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Flexibility crucial in attracting millennials

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A typical millennial: Denis Baranov

Five years ago, when Denis Baranov was studying computer science at university in Moscow, he began working part-time for DataArt, a US-based technology consulting company. After graduating, he continued working remotely for the company for two years while travelling.

He is now a full-time employee in DataArt's London office, and is able to persuade his employer to send him to conferences that also help with his PhD studies. This freedom and flexibility is a big attraction of the job, he says.

“I also value being able to collaborate with colleagues based in locations such as New York and Argentina,” says Mr Baranov. “And I like being able to learn something new every day. For example, I am currently adapting our mobile technology for wearable devices.”

At 26, Mr Baranov is a typical “[millennial](#)” — those whose birth dates range from the 1980s to the early 2000s.

Members of this generation expect their jobs to be challenging, creative and dynamic, says Maggie Stilwell, UK and Ireland managing partner for talent at the consultancy EY, which published a global generational survey this year.

Millennials are a confident bunch who want to develop their own skills and passions outside work, says Ms Stilwell. Organisations that are not flexible will lose employees. “Informal” working hours can benefit staff, their teams and their clients, she adds, especially in organisations that work across different time zones.

For example, one EY partner with a six-month-old baby starts work early and takes a break in the afternoon to be with her daughter, before doing more work in the evening. It is important for millennials to see that flexible working is the norm and that senior people are also part of that culture, Ms Stilwell says. “EY partners are meant to demonstrate visibly what flexible working means, so their diaries are open for everyone to see.”

[Vodafone UK](#) is so keen to show its commitment to flexible working that not even the chief executive has a personal office. In addition to appealing to millennials, hot-desking and allowing people to work when and where they want has reduced office space at Vodafone by 30 per cent since 2009, increased productivity by 20 per cent, and led to energy and travel savings.

Tony Bailey, head of business services at Vodafone, says: “Previously, we had 10 people for every eight desks, now we have 10 for every six desks.”

Partners are meant to demonstrate visibly what flexible working means

- Maggie Stilwell, UK and Ireland managing partner for talent at EY

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The company has also introduced instructive computer games to appeal to sales trainees. Questions are displayed on a pinball machine simulation, and players try to hit the right answers as they float across a screen.

“They accumulate points, compare their score with others and check on the leaderboard who is ahead. It’s fun and interactive. We’ve had good feedback from millennials,” Mr Bailey says.

Young people expect to use technology to create content, share ideas and ask questions. Nigel Danson, chief executive of Interact, which provides social internet software, says: “They are not likely to want to do this with email.”

Millennials also enjoy using social media apps such as Messenger, Snapchat and Yammer. This can be a boon for companies, says Dan Rossner, a digital expert at PA Consulting:

“The default position of conservative organisations may be to lock down [social media] in case of one bad comment, rather than encouraging contributions that could enhance their brand.”

He adds that net-savvy millennial employees can also help in deciding how much social media monitoring of corporate websites is necessary.

A [Vodafone study](#) of 1,100 people in small and medium-sized UK business found four-fifths of HR managers thought workplaces with millennials were more productive.

Almost 60 per cent said they had learnt something from younger colleagues, and more than half thought hiring millennials helped companies stay up-to-date with technology. Vodafone’s report found that the average millennial stays in a job for less than three years. In response, firms such as EY try to weave a long-term relationship by keeping in touch with alumni.

“They could become ‘boomerangers’ or go on to lead other organisations as clients or stakeholders,” says Ms Stilwell.

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