



Millennials are looking for purpose as well as profit in the workplace



Campbell Macpherson, author of The Power to Change

By HELEN TRINCA
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MILLENNIALS PUSH FOR BUSINESS PURPOSE

Profit and philanthropy no longer enough for a generation seeking meaning. Story by **Helen Trinca**

Companies are reassessing their purpose as they emerge from the pandemic, according to change specialist Campbell Macpherson.

He says that along with the disruption of the pandemic, pressure from younger workers is forcing employers to articulate what they stand for.

"Just before COVID, actually, one of my clients, from a recruitment company, called me up and said, we need a purpose," Macpherson says.

"He said, 'my 35-and-under employees are saying, making a profit, filling vacancies, making money for partners is just not enough and even though we have a philanthropic arm, they are saying, we need to come into work to do something special for clients'.

"And I said to him, it's not just 35-and-under employees, your 35-and-under clients need you to do this or they will go elsewhere."

Macpherson is an executive coach and has recently published a book, *The Power to Change*, which addresses the barriers we often have to adopting changes in work practices and processes.

He says the pandemic encouraged companies to think deeply about their models: "Every company is looking for recurring revenues and financial sustainability."

He says the pandemic and lockdown showed us we can change if we have a strong emotional reason to do so. However anxiety levels have "gone through the roof" because of the fear of the unknown. Leaders are realising

that if they don't help staff with the emotional elements of change, they will not have a productive workforce, he says.

"(The changes in 2020) are not something that happen once and then we go back to the way we were," says Macpherson. "We are waiting to go back to the way things were but the change curve is part of life. That's the next challenge."

He says fear of failure, negative thoughts and investment in one's sense of identity were all barriers to change: "We have 50,000 to 80,000 thoughts a day and 80 per cent are negative. Our status or identity in the workplace can be a barrier to change."

Younger people are often better at change because, for exam-

ple, their identities are not so wrapped up in their work.

"They are quite resilient, but in a different way from the way my generation thought of resilience.

"They have come into the world of work understanding that employer and employee loyalty is a myth. We came to that realisation too but we still wanted to believe it was real. Millennials come in and think, this is a transaction, this is my work, I am paid and I get career breaks but I will have many jobs during my career. It's just a different attitude to work. Some employees think this is arrogance. There is an attitude to work that is built on a sense of self-worth that some employers don't think is justified and some do.

"I really admire them. They



look to the bigger picture."

One example, he says, is the millennials' attitude to the environment: "They just get it and they don't get it that we don't get it.

"My parents' generation might talk about political correctness and 'woke' but (the millennials) look at them and say, 'what do you mean, it's about respecting people, what don't you understand?'"

Macpherson says that while fear of change is a problem for companies, it is also an oppor-

tunity for leaders to change focus and build a culture that recognises emotional engagement is crucial to our ability to change.

"Logic is only one-fifth of the journey," he says. "Emotion trumps logic every time. I was introduced to change as a discipline when I went to work at Andersen Consulting and I really learnt how not to manage change. They were brilliant on the methodology and the system but there was zero on the emotional ability to change. It was all about logic and I was watching change not happen."

He says leaders need to understand that it is good and positive for employees to get their fears out on the table so they can be dealt with. "We have all seen computer systems that don't succeed and one reason is that they (companies) don't think of people as people, they just think of them as users," Macpherson says.

The Power to Change, by Campbell Macpherson (Kogan Page)

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