



# THE WELL-TRAVELLED MILLENNIAL AS A HOSPITALITY EMPLOYEE

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HM2-1

Academic Communication Skills 2

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the more international travel of the millennial generation compared to previous generations and determine whether the traits gained directly through these travel experiences aid millennials in their future career paths, taking a specific look at hospitality. It was found that millennials do travel more than their previous generations and also place more emphasis on experiencing other cultures. Research shows these travel behaviors lead to improved interpersonal skills, communication, empathy, decision-making skills, cultural sensitivity, and emotional intelligence. Research shows the majority of successful hospitality professionals are highly proficient in these sectors.

### **Statement of Authorship**

I certify that this assignment is my own work and contains no material which has been submitted as part of an assignment in any institute, college or university. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the assignment.

Signed

Lillian LeBlanc

## **Introduction**

The Pew Research Center defines millennials, or Generation Y, as anyone born between 1981 and 1996. This generation's upbringing, personality, and reputation have become increasingly controversial and criticized as they have grown out of adolescence and begun to penetrate the work force. Research shows millennials are more optimistic and open to uncertainty and unpredictably due to their generally financially-sound upbringing (Pendergast, 2010). In developed countries, their lives have lacked experience with unemployment both in the family growing up and personally (Holondy, 2016). Often referred to as the "now" generation, Gen Y is also characterized by their high internet proficiency, expecting real-time information and immediate gratification after being raised with the Web implemented into nearly every aspect of their lives (Lee, 2013). One of the most prolific gaps between millennials and previous generations is how they travel. The confident, spontaneous, and well-informed members of the Y Generation search for culture and experience-based travel. These well-traveled millennials take lifelong skills away from these experiences that can benefit their future careers, specifically in the hospitality industry.

## **How Do Millennials Travel?**

There are several apparent differences in the way this new generation of adults travel as opposed to the wanderlust priorities of their predecessors, or lack thereof. First of all, they do so more often and with more frugality. The American Association of Retired Persons' 2019 Travel Trends Report showed that American millennials plan about five trips a year and spend an average of \$4,400 USD in total (Leonhardt, 2019). This is compared to Generation X and the Baby Boomers taking two to three holidays annually and spending between \$5,400 to \$6,600 on average (Leonhardt, 2019). Not only is Gen Y spending less on more travel, their money is being

directed toward new preferences. Travel is no longer seen as a glamorous, expensive luxury but instead an obtainable, necessary endeavor for young adults. A young adult on an airplane today would be found in practical sports clothes as opposed to the smart casual dress that was expected of earlier travelers. Transportation and accommodation have grown increasingly less expensive as the market has progressed, and curiosity and spontaneity have peaked as a result of the endless inspiration provided through social media (Thurmond, 2017). A recent survey conducted by Eventbrite found that seventy eight percent of millennial tourists prefer to spend their money on experiences over things (Siji Group, 2019). The results of another study done by TripAdvisor concluded that millennials want to be introduced to places, food, and cultures that are unfamiliar to them when travelling (Thurmond, 2017). They also want these places and experiences to be unique enough to share. Consumer Behaviorists suggest that the New Generation has pioneered what they call the “Happiness Economy.” Countries like Bhutan are even beginning to use Gross National Happiness (GNH) as opposed to GDP to measure their country’s societal and economic status. It is said that in the modern age well-being is the new wealth and social media is how we accumulate it (Solomon, 2018). Forty percent of millennials say that they share their trip online while on it (Adamson, 2016), meaning they are looking for something worth “posting”. Millennials search for these rare and individual moments to share to acquire more status in this Happiness Economy.

The next defining aspect of the way Generation Y travels is their interest in the immersion of local culture. Previous generations preferred comfort when traveling, and hotels used to cater to this need. The hospitality industry was meant to bring the comfort of home anywhere around the world, so no matter how far or different of a place one traveled, they could always return to the sanctity of something familiar. However, the New Generation has

challenged these expectations. Surveys show millennials want unfamiliar cultures, exotic food, and places not known to the general public (Aceron, 2018). They want to be completely immersed in the environment they have traveled to, whether this means they are comfortable or not, because they seek an understanding of these people and cultures as opposed to simply an outside view. Hotels are beginning to cater to these millennial needs. Younger demographic aiming hotels such as Zoku, Citizen M, and Canopy by Hilton are branding their hotels as designed “for the explorer, rather than the tourist” (Siji Group, 2019). Marriott Residence Inns host an event called The Mix to help millennials connect to local culture with dessert samplings, live music, food trucks, and fire pit nights. Hilton Canopys provide young guests welcome gift baskets from a local bakery, access to a fitness center in the community, and local wine and beer tastings (Ganatra, 2018). The rise of peer-sharing accommodation, lead by Airbnb, also reflects these new demands. Young travelers are sacrificing the luxury and comfort of the hotel industry for the convenience and authenticity of a homestay. The globalization of the modern world is drawing people out of geographic security and into the embracement of foreign cultures and lifestyles. The world of Generation Y is enriched with curiosity and diversity.

### **Benefiting Their Careers**

With this great change in travel and lifestyle habits must come a subsequent change in other aspects of millennial lives. While experiencing the world through this new set of eyes, it is no great shock that life skills may be affected and developed. Communication, a vital skill in the workforce, has been proven to be enhanced by international travel. A report in the *Journal of Studies in International Education* claimed that exposure to various cultures results in heightened intercultural communication skills (Williams, 2005), and another study conducted found that forty-two percent of travelers abroad develop stronger interpersonal connections after returning

home (RiceUNews, 2018). This aptitude for interpersonal skills can be a huge foot forward in the business setting. The ability to cooperate and sustain a relationship with your coworkers is critical to a successful professional setting. It is also demonstrated by researchers that international travelers have stronger Self-Concept Clarity (RiceUNews, 2018). Self-Concept Clarity is the extent to which self-beliefs are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and stable. This suggests that individuals who have ventured to new places in the world are steadfast in their beliefs and opinions, which aids in the decision-making process. This depicts yet another asset gained that may be applied to a young person's career.

Another massive proven contribution to the millennial mindset as a result of their culturally rich travel habits is their emotional intelligence, or EQ. Harvard theorist Howard Gardner defines EQ as "the level of your ability to understand other people, what motivates them and how to work cooperatively with them" (Akers, 2018). A study by the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* proved that the aspects of emotional intelligence were stronger in young adults that have traveled abroad than those who have not due to their exposure to experiences outside of their comfort zone (Markman, 2013). Being in a foreign setting around unfamiliar people with a culture an individual is unaccustomed to may force them to take a step back and truly consider the reasons behind actions they may not initially understand. The five categories of emotional intelligence are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill (Akers, 2018). EQ is not only recognizing your own feelings and mastering self-control and commitment but being able to interpret the emotions of others as well as communicate with them due to this true empathy. Emotional intelligence is said to be more important in today's workplace than intellectual intelligence; The Harvard Business Review states that ninety percent of career advancements are credited to EQ when IQ and technical skills are equal between

candidates (Goleman, 2017). These interpersonal abilities are important in any aspect of life, but a heightened EQ can especially assist workplace relationships to thrive.

### **A Look at Hospitality**

One of the fields in which these skills millennials have acquired through their travel can be greatly utilized is hospitality. This personally interactive industry thrives on employees with interpersonal talents and impeccable communication, which, like mentioned before, are strong traits found in well-traveled candidates. Several articles posted in business forums and employment websites, such as LinkedIn, list communication as a key component that hotel employers are looking for in a candidate. Hospitality is all about people, and building lasting relationships with them is vital to a mutually beneficial correspondence.

There also must be an aptitude for cultural sensitivity, which derives from emotional intelligence. When working in a hotel not only are your clients from all over the world, but your coworkers are in some cases even more culturally diverse. When in constant collaboration with individuals from a wide range of different places and backgrounds, it is important to have the ability to recognize, understand, and empathize with cultural differences. One study that supports the idea that international travel increases empathy analyzed two groups of students that had lived a semester abroad, American and Chinese. The results showed that after returning home the American students proved to suspend their surface-level judgements of others without contextual information, as well as making more of an effort to determine the meaning behind people's actions before reacting. The Chinese students found a higher tolerance and trust of strangers, and more appreciation for being introduced to unfamiliar knowledge and skills (Kashdan, 2018). When interacting with a guest or coworker a hospitality employee must think critically and sensitively about the reasoning behind the other's emotions. Contrasting reactions to events may

be due to a variety of cultural or situational differences. An emotionally intelligent individual will take the time to analyze the possible rationalizations of someone's feelings or expectations and act accordingly.

When considering management, an efficient tool of discussion is Minzberg's Ten Managerial Roles. Minzberg's Roles are divided into three categories: Interpersonal, Informational, and Decisional. The Interpersonal roles include Figurehead, Leader, and Liaison. In a Minzberg measurement of US hotel managers considered to be highly effective, Leadership was rated highest of all roles in both importance (86.1%) and allocation of time (71%) (Kang, 1995). As Leadership falls under the category of Interpersonal roles, this indicates that managers who prioritize their emotional relations with their employees are the most successful. It is impossible to provide exemplary service without satisfied service personnel that feels heard and appreciated. The average EQ score for a hospitality management professional is 115, according to a study conducted in the *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism*, as opposed to the general average of 95 and highest possible of 160 (Scott-Halsell, 2008). Not only does this emotional aptitude help managers maintain the most efficient relationship with their guests and employees, it also assists them to stay calm and make quick decisions in the high-pressure situations they may face in the industry.

## **Conclusion**

The fundamental characteristics of the millennial generation have transformed travel into something culturally immersive and meaningful, teaching values that can subsequently be applied to a career in hospitality. The progressive globalization of the modern world has made international exploration and engagement attainable and Generation Y is taking full advantage. Stepping into unfamiliar environments and experiencing alternative ways of thinking and living

is advancing their interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence. These traits may be utilized in any professional setting but are especially critical to an interaction centric industry such as hospitality. The relational aspects of a career in hospitality are arguably the most important skills to have, and internationally travelled individuals are proven to perform exceptionally in this sector. Specifically, this personal relationship dexterity is vital for hospitality management professionals. To provide the level of service required in the industry managers in hotels, restaurants, and other tourism establishments must be emotionally equipped to predict and maintain the satisfaction of guests and employees alike. Therefore, the interpersonal proficiency and emotional competence of well-travelled millennials makes them exceptional candidates for positions in hospitality management and leadership.

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