

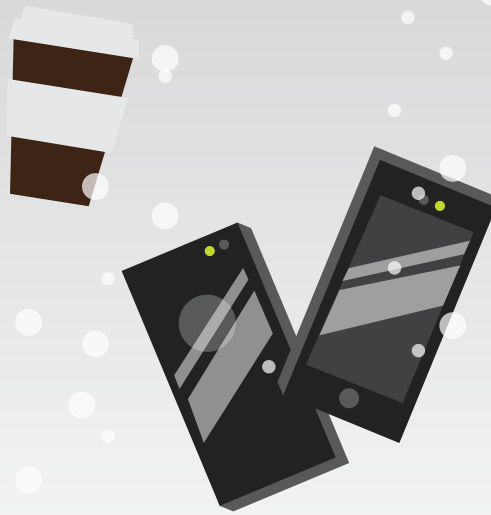


# WHAT WORKERS WANT

TO WIN TODAY'S WAR FOR WORKERS, LOOK AT  
CHANGING YOUR WORKPLACE CULTURE.

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## A TOP PROBLEM FACING RETAILERS OF ALL TYPES THESE DAYS IS FINDING WORKERS. FOR SOME, THE SOLUTION IS TO STOP FIGHTING FOR WORKERS ALTOGETHER AND INSTEAD INVEST IN CHANGES TO THEIR STORES TO SIMPLY ELIMINATE POSITIONS.

Have you been inside your local Walmart recently? Or a Kroger? One Walmart in Richmond, Virginia, recently ripped out five or six checkout lanes to create a new section with 21 self-check registers. It doesn't take a retail expert to know this step reduces the need for cashiers.

There's also a huge sign on the building announcing "Big Changes" coming soon. One logical suspicion is that this store will be one of the 100 locations across the country launching Walmart's "Scan & Go" service, where shoppers use a mobile app and scan barcodes as they load their cart, so once complete, they don't have to even visit a register.

Kroger is rolling out their "Scan, Bag & Go" service in 400 stores in 2018. And

of course, there's Amazon Go in Seattle, with no scanning, bagging, cashiers or registers—nothing.

All of these retailers say they are taking these steps under the guise of creating frictionless shopping experiences. But that's not entirely true. Like we said, they've realized that finding, recruiting or keeping enough, and enough quality workers is too hard.

Some c-store operators may take the same approach and rip up their front ends and go frictionless, but we think there are other steps to take first to solve the worker shortage. To start with, make sure your work culture is aligned with today's modern workforce. It's the least costly way to win the war for workers.

### WHY IS THERE A WORKER PROBLEM?

On one hand, it's not your fault. On the other, it is.

What's not your fault is that you're operating in an economy with 4.1% unemployment, which means the supply of available jobs essentially exceeds demand. Now the bad news: It's going to be that way for the foreseeable future. Consulting firm Bain & Company released a report that projects the average annual growth of the labor force will slow from 0.7% in the 2010s to 0.4% in the 2020s. That means even fewer people from which to recruit new talent.

What is your fault is your company's workplace culture. If your company is not offering what workers want in terms of job tasks, responsibilities, work environment, work culture and benefits, you're part of the problem. You have to get the basics right. It's 2018, and the expectation of potential workers is that your organization operates that way. If not, you're behind. The job and your organization must appeal to today's labor pool.

Modern workers expect to work in an organization with a clearly articulated and meaningful purpose. Your purpose isn't what you do, where you do it or even how you do it. It's *why* you do it. And your why needs to be larger than just to enrich shareholders. It needs to go beyond the organization and somehow serve the greater good.

Modern workers of all ages also expect their workplace to be flexible, with rules that can bend to accommodate their needs. They expect their bosses to collaborate with them, too, involving them in decisions affecting them.

Wait, we know what you're thinking: It's those millennials who did this! Not so fast. Let's examine the root cause—and fault—here.

### OUT-OF-LINE: YOUR WORKERS OR YOUR CULTURE?

First, the backstory. Over the last ten years we've all experienced a new creature entering the modern workforce. Called "millennials," this worker is wired differently from prior generations of workers and has arrived on the scene seemingly only to disrupt it.



**IF YOU'RE NOT OFFERING WHAT WORKERS WANT IN TERMS OF JOB TASKS, RESPONSIBILITIES, WORK ENVIRONMENT, WORK CULTURE AND BENEFITS, YOU'RE PART OF THE PROBLEM.**

Millennials (those from 18- to 35-years-old in 2018) apparently expect the culture at work to be like the outside, modern culture. In most cases, it isn't. That's because work cultures change more slowly and tend to lag modern culture.

## MILLENNIALS EXPECT THE CULTURE AT WORK TO BE LIKE THE OUTSIDE, MODERN CULTURE. IN MOST CASES, IT ISN'T.



How many times over your career have you heard (or used) the expression, “We’ve always done it that way.” Change comes slowly in most existing organizations. New or start-up organizations, on the other hand, are not set in their ways so their work cultures are often more aligned with modern culture. That’s why younger workers are more interested in working for Internet start-ups than Fortune 500 companies.

Yes, millennials showed up with different expectations than prior generations, but that’s not the whole story. Millennials only know what they’ve experienced in the real world, prior to getting a job. So, now, when they show up at a workplace operating like it’s the 1990s, they scratch their heads and wonder what’s wrong. But they are not alone. Workers of all generations today are wondering why work cultures differ from modern culture. It doesn’t take a millennial to realize it’s 2018, not the 1990s. Even Gen Xers and Boomers know.

Here’s an example of how work cultures are lagging: Today, people expect everything and everyone in their life to be open and transparent. The answer to any question is a click or two away and is instantly available. But at work, information is often treated on a “need to know” basis and unless you have a certain job title or function, you don’t need to know. Think about how that’s counter to modern culture. That’s the kind of misalignment that makes some workplaces less appealing not only to millennials, but modern workers of all ages.

That’s why this is an issue. Now let’s talk about what you as a leader should do.

### **WHAT CAN LEADERS DO?**

First, open your eyes to the fact that you don’t need to “fix millennials,” but update your



## CONDUCT AN AUDIT OF YOUR EXISTING CULTURE, ESPECIALLY BEFORE CHANGING ALL THE RULES.

culture to be more aligned with today's modern worker. You're the one out of line. Don't freak out, though. There are easy first steps, like changing some rules, that can go a long way toward updating your culture.

Are workers allowed to have tattoos? More than half of millennials have them and typically hide them from employers. Don't reduce the pool of potential employees with a rule like that. Piercings allowed? Strict dress code? Simple rule changes can impact culture immediately.

Second, look before you leap. Conduct an audit of your existing culture, especially before changing all the rules. Identify where you're misaligned. Maybe your dress code is fine. Before bringing in outside help on this and crowdsource the issues from your workers. They see it. They know. Let them tell you. You're the one in the dark.

Third, organize an internal group, ideally a broad cross-section, to come up with steps you can take to get your work culture more aligned with modern culture. Organize the action plan along a range from "must do" to "wish we could do" items. Start with easy first steps and work your way down the list. Oh, and be sure to tell

everyone in the organization what you're doing—remember, be open and transparent.

In addition, think about how you interact with workers. Is it modern or old fashioned? For example, you should have a mobile-based tool so someone can apply for a job posting. (You are posting jobs online at sites like Indeed and Snagajob, right?) Are your job task training videos mobile-optimized? Do you even have videos? Remember, the generation after millennials only uses a mobile platform and doesn't remember life before YouTube.

Taking some of these small steps will get you on the right path toward having a work culture more in line with modern culture—and it's cheaper than tearing up your store to put in a few automated robot cashiers. That's coming, just not yet. **C**



**John W. Martin** and **Matt Thornhill** of SIR's Institute for Tomorrow share insights on the key demographic trends impacting convenience stores. This article is part of a series of regular articles to appear in *NACS Magazine* on what convenience stores need to do today with employees and customers to win tomorrow.

