

## Hartz & Minds 24: The Mystery of the Millennials

The birthdates of Millennials are fuzzy: experts of all stripes have asserted dates ranging from 1978-1996, to 1980-1995, from 1983-2000 to 1982-2004.

The nomenclature is mind-boggling: Generation Y, Generation We, Generation Next, Global Generation, Generation Flux, Net Generation, Trophy Kids, Echo Boomers, Peter Pan Generation, Boomerang Generation, Digital Natives, and Millennials. There is even a Generation 9/11 theory; those who were between 10 and 20 on September 11, 2001 share a world-view different from those older and younger.

A few facts are clear: there are an estimated 80 million Millennials residing in the US today; they are the first generation to grow up with computers and the Internet; they are the first generation to have a significant number of members of mixed-race or ethnicity; they are (compared to previous generations) socially liberal; they are bifurcated between the highly educated affluent group and the working class group; they were most affected by the Great Recession, and the slow recovery is not reaching them.

At the moment, my software does not even recognize the word Millennials.

The most important thing about this “generation,” is that its members do not want to be defined, in any way. They were raised in a global world of interconnectedness, transparency, and customization; they expect to leave their unique personal mark upon it. **Outsiders view them as either narcissistic or civic-minded; I believe that those are not mutually exclusive.**

Corporate Hartz’s guest teaching at Georgia Tech and Emory, work with businesses (owners and employees), and advising families on philanthropy, has painted an interesting picture of the Millennials. They are not the Servant Leaders (a term coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970), but they are also not the Me Generation of their Baby Boomer parents. Millennials want to help whom they want, when they want, and how they want. For the more privileged among them, this may mean college spring break building infrastructure in Bolivia; for those from less affluent families, this may mean leveraging scholarships to advance their education so they can have a broader or deeper impact in their community.

As we parent/grandparent, hire/work for, sell to/buy from, and volunteer with this generation, we are well advised to approach them as Strauss & Howe do in their book, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. “They will recast the image of youth from downbeat and alienated to upbeat and engaged.” From my experience, these authors and researchers may be spot on; for Millennials, everything is personal. We can benefit from their minds and energy as long as we meet them on their own terms, as individuals, not as a monolith.