The Flourishing Culture Podcast Series
"Six Clear Ways Millennials Can Improve Your Culture "
September 25, 2017

Amy Nagley

Male: Welcome to the Flourishing Culture Podcast, where you'll learn how to build a flourishing workplace culture that drives the ministry impact of your organization, your church, or your company, brought to you by the Best Christian Workplaces Institute. Now here's your host, BCWI president, Al Lopus.

Al Lopus: Hello, and thanks for joining us today. Christian leaders, listen up. There's a critical demographic trend playing out before us right now. It's called the *Millennial* generation. That's 75.4 million Millennials who make up the largest living generation. Why should this matter to your church, organization, or business? Because Millennials are the future of your culture.

Millennials are the tomorrow of your culture, and you need to take notice of them today. The question in front of us on today's podcast is…*How can you leverage and optimize the unique perspective and multiple talents of Millennials to grow the health of your culture and, therefore, deepen the immediate and lasting impact of your organization?*

Our guest is going to answer this question. Today, we have the pleasure of visiting with Dr. Amy Nagley. Amy recently served as a research consultant with the Best Christian Workplaces Institute and has written a white paper on the topic of Millennials in the Christian workplace which we have made available on the show notes page of our blog. What a pleasure it is to welcome a gifted professional, a former colleague and friend, Dr. Amy Nagley. Welcome to our podcast.

Amy Nagley: Hi, Al. Thank you so much for having me. This is wonderful to be back with Best Christian Workplaces and be able to speak to this really important topic and have a fun discussion with you today.

Al: I'm looking forward to it too, Amy. Amy, you know the Millennial generation like the back of your hand, and I can't wait to hear your insights that will benefit our listeners, but let's dive in right now. You're a gifted, talented researcher. What's a key piece of research you've found that spells out these two key things? First…*Who are Millennials?* and second…*Just how engaged and likely to be in the workplace culture are they?*

Amy: So, there's a lot of talk about Millennials. I would say if anyone goes online and you Google, "Millennials," you're going to see all kinds of stuff coming up. *Forbes*, Fortune 500 company articles, *Harvard Business Review*… It's all over the place, but one way I think of Millennials is I think of them as you said. They're one of the largest generational cohorts yet. They actually make up a quarter of all Americans.

The US Chamber of Commerce put forth that people who were born between 1980 and 1999 make up the Millennial generation, and like any generation, Millennials are deeply a product of the experiences they have grown up with. The various societal, cultural, and political events that have occurred since the early 1980s, and maybe even a little bit before that, have had a large part in shaping Millennials.

If you look at a lot of the research that's been done, you'll find there are some themes. I like to make a note that each individual is different and unique, but when you look at the group as a whole and you look for themes that transcend individuals, some things do emerge. One of the things, for example, is that this generation tends to be very technologically advanced. I believe the last statistic I saw said that over 75 percent of Millennials have some kind of a profile on a social media site.

They are highly educated. They're actually the most educated generation to date in society. They have been shown to be more racially diverse as a culture. They're more racially diverse themselves as well as more tolerant of racial diversity in society and in workplaces. They tend to hold in high esteem various types of equality, and they want to really contribute to the greater good in society.

That's the answer to your first question, "Who are Millennials?" Then you asked, "How engaged are they likely to be in the workplace culture?" Well, when a lot of people think about Millennial engagement, the Gallup studies might come up. A lot of people have heard the recent Gallup polls have shown only 29 percent of Millennials are engaged in their jobs.

Today, one thing I'm really excited to do is to break this down and talk a little bit about how engagement is being measured, what that means, if it really tells the whole story, and if not, what might we add to that to make it a little bit more clear what's really happening with this generation.

Al: Amy, as I recall, you worked with over a hundred thousand employee surveys and analyzed that data relative to engagement and a number of things, and from that you've written a white paper .

Many people have heard about the negative stereotypes regarding Millennials and their work ethic. For instance, how they've been entitled or perhaps lazy, but are these stereotypes correct, Amy?

Amy: Well, since I am considered a Millennial myself, even though I tried to argue I wasn't because I owned a typewriter when I was little, I was born after 1980, so I am in that group. Personally and professionally, I would have to say I really don't believe the stereotypes are correct. I think every generation has a unique experience, and I think it's all about the questions we're asking and the angle we're taking when we look at these groups.

Going back to the Gallup engagement survey… I want to start there just briefly. The statistic you will find when you look out at the research that has been done is 29 percent of Millennials are engaged. When most people hear that, probably not everybody, but a lot of people I've heard believe what that means is only 29 percent of Millennials are go-getters, they're going to work, their work is important, they're doing a good job, and they're going above and beyond.

If you actually look at the content of the questions Gallup uses to measure engagement, you'll find something very different. If some of the listeners aren't familiar with the Gallup Q12 that's used to measure Millennial engagement, I'd definitely recommend looking at it. You can find it out there online.

To give you an idea of some of these questions, one of them, for example, says, "Does your supervisor or someone at work care about you as a person?" Another one says, "At work, do your opinions seem to count?" A third one, for example: "Do you have a best friend at work?" Lastly: "In the last year, have you had opportunities to learn and grow?"

If you listen to those questions, the thing that really strikes me is those questions are not asking questions about Millennials' involvement in their work and ability to go above and beyond, to be committed, to be dedicated, and to do a good job. In fact, the onus of some of these topics tends to be on the organization or the environment around the Millennial as opposed to the Millennial. That's the first thing I think is important, debunking the myth some people might have that only 29 percent of Millennials are engaged in the sense that people often think about engagement.

To follow that up, there's been quite a bit of research about, "What do Millennials need in order to drive their work? What are they looking for?" One thing that really has struck me a lot came from the Center for Generational Kinetics and the Barnum Financial Group. They reported in a recent white paper I believe you can also find online that about 60 percent of Millennials said a sense of purpose is extremely important to them when choosing where to work.

They talk about how, when they have a purpose and they know the work they're doing and the time they're putting in is somehow affecting this greater good around them, this greater good of society, something larger than them, they actually are more committed and more engaged.

As I mentioned earlier, the thing I'm excited about is to talk a little bit more about how we can sort of shift the narrative a little to the questions we're asking. Are we spending a lot of our time talking about what's wrong with Millennials or are we asking the questions of, "What are the conditions needed in order to enable this generational group to thrive?"

Al: Well now, Amy, you're talking about the sweet spot for Christian organizations. I know you've studied the research and you've watched Millennials at work. When it comes to Millennial engagement in Christian organizations, you believe there's a different story Christian employers need to know about the Millennials' work ethic. Tell us about that.

Amy: Yeah, I definitely do. I think it is going to be good for all employers to really start thinking about Millennials in a different way. As you mentioned earlier, I analyzed a ton of data with Best Christian Workplaces. I believe the Millennials made up over 13,000 of those data points. When we used a measure that captured the extent to which the Millennials are emotionally connected, a measure that was a little different from the questions asked earlier that the Gallup Q12 has, but instead, the four-item engagement dependent variable Best Christian Workplaces uses…

This measure asks things such as, "I am motivated to put in extra effort beyond what is expected in my job," or, "I would prefer to remain with my organization even if a comparable role at a higher pay were offered." These are questions that get at the commitment of the Millennial. What I found in the research I did with Best Christian Workplaces is whenever you start collecting data on this type of engagement, we found engagement went all the way up from that 29 percent that's reported by Gallup and secular organizations to 45.9 percent in Christian organizations.

One thing I want to make a point to say, even though those two numbers are drastically different, is I do want to make it clear that we can't compare those exactly. We can't compare those directly. Even though both Best Christian Workplaces and Gallup are using an engagement measure, the measures are pretty different.

We can't compare those scores exactly, but the point of this is that we might be reporting a wrong number, an incorrect number, when we talk about Millennial engagement. What I've found with Best Christian Workplaces is when you use a measure where the onus is on the individual and reflects their commitment to the workplace, we're actually finding a number that's closer to 45 to 50 percent of engagement.

Al: Wow. That is a big difference from the 29 percent you mentioned earlier. That's very interesting. Well, Amy, you're familiar with the BCWI's eight factors that drive a healthy-to-flourishing culture. You know, for instance, the factor we call *inspirational leadership*, that is, the ways leaders inspire their organizations to excellence by authentically living out their Christian values, carries the most weight in building a flourishing culture. What does your research show? Does that hold true for Millennials?

Amy: Yes, Al, it does. With those over 13,000 Millennial participants I mentioned earlier whom I analyzed, I found there is a very, very similar pattern between the Millennial generation and the older generations. No matter what age you are, inspirational leadership tends to be the top factor that informs the extent to which a person is engaged in their organization.

Al: That's fantastic. When it comes to measuring employee engagement, the second-most heavily weighted factor is *life-giving work*. How important is life-giving work, then, to Millennials, and what can they bring to the workplace culture?

Amy: Once again, the exact same pattern we saw. When I analyzed the data for Best Christian Workplaces, what we used is what's called a *relative weights analysis*. This allows us to look at various factors that are leading to a certain outcome. The outcome we're discussing right now is engagement, but, as some of the listeners may know if they've listened to some of the earlier podcasts or read some of the white papers that have come out, Best Christian Workplaces looks at drivers of engagement as well.

These drivers are *inspirational leadership*, *life-giving work*, *outstanding talent*, *sustainable strategy*, *healthy communication*, *uplifting growth*, *rewarding compensation*, and *fantastic teams*. On the Best Christian Workplaces survey, each of those factors are measured with a variety of questions. Then, we also measured the dependent variable as engagement, as I mentioned earlier.

What happens with the relative weights analysis is we can actually see which of those factors are most important for engagement. With the Millennials and all other generations, inspirational leadership, as I mentioned, comes out on top, but then also life-giving work, which you just mentioned, always comes out second.

To make it even more interesting… I was really curious. I thought, "Okay, if our big question is, 'Let's find what the conditions are that are needed for Millennials to thrive,' if we know inspirational leadership and life-giving work are the top ones, let's look at the organizations that rate super high on inspirational leadership and life-giving work, and let's see how engaged those Millennials are."

One of the first analyses I ran here was I split the file so I was only analyzing data of Millennials who rated their managers a four or above. The scale goes one through five, so these are managers who received either a four or a five. Then, I wanted to look at Millennial engagement, and oh my goodness,

this was just music to my ears. I see the average engagement for Millennials, which was about 45.8, jumped to 79.4 percent of Millennials are engaged when inspirational leadership is high.

Following that, I wanted to see, "Okay, let's see now what happens when inspirational leadership is high *and* life-giving work is high." This time, we split the data file for the managers who had a four and above for leadership *and* the organizations that had a four and above for life-giving work. Do you have a guess of what the percentage of Millennials who were engaged jumped to, Al?

Al: I have to say 85 percent. How's that?

Amy: It's 92.5 percent.

Al: Wow, nine out of ten when Millennials rated inspirational leadership at a four or above and life-giving work at a four or above. That's 92.5 percent. Amy, that's remarkable.

Amy: That's what I thought.

Al: I trust you're enjoying our podcast. We'll be right back after this brief word about a valuable tool that can pinpoint the true measurable health of your culture.

Male: What if you could get an upper hand on unwanted turnover, relationship conflicts, struggling morale, and unproductive staff, and at the same time increase the effectiveness and impact of your organization? You can with the Best Christian Workplaces Employee Engagement Survey. This popular, proven resource pinpoints the true health of your workplace culture and ways to improve it.

You'll get a detailed breakout summary of the eight essential ways your culture and your organization can flourish, all from a principled, practical, faith-based approach that works. Join the more than 800 satisfied organizations, churches, and Christian-owned businesses who have said, "Yes." Sign up online today at bcwinstitute.org. The Best Christian Workplaces Employee Engagement Survey. It's your first important step on the road to a flourishing culture.

Al: All right. Now let's hear more from today's guest.

We found a little bit of a secret here, and that is when leaders are inspirational, when they are demonstrating authentically high character, when they have great integrity and trust, when things are running operationally effectively, and when Millennials are feeling like the mission and goals of the organization makes them feel like their work is important, which is one of our life-giving questions, we see a doubling from the average engaged employee in a Christian workplace. That's more than triple of the 29 percent engaged you mentioned that shows up in the Gallup workplace.

We're seeing a huge difference between the average in the workplace out there for all organizations, and in Christian organizations, we're seeing Millennials are really finding themselves very engaged in the kind of work we see in Christian workplaces. Wow.

Amy: Yeah. You know, what this really made me think about as I was doing all of these analyses and I was writing this white paper, I thought about some stories I have heard from my grandparents and my parents about, in their days, how difficult things were. I remember my grandpa worked for the power company when he was growing up, and he talked about working 16-hour days 6 days a week, sometimes 7 days a week, and the difficult time he had being able to be with his family, his own health, and all of those things.

I think about the people who got out and spoke up about workers' rights back then, and I think about the emergence of unions, for example, the emergence of human resources departments, or all these things that took place over time that helped make these working conditions better for folks. Now, when I think about Millennials and I think about when people say they feel entitled and they want all these things, sometimes I wonder, "What if this is just the next iteration of making workplaces healthier?"

It's almost like we're moving up Maslow's hierarchy of needs in the workplace. Now that we have reasonable work schedules, breaks, lunches, paid time off, and health insurance, what if this next iteration of workplace culture change is to desire to have leaders who treat them with love, compassion, and empathy?

It's not just about return on investment. It is in part, of course, but it's also about looking at the workplace as an opportunity to make people's lives better who are actually doing the work. You know a lot of managers are already doing this. Al, I would have to argue you do this from my experience when I was working for you.

A lot of managers are already talking to employees about their strengths and about the opportunities they're seeking to help them live out their passions more fully, their calling, their purpose, or the jobs they can do that will lead them into this place of flow and engagement. I honestly think that's what a lot of Millennials are really striving for. I just wonder… I'm curious, in about 100 or 200 years, how might people look back at the Millennials and see that their voices changed the workplace for good for the future generations?

Al: Yeah, that's very interesting. We've talked about how, as we've watched the science of staff engagement move from *staff satisfaction* to *morale* to *engagement*, the next thing probably is measuring the health or the well-being of employees in the workplace, so that's very interesting.

Amy, you've concluded that when we shift the conversation away from the negative assumptions of Millennials into the appreciative space to better understand what unlocks Millennials' potential, we

arrive at six best practices for facilitating Millennial engagement in the workplace culture. Tell us about these six best practices or six practical opportunities our listeners can put into practice right now in working with their Millennials.

Amy: Of course. I love that you used the term *unlocking potential in Millennials*. That's exactly the narrative I think we need to start using. With that, as we mentioned, inspirational leadership and life-giving work are the top two factors, and they share quite a bit of variance. They're almost correlated, I believe, at about 78 percent with each other, so as you can probably guess, these best practices I'm about to mention are going to be strongly related to those two factors.

The first one is *leadership character*. We recommend organizations become intentional about recruiting, hiring, promoting, and rewarding certain types of leaders. This can happen through rigorous selection systems where the hiring managers take time to identify the types of people they're looking for who are going to set up the conditions of the workplace so this next generation can thrive.

We want to look for people who are compassionate, humble, and honest, who want to facilitate peace in the workplace while also facilitating productivity. These are people who are loving, they seek joy, they're honest, they're full of integrity, etcetera. These are leaders who have the type of character people want to work for. There's been a ton of research about how their relationship with their manager is extremely important to them. They want to have frequent interactions with their manager. They want to be given feedback. They want to have this person to show them they care.

On a similar note as the selection system, *leadership competence* is the extent to which an organization is being intentional about recruiting, hiring, promoting, and rewarding leaders who exhibit some specific competencies. These are people who have clear and elaborate plans for how they are going to manage. These aren't individuals who are sort of throwing out rules for the sake of rules.

Instead, they're seeking the feedback of the people who are working for them. They are making decisions that are not only going to lead to productivity but are actually going to lead to people working well together. Communication is a huge piece of this. Leaders who are able to communicate important information to staff in a very clear and inspiring way are who we're really looking for here, who Millennials are seeking.

The third one is the extent to which organizations are *seeking to understand staff gifts*. This is a shift away from, "Staff are here to produce and to be productive." It's a shift away from just that to also including the extent to which there are conversations about staff strengths and gifts. There are conversations that occur in regular one-to-one staff meetings and conversations where appreciative inquiry-type questions are asked.

For example, if I'm meeting with a Millennial, a question I might ask at the very beginning is, "What's been the highlight of your week? What were you doing when you felt the most energized, the most passionate, or the most productive?" See where those conversations go. As they progress, be creative in providing work assignments that bring out the gifts in these individuals.

I think what a lot of people are finding and where research is pointing is when that potential is unlocked and these conversations start happening, a lot of managers start thinking, "Oh. I didn't even realize this person even had an interest in that. Let me create this work assignment." Then they find it starts to enrich the culture, and you move outside of the norm of these specific things you've always done to now something new where there's innovation and creativity. Before I go on, do you have any questions, Al?

Al: Well, I just think it's worthwhile to summarize those first three points, Amy. I can see where you were talking about how inspirational leadership and life-giving work are themes that come through this, because *leadership character* is the first best practice, followed by *leadership competence*, and then followed by *seeking to understand staff gifts*.

Again, in a Christian context, we're not only looking at staff gifts in terms of skills but also spiritual gifts and how many times in a departmental setting or a discussion that spiritual gifts also come up. Understanding what those are and how they relate to the work can be an important discussion. Those are the first three. What's next?

Amy: The next one is *providing role clarity and autonomy*. This is the extent to which the leader or whoever is in this position is prioritizing the act of setting clear and meaningful goals regularly, but then they are also allowing the individual to determine the way in which they want to go about doing that work.

The idea is everyone is unique. People work differently, and we have seen most people are productive when leaders are clear about setting the goals but then they allowed the Millennial… It doesn't even have to be a Millennial. We actually found this across all generations. They provide them with the autonomy in how they go about meeting the actual end goal.

The fifth one is *communicate the mission and outcomes*. We talked earlier about how Millennials especially are really interested in knowing why they're doing what they're doing, so when leaders and organizations are very clear about the impact of their work, they're regularly communicating information regarding the mission and the outcomes of the organization. People are so much more engaged, and they start to be passionate about these steps they're taking that might not seem directly related to that greater good at the time, but now that it's been communicated to them they're able to make that link a little bit more clearly.

We recommend quarterly conversations that include success stories and specific ways one's work is impacting the bigger picture of the organization and even society at large. There's research showing when organizations bring in speakers from the community or people they have affected with their work to thank the department for their work, this increases productivity tremendously, and it's extremely meaningful to the staff.

The last one here… This is a good one. *Create a culture of fun!* Obviously, when we're at work, we're doing work and we are being productive because our work is actually affecting society for the good, but with that, leaders who model humor and fun to staff start spreading this certain type of… I don't even really know what to call it, but it starts to make up a culture.

You start seeing the staff start emulating them, and when people laugh and have fun and there's a time for those personal interactions, people actually broaden their neurological pathways, they tend to be more creative and more innovative, they get into a flow more easily, and they're more productive.

This could happen formally in the form of parties or outings that happen to celebrate various wins in the organization, or it can just be when you're passing somebody in the hall, you make some kind of a comment, and it's obvious you're not always taking yourself so seriously. This tends to be something Millennials really appreciate.

Al: That's so good. Let me summarize here. For the sake of our leaders who are listening and thinking about their own workplace and how they can make their workplace more effective for Millennials, fourthly, you mentioned *role clarity* and *setting clear goals*. We found also that having good performance review processes or progress reviews on a quarterly basis is another way of making sure there's role clarity and having conversation about their jobs.

Fifth was: *communicate the mission and outcomes of the mission*. Amy, I really like your suggestions about quarterly conversations. Of course, we've seen in Christian organizations when people who they're serving give testimonies about the life-transformational work they experience because of the organization. That really does have impact on the employees.

This last one… Listen up, Christian leaders, because a lot of you are always pushing back on me and our team as we're debriefing this issue about fun and having humor in the workplace. Amy, I just love the way you said what fun does (listen up now, leaders) is it broadens the neurological pathways of your employees. Don't you want to do that? That's all about growth, isn't it, Amy? It's about innovation and facing tomorrow and the changes that tomorrow will bring.

Amy: Absolutely. If the listeners are interested in doing more reading on that concept, Barbara Fredrickson has written a lot on the theory called *broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions*. I'm sure if you Google it or go onto some platform you can find some of her work and learn more about that.

Al: Well, Amy, thanks for these six best practices. That's fantastic. I want to thank you for being with us today. I've certainly enjoyed what we've learned. That's for sure. These six points for Millennials… It's really important to focus on the level of character of your leaders and the level of their competence, understanding the unique gifts and skills of your staff, to have clear role clarity, to communicate what the outcomes are of the mission you have as an organization on at least a quarterly basis, and, yes, to broaden the neurological pathways of your employees by having fun with humor. I also believe that spreads cohesion. These are six great points, Amy. Thank you.

Amy: You're welcome. Thank you.

Al: Amy, you know the importance of the Millennial generation and what they can bring to the workplace culture in Christian organizations, churches, and Christian-owned businesses. As we wrap up our time, what one thought would you most like to leave with our listeners?

Amy: Thank you for asking. I appreciate that. Well, I believe at the heart of every person is a purpose or this desire to have meaning in their life and to contribute to some greater good in their local community and also in society and in the world. When it comes to Millennials, I really imagine a world of work where managers are asking these appreciative questions we've been asking today in order to really understand what does unlock the potential of Millennials and what helps them to be at their best.

We're moving into a time where, as you said in the beginning, these individuals are the leaders of our future, and I really believe they have a wonderful intention and they have tremendous strengths and gifts that are just waiting to be unlocked.

The recommendation I would give both from my personal and professional opinion is for leaders to shift the conversation away from the things that are wrong with Millennials and onto those questions that are going to ask, "What conditions are important to them?" and, "How can we start setting up our cultures in order for these future leaders to thrive?" When we start finding the answers to some of these and the cultures start to shift, I really think we're going to start seeing something special.

Al: As you've pointed out, Amy, they could very easily and very quickly become your most engaged workers in your workplace. That's great. Dr. Amy Nagley, a Millennial herself who knows why Millennial engagement is so critical for today's Christian organizations, thank you for sharing your wisdom, insights, and stories with our leaders who have been listening and benefiting from all you've given us today.

Amy: You are so welcome, Al. Thank you so much for having me. It's been really fun.

Al: Thanks for your contributions, Amy. To our listeners, thank you for investing this time in your workplace culture today. This is Al Lopus, reminding you that a healthy culture drives greater impact and growth for your organization. I'll see you again soon on the Flourishing Culture Podcast.

Male: For a free transcript of today's podcast, visit blog.bcwinstitute.org. Join us next week for another one-to-one interview with a respected Christian leader. The Flourishing Culture Podcast with Al Lopus is a presentation of the Best Christian Workplaces Institute, helping Christian organizations set the standard as the best, most effective places to work in the world.