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## It's easy to write-off generation 'snowflake' but Cary Cooper analyses why their concerns may be justified.



By Cary Cooper  
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It's easy to ridicule millennials but while 'snowflake' bashing remains popular it may eventually prove to be a very stupid business move.

If you believe half of what you read online people born between 1980 and 1999 have simultaneously cultivated an **entitlement to perfectly ripe avocados**, while flatly refusing to learn how to spell.



*It reads more like a list of personal grievances than any sort of useful employee suitability test*

But by 2020, **half of the workforce** will be made up of this mocked millennial generation so it seems that any employer willing to alienate such a large number of workers won't last too far beyond 2030. They won't have the staff.



17% of millennials have considered quitting over the anxiety of a strict dress policy

The now infamous **'snowflake test'** – a 30-point pre-screening checklist devised by the CEO of an American marketing agency – suggests some employers are far from ready to meet younger workers even half way.

The quiz went viral for its supposed no-nonsense approach to dealing with 'whiny' workers. Would-be applicants should be quizzed on their attitude to bullying, sick leave, criticism, even coffee choices, the test suggests. But it reads more like a list of personal grievances than any sort of useful employee suitability test.

Implicit in the test is the assumption that organisations are being forced to indulge every millennial whim. There's scant evidence to actually support this though.



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In fact, consultant, PwC noted in its **Millennials at Work study** that this generation genuinely value honest feedback, progression opportunities, flexible working and access to good technology to boost productivity. Hardly the profile of an entitled slacker.

So, in my view, organisations should adapt for millennials, but not pander to them.

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*Yes, firms that completely fail to adapt for millennial preferences will lose out on talent*

Tech giant, Apple - one of the best at attracting talented millennials according to the study - doesn't do it. Their culture is **mature but friendly**. The PwC study found that Apple attracts and retains millennials better than most because they're forward-looking and "naturally innovative".

Yes, firms that completely fail to adapt for millennial preferences will lose out on talent. Younger workers feel no obligation of loyalty to a firm that fails to meet their needs. PwC found that more than half expect to have more than six employers in their life.



Millennials value flexible working and access to good technology to boost productivity

But since older Millennials are now entering the senior managerial ranks, I feel they can and should play a part in ensuring their own organisation doesn't alienate young talent. If they don't, they will just end up moaning about the new intake **like every generation does**.

If the 'snowflake test' was intended to highlight the 'problem with millennials', it missed the mark.

If a recruiter really wanted to discourage so-called snowflakes from applying, perhaps they need ask just one question.

"Do you suffer from any workplace related anxieties?"

### **Anxiety and angst**

It's never useful to characterise an entire demographic by its extremes. When we go after millennials, we're really just attacking new sources of workplace anxiety with which we haven't learned to empathise yet.



*It's only when you attribute these anxieties to 'snowflakes' that they become ripe for ridicule*

If we honestly evaluate the causes behind some of the most widely-criticised millennial concerns, we might discover nothing more than a blend of fairly vanilla professional anxieties plus a few admittedly more unusual social quirks, (most of which are the result of rapid technological and social change.)

It's only when you attribute these anxieties to 'snowflakes' that they become ripe for ridicule.

For example, **answering the phone** can cause anxiety for anyone, but this normal office routine seems to trigger anxiety for a disproportionately high number of millennials.

Why?

Because millennials have mastered other forms of communication technology – often to the advantage of their employer – and simply aren't used to unplanned phone calls. Many associate unexpected phone calls with **receiving bad news**.

Millennial anxiety isn't the only reason fewer business phone calls are made. Task management apps like Trello and Slack have made internal and external communication more intuitive and more secure, reducing the need for regular calls. Why ring someone about a project when you can securely share detailed feedback in

real time?

But for bosses who insist on a call, the solution is still simple. Email ahead to arrange a call and give the other person time to plan. Or better still, talk face to face.



When we go after millennials, we're just attacking new sources of workplace anxiety

### Overcrowding

It's not just custom and culture causing angst. The physical workplace environment has a large impact on millennials anxiety too.

The 18-24 year-old age group are most likely to suffer regular panic attacks, according to a **study of 3,000 UK adults** and 35% of those say they've been triggered by crowded offices.

Another simple solution; rearrange your office to create more space. Or, if that's not possible, consider rotating shift patterns. Some 80% of millennials said they feel less anxious when the **desk next to their own is empty**.

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*Even getting to work can*

**Relaxing dress codes** is another long overdue, yet simple step. Some **17% of millennials** have considered quitting their job over the anxiety of adhering to a strict dress policy. Why take that risk for the sake of upholding outdated style norms?

*be hard for millennials. Public transport is a major cause of anxiety and 60% of workers say they'd prefer a longer commute over one with a lot of changes*

Even getting to work can be hard for millennials. Public transport is **a major cause of anxiety** and **60% of workers** say they'd prefer a longer commute over one with a lot of changes, in order to reduce the overall stress of getting to work.

Crowding is the big driver for commuter-dread. But 41% of UK millennials even have anxiety about **being photographed in public**. Of all the anxiety triggers examined here, this must be the most specific to their

generation. But it's still valid.

There's an obvious temptation to dismiss some of these complaints as symptoms of 'Generation Snowflake' yet again failing to deal with the realities of adult working life, but it's pointless.

In the not too distant future, they'll be the ones shaping workplace culture. And if that means people face fewer sources of anxiety at work and are able to be more productive, that's good for all of us.

Being dismissive simply won't work. It's not kind and it proves nothing. Organisations should strive to address as many of these issues as possible. Chiefly because there's often a simple workaround like rearranging desks.

Even in the absence of a simple fix, such anxieties warrant compassionate attention. In most cases, they're natural responses to an environment that older generations were lucky enough to avoid.

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