to be quite tolerant of variations from their perspective or lifestyle. Raised in a post-modern environment which negates the possibility of one right way of thinking for all people and educated during a time when pluralism has elevated all cultural or religious values to equal status, Millennials have been conditioned to view any and all approaches to life as acceptable. Robert P. Jones and Thomas Banchoff's survey of Millennial values found that "half of Millennials say that what is right or wrong depends on the situation, compared to 45% who say that there are some things that are always wrong, regardless of the situation."<sup>15</sup> Thus, 54% of Millennials believe that abortion should not be restricted in any situation<sup>16</sup>, and a sizable majority believes that marriage should be an option for homosexual couples.<sup>17</sup> While these numbers can be expected to be lower among evangelical youth, Jim Raymo reports that "our experience with Millennials in ministry contexts leads us to conclude that they embrace biblical absolutes personally, but are uncomfortable being seen as narrow-

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<sup>14</sup> "Generations in the Next America Event Video." Pew Research Centers Social Demographic Trends Project RSS. March 7, 2014. Accessed October 18, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, and Thomas Banchoff, "A Generation in Transition: Religion, Values, and Politics among College-Age Millennials, Findings from the 2012 Millennial Values Survey," *Public Religion Research Institute and Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs*. (April 19, 2012), 486, Kindle.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 510, Kindle.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 533 Kindle.

mindful or judgmental.”<sup>18</sup> Young adults have an aversion to stereotyping other people or assigning labels to certain segments of society. They resist dividing people into simple categories which can then be accepted or rejected as a group rather than treated as individuals to be understood and respected.

Evangelical Millennials tend to be more concerned for the whole person in terms of the application of the message of Christianity than what has been characteristic of older evangelicals. That is to say that their understanding of Christianity is more holistic than what was true in the past. They recognize that the Gospel has implications both for the deliverance of humanity from the righteous wrath of God and from the devastating effects of sin. So they are motivated to seek for ways to alleviate the human misery that is the unfortunate lot of so many people on our planet.<sup>19</sup> Commenting on Richard Stearns’ book *The Hole in Our Gospel*, Gene Wilson notes,

he suggests that the reason we fail to serve our fellow humans as we should is that we have neglected a part of the gospel. This idea has taken hold because it reflects a generational shift toward making a difference in the earth (rather than merely talking), a growing awareness of human need and suffering, and a more holistic worldview. Stearns just put words to what many (especially Millennials) were thinking and actually doing.<sup>20</sup>

Concurrently, Millennials are frequently generous in giving toward causes that promise relief to human suffering. Chuck Bomar observes, “If you look closely at this generation of college-age people, you’ll find that they seem to be more concerned about other people than any American generation that has gone before them. They are overall compassionate and believe they can make a difference.”<sup>21</sup> David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, notes that “nearly one out of every 10 of all Millennials say they text to donate at least once a month, which doubles among practicing Christian Millennials to two out of 10.”<sup>22</sup> So important is this focus among young evangelicals that Jim Raymo states “Showing

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<sup>18</sup> Raymo, Kindle Location 1918.

<sup>19</sup> The urge to improve the state of the less fortunate is characteristic among Millennials in general. Derrick Feldman, “The 2014 Millennial Impact Report.” *The Millennial Impact Project* (n.d.): n. pag. Web. 8 Dec. 2014. p. 12, notes that the third most important factor for Millennials in choosing a job is the company’s involvement with causes (humanitarian efforts). The first and second factors are what a company actually sells or does and the work environment of the company.

<sup>20</sup> Gene Wilson, “Holistic Church Planting: Moving Beyond Polemics to Obedience.” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (July 2014): 344.

<sup>21</sup> Bomar, Kindle Location 144.

<sup>22</sup> David Kinnaman, “How Technology Is Changing Millennial Faith,” (October 15, 2013): 1, accessed November 1, 2014, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/640-how-technology-is-changing-millennial-faith>.

Christlike compassion for the poor and those scorned by society has long been a Christian tradition. But ministries that refuse to take this attitude, and to act upon it, may be viewed by the young generation as irrelevant.”<sup>23</sup>

Part of this perspective on the part of the Millennials is shaped by a general sense of idealism and hope for the future. Bruce Tulgan opines that “all the leading research shows that Gen Yers are more idealistic than any other new youth cohort since the first wave of baby boomers came of age in the 1960s.”<sup>24</sup> Thom Rainer states it this way,

The Millennials tend to be upbeat, positive, and happy. But they are realists as well. They know that not all is well with the world. The Boomer Generation knew that and protested it. The Gen X Generation knew that and was depressed about it. And the Millennials know that, but they believe they can have a role in changing it.<sup>25</sup>

To be fair, some of this optimism is associated with an unrealistic sense of entitlement, leading, for example to improbable expectations in the workplace.

Today, the idea of proving yourself through experience doesn’t exist. Actually, it’s quite the opposite. Most twentysomethings think they should have more responsibility than given and potentially a higher influence into the overall direction of the company. Because they’ve thought through some things in theory, they assume they know best – and others should recognize what they have to offer.<sup>26</sup>

Not all Millennial expectation is naïve and narcissistic, however. Having grown up in a society that overvalued personal gain, many of today’s youth are rejecting the idea that the ideal life is to be found in accumulating more goods and acquiring personal comfort. Chuck Bomar poignantly remarks,

College-age people often look at parents or other adults stuck in careers they don’t love or find fulfilling. Twentysomethings see that their needs have been met, but they also see how much their mom or dad would prefer to be doing something else professionally. They see people stuck in career or activities they don’t enjoy, which is precisely what college-age people want to avoid – and will try to avoid at all costs. They would rather do something that satisfies them personally than get stuck in a career that only makes good money.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Raymo, Kindle Location 1565.

<sup>24</sup> Tulgan, 111.

<sup>25</sup> Rainer, 18.

<sup>26</sup> Bomar, Kindle Location 999.

<sup>27</sup> Bomar, Kindle Location 740.

The result of this fear of pursuing life without personal satisfaction has given rise to a generation that is eager to make a difference in the world and to contribute to significant change in society. They “want significance and feel that a person’s life should be meaningful and purposeful in the eyes of others.”<sup>28</sup> Research conducted by Morley Winograd and Michael Hais reveals that “88% of Millennials rated the opportunity to have an impact on the world as an important consideration in choosing an employer.”<sup>29</sup> Further, observing that Millennials express high confidence in their potential to make a difference, Thom Rainer reports, “we asked Millennials to respond to a simple statement: ‘I believe I can do something great.’ If you think the Millennials may doubt themselves, think again. Those who agreed with that statement represented 96 percent of those we surveyed!”<sup>30</sup>

This optimism on the part of our society’s youth can serve as an obstacle or an advantage. It can be an obstacle because the interface of an older generation which has earned the right of leadership and gained the fruit of experience with a younger generation which is self-assured and highly confident inevitably leads to interpersonal conflict. Whole books have been written on the topic of how to integrate Millennials into the workplace,<sup>31</sup> and most of them portray the challenge as rather demanding. Along with the Millennial’s seemingly boundless enthusiasm, however, is their capacity for a high level of productivity. The combination of their facility with technology, their propensity to network, their appetite for teamwork and their urgency to contribute gives them an aptitude to become highly productive. Writing in the introduction to his upbeat book about managing Millennials in the marketplace, Tulgan pronounces “Yes, Generation Y will be more difficult to recruit, retain, motivate, and manage than any

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<sup>28</sup> Raymo, Kindle Location 321.

<sup>29</sup> Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais, *Millennial Momentum: How a New Generation Is Remaking America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 151.

<sup>30</sup> Rainer, 116.

<sup>31</sup> This is the primary goal of Bruce Tulgan’s book *Not Everyone Gets a Trophy: How to Manage Generation Y*. Other books representing this genre would include *Managing the Millennials* by Chip Espinoza, Mick Ukleja and Craig Rush as well as *Y in the Workplace: Managing the "Me First" Generation* by Nicole A. Lipkin and April J. Perrymore. Though not exclusively a book about management, I would categorize Tim Elmore’s *Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future* in this realm also.

other new generation to enter the workforce. But this will also be the most high-performing workforce in history for those who know how to manage them properly.”<sup>32</sup>

It is to this optimism that I turn now. How should the characteristics of Millennials be viewed by those who administrate evangelical missionary organizations? I believe that, notwithstanding the inherent challenges involved in intergenerational integration, the distinctives of America’s youth should motivate enthusiasm for adaptation to their priorities.

### **Advantages of the Millennials**

Someone once said,

The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers.

That someone was the Greek philosopher Socrates, who died in 399 B.C.<sup>33</sup> Since time immemorial, older generations have been suspicious of younger generations. Most generations do not share the same outlook or experiences as the previous generation, and this naturally leads to concern and doubt about the suitability of those coming afterward to adequately steward what is being left behind. Sometimes this concern is expressed in harsh words of criticism and complaint; sometimes it is quietly murmured as disappointment over perceived insufficiencies. Considering some of the key characteristics of Millennials, however, and comparing those characteristics with the qualities needed to succeed in the task of missionary outreach should generate anticipation of good things to come. If we can capture the imagination of the Millennial generation for the work of missions and mentor them to capitalize appropriately on their strengths, there is tremendous possibility that they can become the greatest generation of missionaries ever produced by America.

The first, and perhaps most obvious advantage of the Millennial generation is their sheer size. As the largest ever generation of Americans, they hold great potential for contributing to the demand for

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<sup>32</sup> Tulgan, 4.

<sup>33</sup> “Socrates,” *Respectfully Quoted: A Dictionary of Quotations* (1989), <http://www.bartleby.com/73/195.html> (Accessed November 1, 2014).

missionaries among the world's ever expanding population. Statistically, however, this generation is less evangelical than its predecessors. Raymo cites that "less than 25% believe the Bible is the word of God and should be taken literally, with nearly 40% stating the Bible is only a book written by men."<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, because this generation is highly relational and wants to believe in something bigger than itself, the opportunity to engage them with the Gospel and disciple them toward missionary outreach is quite viable. In many ways, young Americans in general are becoming more collectivist and less individualistic, which means that they tend to find their identity more through association with others who relate to a common cause. At the same time, Americans are becoming less religiously affiliated while remaining vaguely committed to spirituality. A Pew Research study in 2012 revealed that among Americans not affiliated with any denomination, 68% believe in God, more than 33% consider themselves "spiritual but not religious," and 21% claim to pray daily.<sup>35</sup> This social environment opens avenues for engagement with the gospel, which coupled with this generation's appetite for accomplishing meaningful change in the world,<sup>36</sup> could be shepherded towards ultimate engagement in missionary outreach. Conversion always remains the domain of God, but among those who respond to the Gospel, a strong percentage may be willing to consider the difficult yet rewarding path of becoming a missionary.

Along with the size of the Millennial generation we must consider its ethnic diversity. One of the perennial weaknesses of American evangelical missions has been its tendency to be comprised primarily of white, Anglo Saxon people. The increased diversity of Millennial evangelicals favors the continued integration of individuals of various racial and ethnic backgrounds into America's missionary force in the

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<sup>34</sup> Raymo, Kindle Location 386. Contrarily, research conducted in August, 2014 by the Barna Group reveals that 96% of evangelical Millennials believe that the Bible contains "everything a person needs to live a meaningful life." "Millennials and the Bible: 3 Surprising Insights," Barna: Millennials - Knowledge to Navigate a Changing World, August, 2014, accessed November 15, 2014, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/687-millennials-and-the-bible-3-surprising-insights#.VGecsPmjOm4>.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials and the Looming Generational Showdown* (New York, N.Y.: Public Affairs, 2014), Kindle Location 2520.

<sup>36</sup> A Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults found that 86% of the respondents believed that it was important for them to have a career that does some good in the world. Lauren Stiller Rikleen, *You Raised Us – Now Work with Us: Millennials, Career Success, and Building Strong Workplace Teams* (American Bar Association, 2014), Kindle Location 2599.

form of multi-racial and multi-ethnic missionary teams. This should notably enhance their ability to engage many people groups with the good news of salvation through Jesus.

I have noted the fact that Millennials are more educated than any generation that has come before<sup>37</sup>, so much so that one author labels them “Generation Higher Ed.”<sup>38</sup> While their increased education has not necessarily benefitted the Millennials in terms of employment in a distressed economy<sup>39</sup>, for those who are willing to enter the complex world of modern missions this trend bodes well. With more mission fields reaching a point of sophistication in their development and increased ability to advance Christianity largely without outside aid, Western missionaries are often assuming increasingly specialized roles in missionary endeavor. While possessing an advanced education has never been necessary for proclaiming Christ, it is growing in its potential for opening doors for creative access platforms and providing leadership in ways that are new to this generation.

Millennials are endemically egalitarian and tolerant of others. Historically, however, American missionaries have frequently been notable for their ethnocentrism and predilection for colonialist attitudes. As author Tim Keese quips,

Growing up, when I thought about the church around the world, it looked like my church. That was all I knew. Sure, Christians in other countries had different languages and cultures, but if their worship styles were different or their theological preferences deficient, well, that’s why I was going over to teach them. And so, as is too often the case in missions, church planting resembles church franchising instead.<sup>40</sup>

It is always easy to assume that the way that one has practiced Christianity at home is appropriate or even preferable for people in another society and culture. Americans of the Silent or Baby Boomer generations were schooled on the ideals of American exceptionalism and our inherent superiority to the rest of the world. Today’s youth, on the other hand, do not commonly share those perspectives. They are far more

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<sup>37</sup> At the same time, fully a third of older Millennials (ages 26 to 33) have a four year college degree or more—making them the best educated cohort of young adults in American history. Educational attainment is highly correlated with economic success, even more so for this generation than previous ones. Millennials in Adulthood, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Bomar, Kindle Location 181.

<sup>39</sup> “Their difficult economic circumstances in part reflect the impact of the Great Recession (2007-2009) and in part the longer term effects of globalization and rapid technological change on the American workforce.” Millennials in Adulthood, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Tim Keese, *Dispatches from the Front: Stories of Gospel Advance in the World’s Difficult Places* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 18-19.

likely to assume that people in other parts of the world are different but equal to themselves. Rather than formulate judgments based on observable distinctions, Millennials are freer to appreciate the dissimilarities between themselves and other people. Part of this reality stems from the fact that Millennials are a more ethnically diverse generation than their predecessors. Raymo reports that this generation has

the lowest proportion of Caucasians. By 2000 nonwhites and Latinos accounted for more than one-third of the total population of the Millennials. That's nearly 50 percent higher than their representation in the Boomer generation, and nearly *200 percent* higher than that of the seniors born before 1946. The world of the Millennials is indeed different from that of their parents and grandparents [emphasis original].<sup>41</sup>

Today's youth has been raised in an environment of tolerance for those who are different from themselves. Raymo further claims, "Most of the members of this generation are truly color blind in the best sense of the phrase. They are taking racial and ethnic relationships to new levels."<sup>42</sup>

Inasmuch as a great portion of missionary success depends on the ability to develop relationships with people much different from oneself, this characteristic of Millennials alone gives them a noteworthy advantage in missionary outreach over those of other generations. Their tolerance of other customs and beliefs enables them to more deeply understand and respect adherents of different religions and traditions and more accurately speak the Gospel into their distinct contexts.<sup>43</sup> In addition, their egalitarian attitudes foster openness to serving alongside of, or under the direction of, local believers rather than insisting on American control of the missionary enterprise. Jim Raymo observes, "In contrast to previous generations of Western missionaries, they reject working independently from others (both nationals and missionaries) and want to see people working together at all levels."<sup>44</sup> Finally, these twin characteristics of egalitarianism and tolerance enable Millennials to adapt more freely and more deeply to their adopted culture in ways that enhance their capacity to enter into the lives of those they have gone to serve.

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<sup>41</sup> Raymo, p. 81.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>43</sup> Raymo, Kindle Location 1650 states, "This generation brings to ministry an inclusive tolerance and embracing of other races and cultures and a willingness to listen to other religious positions, along with genuine enjoyment in learning from others."

<sup>44</sup> Raymo, Kindle Location 1502.

Another advantage of Millennials is their incorporation of technology into their daily lives.<sup>45</sup> They have grown up using computers, internet, and social media as research tools and avenues for communication. They instinctively understand the power of technology relative to the spread of the Gospel. Just as previous generations embraced the use of radio and then television to enhance the spread of Christianity, today's youth are exploring means of using Facebook, YouTube and Vimeo to evangelize and disciple people. It is reported that among this generation of "digital natives" 54% of Christian Millennials use online videos related to faith issues,<sup>46</sup> and that "more than four out of 10 practicing Christian Millennials say they participate in online conversations about faith, and the same number say they blog or post comments on blogs about spiritual matters."<sup>47</sup> While the specific ways in which technology will be employed in missionary activity in the future remains uncertain, Millennials are clearly poised to maximize its use for Gospel productivity. They recognize the power of visual media on devices such as smartphones, and they understand the value of collaboration through social networking. As Winograd and Hais remark, "Millennials have been taught since they were toddlers that the best way to solve a societal problem is to act upon it locally, directly, and as part of a larger group."<sup>48</sup> Millennials do not view employing the latest technology primarily as an exciting upgrade to be enjoyed, but as a useful tool to be employed. They can work smarter, faster and more productively because they have grown up using technology as an extension of their talents and abilities. Many Baby Boomers and Generation Xers become impatient with Millennials' demand for the best possible technology, considering it a manifestation of narcissism, but Bruce Tulgan offers an insightful analogy when he quips, "Imagine if someone told you in the early 1990s that you would have to use carbon paper to keep copies

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<sup>45</sup> Lauren Stiller Rickleen, *You Raised Us - Now Work with Us: Millennials, Career Success, and Building Strong Workplace Teams*. Chicago: American Bar Association, 2014. Kindle Location 1552, "An overwhelming majority of the respondents identified themselves as technologically proficient, with more than 97% stating that they were somewhat or very tech savvy."

<sup>46</sup> Kinnaman, 2.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>48</sup> Winograd and Hais, 226.

of your documents. That's what it sounds like when you tell Gen Yers you don't want them to use the tools available to them."<sup>49</sup>

It has been postulated by some that Millennials reliance on technology has diminished their ability to communicate verbally. The reality, however, is that emerging adults simply communicate differently than older generations, particularly when they are communicating with members of an older generation. Millennials tend to incorporate technology along with their verbal communication, whereas older generations tend to categorize direct verbal and technology enhanced communication as two separate forms of interaction. When limited to only verbal communication, in a work setting, for example, many Millennials feel hampered because they are being required to communicate in ways that are uncomfortable for them.<sup>50</sup> Millennials see many forms of verbal only communication as inefficient and outdated.<sup>51</sup> However, there is no reason to believe that they are incapable of adapting to environments requiring only verbal communication. They simply must be shown the value of doing so for the sake of a beneficial outcome.

Millennials are likewise advantaged by their holistic approach to ministry. Commenting on the book *The Hole in Our Gospel* written by Richard Stearns, Gene Wilson observes that

the reason we fail to serve our fellow humans as we should is that we have neglected a part of the gospel. This idea has taken hold because it reflects a generational shift toward making a difference in the earth (rather than merely talking), a growing awareness of human need and suffering, and a more holistic worldview. Stearns just put words to what many (especially Millennials) were thinking and actually doing.<sup>52</sup>

It is certain that Millennials are more likely than previous generations to seek for ways to minister to people's entire need, both physical and spiritual. Because of this, they tend to develop relationships more easily with individuals who benefit from their compassionate care.

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<sup>49</sup> Tulgan, 51.

<sup>50</sup> Rickleen, Kindle Location 1570, "In their survey responses, Millennials frequently highlighted the communication gap they experienced. Nearly 30% of the respondents stated that they communicate differently with managers in the workplace than [sic] they do with their peers at work, and more than 24% said that they are less effective when unable to use their preferred communication methods at work."

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, Kindle Location 1669.

<sup>52</sup> GeneWilson, "Holistic Church Planting: Moving Beyond Polemics to Obedience." *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (July 2014): 342-49.

Millennials are most likely to give volunteer time if they know their efforts will make a tangible difference in someone's life. They tend to get "hands on" with causes they care about when an organization can offer a range of volunteer opportunities, from one-time, episodic commitments to long-term, pro-bono or skills-based opportunities.<sup>53</sup>

This approach, when applied by evangelicals, frequently opens avenues for Gospel proclamation.

Ministry is accomplished in ways that accord with Jesus' practice of both relieving personal suffering and announcing the good news of salvation.<sup>54</sup> Whereas older missionaries often tended to dichotomize verbalizing the gospel message and demonstrating Christian charity, Millennials are less inclined to make such divisions and look for ways to help their fellow man. This approach permits a more natural and fruitful ministry experience. As Raymo communicates, "They are all about demonstrating the goodness of God in His love for people, believing this results in irresistible attraction to Jesus."<sup>55</sup>

A final advantage of Millennials is their unfailing optimism and hopefulness. Drawing on their confidence in their education, their control of technology, and their cooperative approach to problem solving, Millennials are typically upbeat about their ability to affect change in the world. Bruce Tulgan states, "Uncertainty is their natural habitat. Globalization does not make Gen Yers feel small. Rather, it makes them feel worldly. Technological change does not make them feel as if they are racing to keep up. Rather, it makes them feel connected and powerful."<sup>56</sup> Contrary to many older Americans who view the world as increasingly deteriorating, Millennials have a generally positive approach to life. Perhaps it has always been the inclination of individuals who pursue missionary service to be forward thinking and expectant of a good outcome, but the next wave of missionaries possesses a generational perspective which naturally lends itself to embracing hope for making a difference in the world. Millennials in general are not looking for a job, but for an opportunity to make an impact for good. Thus, "88% of Millennials rated the opportunity to have an impact on the world as an important consideration in

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<sup>53</sup> Derrick Feldmann, "A Generation for Causes: A Four Year Summary of the Millennial Impact Project." *The Millennial Impact Project* (n.d.): n. pag. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

<sup>54</sup> For example, in Luke 10:9, Jesus' instructions to those sent on a missionary journey was to both relieve human suffering and proclaim spiritual fulfillment.

<sup>55</sup> Raymo, Kindle Location 1548.

<sup>56</sup> Tulgan, 6.

choosing an employer.”<sup>57</sup> Translating that impulse into evangelical missions, this generation is not content to have a position or to simply do something noble. They expect to engage in something monumental, sacrificial and redemptive. They do not simply want to discuss missions, promote missions, or support missions. They want to do missions.

## **Engaging Millennials**

As we have noted, Millennials are eager to engage their world in ways that make a significant difference. Jim Raymo notes, “They believe making a difference in some sphere of life is as important as their own personal success.”<sup>58</sup> He goes on to say, “For Christian young people, missions can be a logical path to follow if aspirants and appropriate organizations can meet and mesh.”<sup>59</sup> The question before us, then, is how can mission agencies mesh with Millennials? A recently published study asserts that Millennials will take the lead as the generation with the largest workforce in America in 2015.<sup>60</sup> For mission agencies, that means that it is crucial to adapt to these younger recruits as quickly as possible.

Mission agencies should integrate with Millennials by striving to accommodate their characteristics so that the agencies reap the advantages of their strengths. We have noted that this generation is often relationally oriented in ways that differ from their predecessors.<sup>61</sup> To be sure, their means of developing and maintaining relationships differs from that of previous generations<sup>62</sup>, primarily in terms of dependence on technology, but their inclination to be more regularly connected to other human beings is a notable tendency. Therefore, means must be sought to promote relational bonds with missionary agencies in ways that are relevant to the new generation. Historically, missionary candidates were recruited as mission agencies touted their institutional integrity and noble history. While those

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<sup>57</sup> Winograd and Hais, 151.

<sup>58</sup> Raymo, Kindle Location 1680.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> “The 2015 Millennial Majority Workforce,” Elance ODesk, October 29, 2014, accessed November 16, 2014, <https://www.elance-odesk.com/millennial-majority-workforcew>.

<sup>61</sup> Rainer, p. 19, states “But the Millennials are relational beyond their immediate families. They have not let the avalanche of technological tools cause them to withdraw from personal contact with other.”

<sup>62</sup> Rickleen, Kindle Location 1614, discussing the potential for conflict between Boomer bosses and Millennial hires, Rickleen notes, “Employees and their supervisors are likely to have significant differences in their communication styles. By failing to understand and bridge these differences, however, the workplace suffers from unnecessary inefficiencies and the impact of conflicting messages.”

factors are not unimportant to any generation, Millennials are less likely to be drawn to an organization based on its image than by its people. Agency personnel must become proactive in establishing and developing relationships with potential missionaries. Today's youth are impressed with authentic, passionate followers of Jesus. They want to hear stories of how Christ used missionaries to bring deliverance and hope to people in difficult circumstances. They want to connect with the people of an agency, not with the agency as an institution. The last thing the average young person wants is to be marketed. They want to sense that they are important as individuals to the organization rather than simply being recruited to fill a need.<sup>63</sup> That implies treating Millennials as equals and taking their dreams and goals of missionary service seriously. Bruce Tulgan is correct when he states, "The worst thing you can possibly do with Gen Yers is treat them like children, talk down to them, or make them feel disrespected."<sup>64</sup> Similarly, Raymo counsels, "Some of their notions may be unrealistic, but one of the worst possible responses is for a leader to outright negate those aspirations or to indicate a bored unwillingness to even consider them."<sup>65</sup>

Once Millennials commit to an agency, it is important to relate to them as colleagues rather than subordinates. According to Raymo, "This generation wants leaders who are coaches rather than directors. Their preferred style is for leaders 'to be very involved in my life.'"<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Tulgan observes, "The best way to demonstrate that you care about a Gen Yer's success at work is to invest your own time in helping that person succeed."<sup>67</sup> Authoritarian leadership and the expectation of distance between leaders and subordinates will quickly turn away Millennials. Undoubtedly, adopting a more embracing approach requires a greater investment of time and energy toward the new missionary, but the result will be a

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<sup>63</sup> Derrick Feldmann, "The 2014 Millennial Impact Report." The Millennial Impact Project (n.d.): n. pag. Web. 8 Dec. 2014. p. 14, cites, "Beyond compensation and benefits, Millennials are more likely to stay at their company when they perceive their talents and passions being used and fulfilled. In fact, more than half (53%) of respondents said having their passions and talents recognized and addressed is their top reason for remaining at their current company. The next biggest factor in retention was bonds with co-workers (20%), followed by belief in the company's mission and purpose (20%)."

<sup>64</sup> Tulgan, 59.

<sup>65</sup> Raymo, Kindle Location 1742.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, Kindle Location 1632.

<sup>67</sup> Tulgan, 62.

stronger sense of commitment and contentment for both the agency and the Millennial.<sup>68</sup> Again, Tulgan, who writes from a management perspective regarding integrating Gen Y into business situations, opines, “They need you to guide, direct, and support them every step of the way. In return, you’ll get the highest performance workforce in history.”<sup>69</sup> All of this should not be construed as saying that Millennials are not also responsible to be learners and make adaptations to the missionary agency. Learning to work in harmony and to develop a servant spirit is part and parcel of all successful missionary endeavor. The point is not that the essential qualities of good missionary character can be foregone by Millennials because they come from a different generation; quite the opposite. Many emerging adults will need to relearn their place among their co-workers of various generations in order to eventually become effective leaders themselves. As agencies encourage camaraderie and foster transparency, however, Millennials will have a starting place from which they can be tutored and guided by those whom they will grow to respect. Failing to initially adapt to their cultural starting point, on the other hand, will result in lost opportunity to even begin towards path of effective cooperation.

Another important aspect of Millennials’ relationship orientation is their frequently strong bond with their parents. Lauren Stiller Rickleen posits that “Millennials have relied upon their parents even through their teen years, ages when prior generations experienced far greater intergenerational tension.”<sup>70</sup> Further, she cites that “Nearly 84% reported that they ‘frequently’ or ‘sometimes’ sought both career and personal advice from their parents,”<sup>71</sup> and further, “Millennials have an unabashed closeness with their families that profoundly influences the decisions they make in most aspects of their lives.”<sup>72</sup> In the classes I teach, I regularly conduct a non-public survey asking students about their personal lives in order to better ascertain what they are like and how they are thinking. In answer to the question, “who do you consider to be your hero?” more than 90% of respondents name one

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<sup>68</sup> Rickleen, Kindle Location 660 notes, “Millennials place a high priority on workplace culture and desire a work environment that emphasizes teamwork and a sense of community.”

<sup>69</sup> Tulgan, 18.

<sup>70</sup> Rickleen, Kindle Location 793.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, Kindle Location 822.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, Kindle Location 853.

or both of their parents. Missionary organizations have not routinely involved parents in the process of recruiting and integrating new missionaries. This should change. Agencies must begin to discover ways to get to know the parents of Millennial recruits and build relationships with them. Because the single biggest influence on the decision making experience of today's average young person is his or her parents, interacting with parents about the opportunities presented to their children, answering their questions, and even involving them in the acceptance and initial training program of the agency would fortify the stability of the new missionary and establish healthy relationships which will benefit all involved. One downside of this approach is the potential for imposition by what are sometimes called "helicopter parents," that is, parents who hover about their children and tend to make decisions for them or dominate their choices. The challenges of missionary service mitigate against allowing the decision to pursue field practice to be coopted by anyone but the one actually going to do the work. So agencies, while working with parents as primary influencers on the decision making process of their Millennial children, must distinguish between parental decision and parental coercion. Parental influence over Millennials tends to endure much longer than it did for previous generations, but eventually it diminishes, even in the case of helicopter parents. Rickleen reminds us that, "as in generations past, Millennials eventually transition to spouses and similar significant relationships in their lives and sources of advice."<sup>73</sup> Once a Millennial is well established in a marriage or is bearing full responsibility for his or her economic decisions, the role of parents in decision making becomes greatly reduced.

A further implication of Millennials' relational orientation is that they are more likely to develop missionary teams even before associating with a missionary organization. The Millennial Impact Project summary speaks to the inclination of emerging adults to develop peer relationships for the sake of accomplishing common goals.

This peer influence appears quite noticeably in social technology and often begins in self-organized, small groups, such as five friends who attend a volunteer event. Higher levels

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, Kindle Location 915.

of engagement can branch out of this initial peer influence, leading to a larger role where the Millennial becomes a type of activist for the cause.<sup>74</sup>

Accepting pre-formed teams of missionaries may seem like a challenge to the autonomy of the agency since they will be asked to accept all of the members of the team as one unit. However, the benefit of having a preformed group of friends who already share common objectives and have bonded spiritually and emotionally far outweighs the need for the mission agency to maintain control over the formation of work groups. The potential for fruitful ministry, mutual encouragement and productive sharing of responsibilities among such a team would be enormous. Millennials will also want to network effectively both inside and outside of the agency. This has been their natural approach to accomplish their objectives. Agencies must be open to greater sharing of ideas, experience, philosophy and strategy both within their organization as well as between organizations. A sense of proprietary limitation and agency isolation will be viewed as provincial and lacking in vision by young missionaries. According to Raymo,

A Millennial's ideal mission would be evangelical and demonstrate appreciation for God's work through various churches and other missionary organization. The members and leaders would come from various national, cultural, and ethnic groups and thus represent the fullness of the worldwide church.<sup>75</sup>

Another key component in engaging Millennials is maintaining the latest technology possible. A study commissioned by the world's largest online workplace, notes that "Millennials' advantages over prior generations include the ability to adapt, come up with fresh ideas and keep up to date with emerging technology."<sup>76</sup> This same study revealed that "82% of hiring managers feel that millennials are technologically adept."<sup>77</sup> Agencies should offer Millennials the opportunity to interact with them in ways which are appropriate to their context. That means, for starters, agencies need to have web sites that will draw young seekers' interest. As Tulgan retorts, "If you are not visible and interesting and user-friendly

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<sup>74</sup> Derrick Feldmann, "A Generation for Causes: A Four Year Summary of the Millennial Impact Project." *The Millennial Impact Project* (n.d.): n. pag. Web. 8 Dec. 2014. p. 7.

<sup>75</sup> Raymo, Kindle Location 1700.

<sup>76</sup> "The 2015 Millennial Majority Workforce," Elance ODesk, October 29, 2014, accessed November 16, 2014, <https://www.elance-odesk.com/millennial-majority-workforce>.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

on the Internet, you might as well not exist to Gen Yers.”<sup>78</sup> Serving the technological appetite of Millennials is not limited to a good web site, however. Agencies should strive to make their headquarters as technologically advanced as they can and encourage new missionaries to budget for acquiring advanced technology for use on the field. They must certainly refrain from a begrudging attitude toward high tech tools as being simply diversions or worldly pursuits.<sup>79</sup>

Given the reality that Millennials tend to postpone commitment and delay settling into a permanent career path, they are unlikely to agree to a lifetime of missionary service all at once. Therefore, agencies would do well to offer a variety of short-term and interim options to them. In his book about managing Millennials, Bruce Tulgan reports that few of them will remain in any particular job assignment for more than a few years. Most of them assume that they will gain some experience, learn some skills and move on. What they want is experience which will benefit them immediately.

What really concerns Gen Yers are the short-term opportunities and rewards. If you want to speak to them in a way that separates your job offer from the others right now, you have to talk about right now. You have to talk about what you have to offer them today, tomorrow, next week, this month, the first six months, and the first year. If you want your recruiting message to attract them, then you need a recruiting message that speaks to their real concerns.<sup>80</sup>

Millennials pursuing missionary paths are not different in this basic mentality. They want to see that their evangelistic and humanitarian efforts are productive and meaningful. The Millennial Impact Project found that “the majority of Millennial volunteers and donors seem to enter a cause by first completing smaller actions rather than making a long-term commitment.”<sup>81</sup> So agencies should make available mission field experiences ranging from several weeks to several years which require increasing levels of commitment and integration into the mission organization. It is true that this is not the way most Baby Boomers came into their commitment to missionary activity, but it is unmistakably the path which most Millennials will follow.

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<sup>78</sup> Tulgan, 24.

<sup>79</sup> Rickleen, Kindle Location 1573, reports that respondents to a survey regarding Millennial contentment in the workplace “regularly expressed frustration with having limitations imposed on their ability to use technology to its optimum benefits.”

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>81</sup> Feldmann, p. 6.

After a lifetime of being the object of marketing campaigns, this generation tends to distrust anything that they perceive to be a sales pitch. Presenting an organization as strong in every area and without weaknesses will actually turn away many young people. Barna researcher David Kinnaman reveals,

Millennials live in an era of radical transparency, powered by social and digital tools. Any leader or organization who wants to engage Millennials must learn this—whether from the pulpit or the front of the classroom, whether fundraising or marketing. If Millennials are doing their own research on what happens from the stage, leaders need to take care not to make false promises or exaggerations in their messages. Millennials, who already exhibit institutional distrust, have heightened sensitivity for artificiality and false promotion.<sup>82</sup>

Agencies should not hesitate to express accurately their areas of weakness as well as their strengths. This will be viewed as a sign of integrity by young people. They want to build relationships with real people who have real struggles and real disappointments along with their real victories. Jim Raymo presciently remarks, “An honest transparency about the strengths and weaknesses of an organization and its leadership is more impressive to a Millennial than a blustery veneer of infallibility.”<sup>83</sup>

Similarly, agencies must be cautiously accurate in their depiction of any missionary assignment that a Millennial is considering. It is demoralizing and confusing to a young person to realize that what he or she signed on for is not the reality on the ground. Again, Tulgan captures this generational perspective when commenting on discontent in the workplace. “The most common thing we hear from new young team members is, ‘That’s not what you told me in the interview.’”<sup>84</sup> Anyone involved in missionary activity recognizes that the vicissitudes of field life are such that a completely precise delineation of day-to-day experiences is impossible, but every effort must be made to communicate an objective expectation to the candidate.

The creativity and sense of empowerment that characterizes Millennials translates into an eagerness to approach missions through non-traditional forms. There is a sense of collective intelligence among this generation that can at times be dismissive of methodologies which functioned well in the past.

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<sup>82</sup> Kinnaman, p. 1.

<sup>83</sup> Raymo, Kindle Location 1700.

<sup>84</sup> Tulgan, pp. 19-20.

Nonetheless, their capacity to network and analyze problems will lead them to be innovative in their means of fund-raising, finding new platforms for field access, developing contextualized ministry philosophies and other strategic developments which are yet on the horizon. There is the generation of entrepreneurs,<sup>85</sup> so if they believe that a missionary agency is slow to adjust to a changing environment or unwilling to consider innovative approaches, they will simply leave and start their own organizations. Millennials must be allowed to feel empowered to make a difference.<sup>86</sup> Agencies must communicate a strong vision for the future, along with an eagerness to be current and transformative. They can be proud of their history, but must not expect to recruit new missionaries by focusing on the past.

Due to the elongated educational pursuits of many Millennials, a sizeable percentage of future missionary candidates will be encumbered with debt. Chuck Bomar cites the Project on Student Debt which reports, “37% of public school graduates and 55% of private school graduates start their careers with unimaginable debt.”<sup>87</sup> Historically, many missionary agencies have been reluctant to accept candidates with significant debt owing to the assumption that it would be wrong to ask donors to fund their debt repayment. Today’s environment, however, is such that without the development of programs for making payments on student loans while receiving missionary funding, there will be far fewer qualified candidates for missionary service. Agencies should create debt alleviation strategies which coordinate with fund-raising for short-term missionary endeavors as well as career service.<sup>88</sup> Beyond changes in fund-raising strategies, agencies should increasingly explore alternative models of funding for missionary activity including Business as Mission, corporate sponsorship, and bi-vocational ministry. Each of these options diminishes the need to ask individual donors to contribute to student debt alleviation.

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<sup>85</sup> The Elance-oDesk study previously cited reveals that among hiring managers 72% described Millennials as open to change, 66% described them as creative, and 55% said that they possess an entrepreneurial attitude. Additionally reported is that 79% of Millennials are open to creating their own business in the future.

<sup>86</sup> Tulgan, p. 134 states, “For Gen Yers, power is about control of resources, wielding of status, authority to make decisions, and autonomy to take action.”

<sup>87</sup> Bomar, Kindle Location 537.

<sup>88</sup> For example Cru (formerly Campus Crusade) has long maintained a policy allowing staff members to raise funds to cover their monthly student debt payment up to a preset limit.

Perhaps the most significant distinction between the Millennials and the generations which currently serve in the administration of most evangelical missionary agencies regards their disparate views toward authority. Most Baby Boomers and Generation Xers view authority as something which is earned through loyal service and recognition of leadership capacity. The egalitarianism and perceived sense of entitlement among today's youth make them resistant to authoritarian or hierarchical structures within an organization. They want to be involved in decision making from the first day of their association with a ministry. Bomar puts it this way,

Today, the idea of proving yourself through experience doesn't exist. Actually, it's quite the opposite. Most twentysomethings think they should have more responsibility than given and potentially a higher influence into the overall direction of the company. Because they've thought through some things in theory, they assume they know best – and others should recognize what they have to offer.<sup>89</sup>

While we may agree that this is both naïve and presumptuous, it is the mindset of the next generation. Though agency leaders need not concede all of their authority to new recruits, they must develop new patterns of encouraging interaction and involvement for them so that they feel like part of the team and contributors to something important. Raymo observes, “The younger generation does not hesitate to refuse to cooperate with leaders who appear to have little regard for new worker's ideas.”<sup>90</sup> He further cites unwillingness to consider the young worker's ministry aspirations, second-class treatment and authoritarian leaders as ministry deal breakers with Millennials.<sup>91</sup> This makes it critical to initiate engagement with younger missionaries in ways that fit their expectations rather than demanding that they fit ours. We must view our intersection with emerging adults in the same way that we view our missionary interactions with people in other cultures. Our goal is not ultimately to accommodate them for the sake of their comfort. Our goal is to see them change in order to productively participate in the work of the Gospel. My call is for agencies to posture themselves in a way that optimizes the development of relationships so that they and the new Millennial partners who associate with them can grow strong

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<sup>89</sup> Bomar, Kindle Location 999.

<sup>90</sup> Raymo, Kindle Location 1614.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, Kindle Location 1735.

together and cultivate the skills and perspectives that will produce a new and great generation of missionaries.

## **Conclusion**

Like all generations within any society, the current generation of American youth demonstrates characteristics that are different from those of preceding generations. Like all generations within any society, these differences are cause for concern and uncertainty among established leadership within that society. Questions about continuity, priority and perspective are raised and considered. This paper has focused on the question of the integration of Millennials into existing structures of American evangelical missionary organizations. It has demonstrated that changes will be necessary in order to accommodate youth with viewpoints and relational styles that vary from those of the past. Attempts have been made to demonstrate that many of these variations found among Millennials are positive and highly apropos for missionary activity. What may become America's greatest generation of missionaries is emerging.<sup>92</sup> Those agencies which support, encourage, train and serve missionaries should make every attempt to capitalize on their strengths and collaborate with them to maximize their impact on the world. Adjusting to these changes will be difficult, but it is cultural adjustment which is precisely the expertise of mission organizations. The very nature of missions is to meet people where they are, adapt to their culture and help them become Christ-like in their approach to life. Millennials have much to learn. They must be shepherded into becoming submissive servants of Jesus for the sake of Gospel expansion. The call of this paper is to meet them where they are, value their strengths and make the necessary adjustments to present mission structures in order to gain the most from their potential. I am calling for mission organization leaders to "become all things to all people for the sake of the Gospel" with regard to integrating Millennials into their structures, strategies and procedures.

What is not addressed directly in this paper, yet is a key element in making the transition from the current dominance of Baby Boomer and Generation X personnel to full partnership with Millennials, is

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<sup>92</sup> Rickleen, Kindle Location 469, reports that "Millennials are expected to comprise 75% of the global workforce by 2025."

how to best rally field personnel from older generations to these concepts for the sake of unity and productivity between older and younger missionaries on the field. This issue merits further consideration and investigation.

The story is still being written about how Millennials will change the way we do missions. There are diverse opinions about what the future holds. Today's emerging adults have no lack of weaknesses which give pause to many missional leaders. Their strengths and inherent advantages, however, should ignite an eagerness on the part of missionary organizations to rethink, reshape and recommit themselves for the sake of encouraging and enabling the next generation of missionaries to build upon and even surpass the success of the faithful servants who have come before them.

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