Millennials and employers in line on workplace values

BY JAIME MYSLIK

HARRISTON – Despite the "kids these days" mentality some employers use to describe millennials, a recent survey shows workplace values are often shared by owners and these young workers.

Tom Lusis, talent attraction lead for Wellington County's economic development department, recently made a presentation at LaunchIt Minto in Harriston to reveal the results of a survey conducted to better understand intergenerational issues in the workplace.

Lusis explained young people aged 18 to 26 are the biggest cohort right now in the labour market, but many employers are writing millennials off because they've either had a bad experience or do not understand that generation.

Survey officials talked to both sides of the labour market to try to identify areas of disconnect.

The survey was funded through an Ontario 150 grant as well as project partners including Wellington Waterloo Community Futures, the University of Guelph and Conestoga College.

The survey targeted employers and millennials and asked questions about the importance of: work-life balance, training and skills development, mentorship programs, reverse mentorship, collaboration in the workplace, competitive salary rates, flexible work options, technology in the workplace, generational training and rapid time frames for promotion and growth.

The survey was completed by about 235 millennials, the majority aged 21 to 24, and 63 employers throughout Wellington County and Guelph.

While the intention was to target students at both the University of Guelph and Conestoga College, the college faculty went on strike right before the survey was to be released, so the majority of millennial surveys were completed by University of Guelph students, Lusis explained.

Those who completed the survey were asked to rank each of the questions from one to 10, with one being the least important and 10 being the most important in terms of workplace values.

Employers identified training and skills development, collaboration in the workplace and work-life balance as most important, while generational training, rapid timeframes for promotion and growth, and reverse mentorship were considered least important.

Millennials identified training and skills development, collaboration and work-life balance as most important, and generational training, timeframes for promotion and growth and mentorship programs as least important.

"These trends surprised me, because based on the conversations I've had with employers, I was expecting a lot more differences," Lusis said.

"I was thinking we were going to see total differences.

"But if you look at things, the average difference between all the values is under two ... that's quite close."

The two groups even mimic each other and sometimes overlap perfectly.

"Which again is kind of unexpected to us, at least based on the mindset that we went into doing this particular survey," Lusis said.

In addition to asking the 10 common questions, the survey also asked context questions.

Employers were asked to identify the biggest challenges and benefits of working with millennials. For challenges employers identified poor work ethic, unrealistic expectations in terms of salary and moving up the corporate ladder, and the lack of company loyalty.

"This came up in several ...ways or shapes and the easiest way to describe it is the idea that millennials see our jobs as a stepping stone," Lusis said.

> "I'm not saying that this cohort is not different than previous cohorts ... but ... I don't think there's as huge a difference as many people are positioning them to be."
>
> - TOM LUSIS ON MILLENNIAL WORKERS



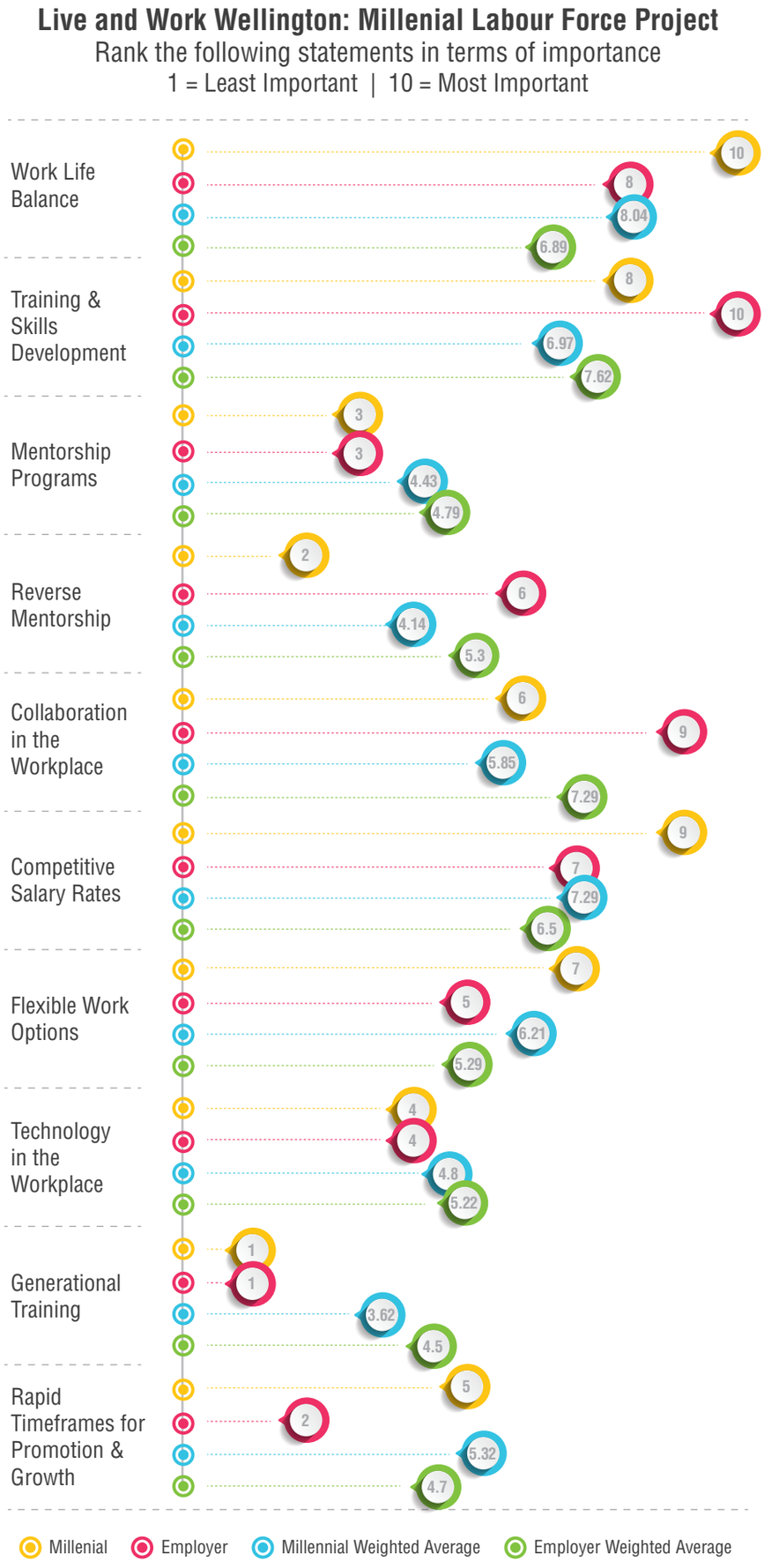
TOM LUSIS

County survey included

235
millenials

63
employers





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As for the benefits of working with millennials, employers stated the biggest was the idea that the young workers are tech savvy.

"What was interesting to me was this wasn't just social media, although social media was mentioned," Lusis said. "It was also when it came to computer stuff.

"When it comes to taking notes, again anything digital they're just better at it and it's a real benefit."

Employers also said a benefit was millennials' enthusiasm, energy and "positive vibe," as well as a new approach to doing things.

"This was interesting because it ranged from marketing strategies to how do you take what's on the menu and give it a new spin," Lusis said.

"And also the idea that they're not intimidated by doing something differently.

"They're not intimidated by changing things."

The idea is to use survey results as a starting point for discussion when the economic development department is approached by employers who say they are having difficulties working with millennials.

"I'm not saying that this cohort is not different than previous cohorts - there's enough information to suggest that they are - but what I think I'm saying is that I don't think there's as huge a difference as many people are positioning them to be." Lusis said.

"And I think that's an important ... distinction."

Employers can complete the survey and receive a graph that shows their answers in comparison to the average Wellington County business and to millennials.

Lusis says the economic development department will be able to look at the results and make suggestions for where the employer can make changes to work better with millennials as well as for what values they need to promote to attract millennials.

"From my perspective if you're ranking above millennials in these areas, you want to really showcase that in any job ad where there's any kind of marketing materials you put out," Lusis said.

In the future, he said, the survey may be used as a template to look at individual project structures and as a baseline to enhance programs and activities for project partners.

He also said the county may look at the cohort that does not have a university or college education.

"The reality is that here and now our labour force growth is coming from this cohort and in the future I really believe that what we see and some of the tendencies we see with this group we're going to see with the next cohort as well," Lusis said.

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