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The Misunderstood Millennial

The Bottom Line

Contrary to widespread perceptions of their generation, Millennials are demonstrating more insular, self-protective and scrappy attitudes than previously assumed. As Millennials' core values evolve with the tumultuous times, it's imperative for the marketers courting this generation to alter their outreach plans accordingly.

At the Root

A belief that "the system" is letting them down

61% agree, "Do unto others before they do unto you is becoming a more practical golden rule" (compared to 51% of Xers and 44% of Boomers).

Rising cynicism about "making a difference"

38% of Millennials agree, "In terms of making a real difference in the world, it doesn't matter which companies I choose to do business with," up from 29% in 2009

Personal success is *the* priority

58% agree "To get ahead in this world, you sometimes have to compromise your principles" (vs. 45% of Xers and 43% of Boomers)

Telling the Story

Since first arriving on the scene, Millennials have been widely perceived as an idealistic and civic-oriented group that cares more about the greater good than did the generations that preceded them. "Their life mission will not be to tear down old institutions that don't work, but build up new ones that do," predicted William Strauss and Neil Howe in their 2000 book, "[Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation](#)." In more recent times, Evan Selinger and Thomas Seager of Future Tense advanced this "do-good" narrative, arguing that the Millennial-led Occupy Wall Street movement represents [a shift in ethical behavior](#) toward collective action for the common good.

A closer view of the current attitudes and values of this evolving generation, however, invites a different conclusion from the conventional wisdom. Faced with an

A Narrowing Perspective

Today **55%** 2008 **67%**



"We should do what is good for the planet even if it harms the US economy" (down from 67% in 2008)

epidemic of uncertainty and volatility—as well as [record student debt](#) and [unemployment](#)—far more Millennials are turning inward and even showing a gritty, scrappy side at odds with the pervasive stereotypes of them. In fact, confronted with a system that isn't working for them, they're focusing more on their *personal ambitions* than the needs of the wider community. It's an attitude evident in the two-thirds (66%) of Millennials that agrees with the statement, "These days, people always have to be thinking of ways to beat the system in order to make things work out the way they want them to" (vs. 48% of Xers and 44% of Boomers).

Does this shift in attitudes mean that Millennials will shun all civic-oriented appeals? Of course not. But it does suggest that that Millennials' individualistic side has not been given adequate attention by generation-watchers and marketers.



For more insights about the evolving Millennial mindset in the US, read [Millennials in Crisis](#), our Futures Perspective on the ways this generation will define success in the years ahead.

Taking Action for Growth

Evaluate your assumptions

Take a close look at the ways you define the Millennial generation and reconsider your assumptions about them. Have these views adequately evolved with the times?

Pay heed to Millennials' "My World" concerns

While Millennials have often been characterized as community-focused, watch for their energies to become more focused on their own personal gain ("My World") over the greater good ("The World") in this challenging environment.

Help deliver a feeling of "beating the system"

For many Millennials, the deck feels stacked against them. Consider strategies that give Millennials a feeling that they can succeed and make progress in a challenging environment.

Do you think we're seeing a new, scrappy Millennial? Share thoughts on our [Facebook page](#) or contact your MONITOR consultant to continue the conversation.

The New Millennial Mindset

MONITOR Minute

Millennials are more willing to bend the rules to benefit their priorities and ambitions

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At least sometimes forgivable if a person ...	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers	Matures
Views or downloads pirated content online (such as movies, television shows, music or sports)	70%	52%	34%	22%
Pretends they didn't receive information sent to them in an email	65%	56%	46%	41%
Buys clothing intending to return it after wearing it once	48%	26%	13%	7%
Claims to have a better educational background than they really have in order to get a job	44%	33%	24%	18%
Changes a price tag on something in a store to get a discount	33%	19%	9%	6%



The World

67% 2008 **55%** 2011

"We should do what is good for the planet even if it harms the US economy"

Our World

42% 2009 **36%** 2011

"Importance in your personal life today*: making a difference in your local community"

My World

57% 2008 **61%** 2011

"Do unto others before they do unto you is becoming a more practical golden rule"

Source: 2011 Yankelovich MONITOR
*6-7 on a 7-pt. scale where "7" is "extremely important"