



# Millennials: The Next Great Crisis Managers?

17 Jan 2019



Millennials are no strangers to crisis. They grew up in the shadow of 9/11 and school shootings and entered the workforce as the economy greatly recessed. So, why does it seem so hard to capture their attention when it comes to corporate emergency, crisis, and continuity programs?#

Getting millennials to engage or lead in their companies' resilience programs can seem challenging, but it is not impossible. In fact, millennials may end up dramatically improving corporate resilience over the next five to ten years as they continue to move up in the leadership ranks. Instead of lamenting their apparent indifference, we should all think deeply about why they seem not to care.#

## **Times New Roman#**

Millennials have spent their whole lives sifting through too much information to parse out what might be important. They tune out quickly if information seems to be irrelevant. So, this is a challenge in an industry that tends to drone on incessantly before it gets to the point. Hurricane plans that spend the first three pages defining a hurricane or a business continuity plan that spends the first ten pages explaining all of situations that the plan does NOT cover. For a millennial (or ironically a CEO), these plans may as well be written in Times New Roman font

by their grandparents. Millennials want concise, action-oriented plans and training that tells them what to do. Get to the point and make it pretty. But, aren't they right? Shouldn't we all want that?#

### **Connect, Contribute, Collaborate#**

Millennials value sincere stories from real people. They tend to tune out information that has too much jargon or blatant cheerleading. To effectively engage millennials in emergency, crisis, and continuity programs, companies must do so in a genuine way that helps millennials feel connected to both the challenges and the solutions. Millennials want to know why the programs are needed and how they work. They want to know how their engagement will make a difference. But again, shouldn't we all?#

Telling genuine stories of how programs have been successfully executed is a helpful way to show why corporate resilience is essential and effective. For example, the personal story by a site leader of how a Corporate Crisis Management Program actively supported employees and business in the aftermath of a hurricane is monumentally more powerful than any PowerPoint presentation. Personal accounts can be in various formats, but the more personal, the better. Video, concise case studies, and infographics can all be effective ways to communicate a real-life story.#

It is key to fully connect millennials with challenges and then engage them in order to contribute to the solutions. In my experience, millennials are incredibly adept at working together to solve complex problems. Several technology companies we have worked with have built extensive task systems that support this hive mind mentality of working together. This is an area in which millennials have us Gen Xers and Baby Boomers beat; so, use this strength to move the program forward. Challenge millennials to use their experience and perspective to improve often static, dull program documentation and training. Their expertise at engaging each other using various forms of social media are useful, too. Utilize these channels to share stories and make corporate resilience interesting and relevant.#

### **Speak to the Right Audience, and Put it On My Phone#**

Another common mis-step in emergency, crisis, and continuity programs is that information is not adequately customized for the audience. For millennials especially, it must be clear that the information they are receiving (or being asked to provide) is tailored specifically to their needs. For example, receiving a broad business impact analysis questionnaire that asks for information with no context is likely going to be ignored. However, if the questionnaire is appropriate to the audience and context is provided, they will more than likely engage. Put simply, they need to know why they are being asked to do it. Meaning, what purpose does it serve?#

Finally, if millennials can't access information on their phones, it may as well not exist at all. For better or for worse, this is a reality regardless of your generation. However, organizations often fall short when investing the time and effort required to readily access the information. There are a myriad of tools to help make emergency, crisis, and continuity information accessible by phone. Tools alone don't solve these problems, but they can certainly be helpful. This is another opportunity in which a knowledgeable millennial is likely the best choice to develop and define user experience for the app to make information accessible by phone.#

Different generations grow up in varying contexts, leading to major distinctions in how they receive and interpret information. For instance, Generation X is more versed at adapting to flawed systems, while millennials tend to thrive at creating new ones. So, let's give them the ability to create. Rather, let's challenge them to create. In my experience working in corporate

crisis management for nearly two decades, their expectations are akin to CEO's and other C-Suite leaders. They want accurate, actionable information that is directed at the right audience and delivered in a slick package. But, don't we all?#

*By Grace Burley, Managing Director of Corporate Resilience, Witt O'Brien's#*

*Grace has nearly two decades of experience in the crisis management industry. Throughout her career, Grace has served as a consultant to assist dozens of Fortune 500 companies develop and implement comprehensive crisis management and business continuity programs. #*