Our Millennial on Millennials: Review of Simon Sinek's "The Millennial Question"

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If you have to make a choice between watching the video that this article references or reading my response, please watch the video.

When asked to write an article for this month's newsletter which focuses on my generation, the millennial generation, I had a harder time than usual deciding on a direction for the piece. Admittedly, I know that when speaking about millennials, I can get a bit defensive and passive aggressive because it is no secret that folks love to throw shade *(a bit of millennial lingo for you)* at us when it comes to how we operate in the workplace. When I hear the term 'millennial', I know that what is soon to follow in the majority of conversations is related to the labels that have been so lovingly bestowed upon us such as entitled, lazy, self-interested, tough to manage, unmotivated, non-committal and the list goes on. But what people rarely consider or discuss is the WHY behind what shaped this generation and the circumstances under which we developed… and here comes the passive aggressiveness… the circumstances that were in fact created by previous generations.

With that said, I've chosen to simply share a well-known Gen X thought leader's perspective that I hope sheds light on the why-behind-our-wiring with the intention that this information promotes better understanding for those who lead us, those who shape the cultures to which we belong and those who

feel it's in their best interest to see us succeed. As Brene Brown says, which so emphatically applies here, "People are hard to hate close up. Move in."

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"The Millennial Question" video of Simon Sinek being featured on *Inside IQ Quest with Tom Bilyeu* is a video that was shared with me by someone in my network on LinkedIn after soliciting inspiration for this article (thank you, Sandy!).

From my millennial perspective, Simon thoughtfully and empathetically delves in to why my generation is the way that we are and to sum it up in a southern saying, *we're a product of our raising*. Sinek identifies four key factors that have influenced our generation unlike any other: parenting, technology, impatience and environment. To hit the high points for you with relative outcomes:

- PARENTING strategies that were well intended but ultimately failed. Outcome? A generation with lower self-esteem than previous generations
- TECHNOLOGY that has yielded a generation who is addicted to the chemical dopamine response that social media and technology provide. Outcome? Lack of coping mechanisms related to stress and lack of meaningful connection.
- IMPATIENCE from growing up in a world of instant gratification. Outcome? Inability to experience deep fulfillment or joy from things that take time to foster and grow.
- ENVIRONMENT that values numbers over humans in the corporate world. Outcome? A group that thinks their perceived failure is their own fault when the system is not designed to meet their needs.

While I have read a few other millennial responses to Sinek's message that characterize his takeaways as gross generalizations of our generation, I have to say that from my perspective I think he is on to something.

Regardless of the comprehensiveness of his assessment, the question then becomes what do we do with this information? How do we use it to inform the leaders of this group of people? How do we shape our work environments for them to succeed? What is the best way to inspire, motivate, come alongside and lead this generation into the promised land?

According to Sinek and the synopsis above, it is no secret that there are gaps to be filled in the developmental needs of this group of individuals as human beings, much less workers in a corporate environment. Sinek proposes that like it or not, it is now the corporation's responsibility to meet the developmental needs of this generation by optimizing leadership and the corporate environment to fill these gaps. In his summary he states, "We now have a responsibility to make up the short fall and to help this amazing, idealistic, fantastic generation build their confidence, learn patience, learn social skills, and find a better balance between life and technology because quite frankly, it's the right thing to do."

Whether you agree or disagree with Sinek, I find his charge compelling as it relates so accurately to the **Leadership Character Model** by which all of our work here at TLG is filtered through. Millennials are desperate for leaders with character; leaders who are willing to stop blaming this generation for being the way that they are and humbly lead from a place of empathy and connection. Unleashing the potential of this highly curious, educated, creative, tech-savvy, connected generation is essential to

maximize the effectiveness of any organization. If you are curious about how the leadership character model could be applied to help leaders in your organization better connect with the largest generation in your workforce, that is a conversation worth having and I would love to have it with you.

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