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I write about Millennial culture.

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## How To Create A Benefits Plan That Appeals To The Young And Cool

Last week I attended the Human Resource Executive® [Health & Benefits Leadership](#) Conference in Las Vegas, where it seemed like all anyone was talking about – in the sessions, in the bathroom, even at a party at trendy nightclub Pure – was millennials and how they feel about benefits.

I knew the Obama administration cares deeply about what kind of healthcare system millennials want. The Affordable Health Care Act depends on Americans aged 18 to 34 signing up to offset the cost of older enrollees (days before the enrollment period ends the jury is still out about whether enough actually did) so the government is working hard to appeal to them.

I also knew that some of my friends think about their individual benefits. I had a friend who just quit her full-time job to go freelance contact me to discuss benefit options, and I overheard two mid-20 girls comparing, over cocktails at a high-end bar, whether their plans covers that acupuncturist they both hoped to visit...

But I had no idea just how important this issue was to any company who employees young professionals.

Benefits, it turns out, are becoming a more important factor determining where people, including millennials, choose to work. In 2012, for example, only 28% of respondents in MetLife's annual U.S. Employee Benefit Trends Study of 1,200 employees, said that benefits were an important reason they came to work for their current company. In 2013 the number was up to 43%.

Employees who are satisfied with their work benefits are also happier, more productive employees, says the American Psychological Association that studies this trend. "In these positive work environments employees gain increased job satisfaction, improved morale, better physical and mental health and enhanced motivation," they wrote on a press release.

In short, if a company wants court the best millennials (which it should considering millennials now number 80 million, a significant portion of the work force) it should offer the best benefits package.

While in Las Vegas I spoke to Cindi Van Meir, a Product Manager for Benefitfocus, a company that creates benefit-enrollment and education apps

and technology for employers. She shared what millennials want with their benefits and how companies should respond accordingly.

Millennials care about their benefits. Contrary to popular belief – we've all seen the media hype saying young people are turning down health insurance – millennials care deeply about benefits. More than any previous generation they have student loans to pay, family members to support, and beliefs that social [security](#) won't cover their needs in the future (a Pew Research Study found 51% of millennials believe there won't be any money left in Social Security by the time they retire.) Starting to work in the recession, they've also seen colleagues work way past retirement age, something they believe they will also have to do. It's no wonder they take their financial responsibilities seriously and want to know how their employers will help. "A lot of times, the millennials, the first thing they ask prospective employers after their pay is what will their benefits be," says Van Meir. "They want to know about their 401K and what type of accounts their employers offer."

Millennials want to choose what type of coverage they get. In the past employers used to offer fixed plans, packages that included a certain amount of money allocated for medical, dental, disability, and life insurance. But young professionals who grew up with lots of choice, don't want that. They want to say, I never go to the doctor so I only want a little bit of medical insurance, but I need new glasses so I want more vision insurance, and I'm about to go on that skydiving trip, so let's throw life insurance into the mix. Forward-thinking companies are responding with new types of funding models, says Van Meir. "Employers will say, 'you have \$5000 to do whatever you want, and pick what type of coverage you want from this list.'"

Millennials have competing benefit offers; they need to be courted. More and more millennials are choosing to work for themselves – According to a soon-to-be-released study sponsored by Deloitte 70 percent of young professionals across the globe aspire to be their own boss – which means they can often choose between many benefit options. Perhaps they work enough time for an employer and can take that deal? Or they want to sign up for the public exchange or join the freelancers union? "Millennials are very savvy consumers," says Van Meir. "They are not afraid to take their time to compare plans and make the choice that is best for them." Some organizations are responding with text and tweet advertising campaigns that try and get millennials to see why their product is the best.

Millennials want real-time, instant information... Millennials expect to have information quickly, instantly, and constantly coming at them from multiple sources. Gone are the days with employers can simply put up posters in the breakout room and set up sign-up tents during enrollment periods and call it a day, says Van Meir. Companies must use digital means to constantly provide information about benefits and how millennials sign up. One company that has mastered this is Under Armour, an athletic wear company. Their benefits team runs its own twitter feed during enrollment periods to get their populations to pay attention.

...But they also crave face-to-face mentorship. In the past, young professionals signed up for benefits as early as 18 or 21. Now, they can stay on their parents coverage until 27, which means "they might not have had to think about it before," says Van Meir. Therefore, while millennials do want to be educated and receive information about what to do digitally, they "also want one-on-one time with someone to help walk them through the process."

She suggests companies implement mentorship programs where boomers can walk through younger counterparts through the intricacies of benefits.

Insurance Cards will no longer do the trick. Millennials want information about their benefits available whenever and wherever they need them. This isn't so they can check up on their enrollments on a day-to-day basis; rather, it's so that the one day they end up at the doctor's or the hospital they don't have to find this tiny card that arrived in the mail years ago. Van Meir says at minimum employers should create mobile apps so millennials have all their information stored in their phones.

What is good for millennials is good for society. The things millennials crave – flexibility, information, freedom to decide what is best for them – is good for society, says Van Meir. “Consider that over the course of time, a large generation of people will be making the right choices for the right benefits for them. That contributes to the overall reduction of the costs of healthcare.” So yes, it's a lot of work to accommodate this new generation of employers, but the new system should benefit everyone.

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**This article is available online at:**

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/alysonkrueger/2014/03/28/how-to-create-a-benefit-plan-that-appeals-to-the-young-and-cool-create-a-twitter-feed-throw-out-insurance-cards/>