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### The Millennial Job Market: Maintaining Confidence in the Face of Rejection

Eliza Boles

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2018

# The Millennial Job Market: Maintaining Confidence in the Face of Rejection

Eliza Boles



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# Millennial Leadership in Libraries

*Edited by*

**Ashley Krenelka Chase**

*Associate Director, Dolly and Homer Hand Law Library,  
Coordinator for Legal Practice Technology & Adjunct  
Professor of Law, Stetson University College of Law*

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public libraries to ensure their future in our communities and supporting organizations that encourage literacy and storytelling.

*Sarah E. Fancher* is the Director of the Sam and June Hamra Family Library at Ozarks Technical Community College in Springfield, Missouri. Sarah received her B.B.A. in Economics from Loyola University Chicago, and after working for several years in the commodity futures industry, she received her M.S. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is a frequent reviewer for Choice and co-author of the forthcoming "Pay Attention to the Data Behind the Curtain: Leveraging LibGuides Analytics for Maximum Impact" which will be published in the LITA guide Innovative LibGuides Applications: Real World Examples (Fall 2016). Her research interests include library leadership, library marketing, business information literacy and distance librarianship.

*Jaleh Fazelian* is the Head of Research, Learning, and Information Services at the Grasselli Library and Breen Learning Center at John Carroll University. In addition to her responsibilities as Head of Research, Learning, and Information, Jaleh is the Past President of the Middle Eastern Librarians Association. Jaleh is a 2016 graduate of the ALA Leadership Institute. Jaleh's scholarly interests include how librarians use social media for professional development and networking and how middle managers navigate peer relationships. Jaleh received her B.S. in Historical Studies, her M.A. in Historical Studies from the Southern University Illinois at Edwardsville, and her MLS from Indiana University.

*Eliza Fink* serves as the Digital Resources and Services librarian at the University of Tennessee. Her primary responsibility there is to support the college's research and teaching endeavors by managing and promoting the Law Library's electronic resources and participating in the planning and teaching of legal research courses. She also teaches Advanced Legal Research. Eliza received her J.D. from the University of Tennessee in 2010, and her M.L.I.S. from Wayne State University in 2014. She is a member of the Tennessee Bar. Eliza's scholarly pursuits focus primarily on the use of educational technologies to explore trends in learning and formative assessment.

*Ellen Frentzen* is the Associate Director for Administration and Access Services at the Fineman & Pappas Law Libraries at Boston University School of Law. She received her J.D. and a concurrent LL.M. in International and Comparative Law from Cornell Law School, and her MLIS with a special certificate in law librarianship from the University of Washington iSchool. She is a graduate of the 2014 Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians, and has attended the American Association of Law Libraries' Leadership Academy, Management Institute, and Business Skills Clinic, in addition to pursuing many other professional development opportunities. Her scholarly interests include library administration and management, including professional and career development for junior staff, library

# The Millennial Job Market: Maintaining Confidence in the Face of Rejection

Eliza Fink

*Digital Resources and Services Librarian  
University of Tennessee College of Law Library*

## Introduction

During the last ten years, many of my friends have attempted to distance themselves from their “Millennial” status. Born in the early 1980s and thus on the cusp of a new generation, they feel less inclined to join the often-underestimated cohort of their slightly younger peers in favor of the more respected Generation X.<sup>1</sup> Millennial Americans face accusations of being self-entitled, aimless, and technology-obsessed. I have been told that Millennials lack the work ethic and determination of previous generations. However, from my perspective, Millennials have simply not been given a chance to show we are as motivated as our elders because the timing of the 2007–2009 financial crisis had a great impact on our lives, both financially and psychologically.

Where many people see Millennials as a group of directionless young workers taking their time to leave their parent’s nest, I see people with strong desires to put their best work into every aspect of their lives. Millennials like myself want to be more efficient at work because we have technology in our corner. We want to leverage that efficiency with more flexible work schedules, allowing us to be more involved in the lives of our families and friends. We want to learn about the world we are exposed to through social media, whether that happens with travel, reading, photography, or any of the other hobbies that Millennials share with one another in the new world where *everything* is shared. My argument to my Millennial-denier friends is this: there is nothing wrong with wanting to have it all, even in an economic climate that often makes that seem impossible.

To put this struggle into context, in 2008, when Lehman Brothers bank collapsed and, with it, came the international financial crisis, the first wave of Millennials were in their mid-20s. Had they chosen the path of post-secondary education, they would probably be finishing graduate school and entering the workforce. Then, suddenly, that workforce shrank faster than anyone could have

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<sup>1</sup> *Most Millennials Resist the “Millennial” Label: Generations in a Mirror: How They See Themselves*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (Sept. 3, 2015), <http://www.people-press.org/2015/09/03/most-Millennials-resist-the-Millennial-label/>. A 2015 Pew Research Center study found that only 40% of “Millennials” actually identify with the term. 33% of people surveyed ages 18–34 erroneously considered themselves to be part of Gen X.

imagined.<sup>2</sup> What was promised to those graduates from every admissions counselor since they began high school was no longer there. Millennials who entered the job market in 2009 faced a nearly 18% unemployment rate.<sup>3</sup> Long-term unemployment also began to rise at startling rates.<sup>4</sup> For reasons I will discuss, Millennials are in need of consistent feedback to stay positive about their work performance and, unfortunately, long-term unemployment is not a situation known for consistent feedback. Those Millennials lucky enough to find work immediately out of school faced major obstacles such as budget cuts and reduction of staff. And while most Millennials were told that things would improve as soon as the Baby Boomers began to retire, I'm hoping no one held their breathe for that; Baby Boomers are retiring at much smaller rates than anticipated.<sup>5</sup>

To add a bit of humanity to a story focusing, so far, on money and numbers, I will share my own story of the financial crisis and the impact it has had on my life. In 2008 I was 23 years old, starting my second year of law school at the University of Tennessee. A career as a librarian wasn't on my radar. The Class of 2009 was preparing to graduate and, although they had largely seemed like a fun group of people, the atmosphere in the school was changing. Slowly during that year, more and more of my senior classmates reported difficulty getting job interviews, both for summer clerkships and for post-graduation attorney positions. That spring, I lucked into a student position at the reference desk of the Joel A. Katz Law Library (a position that would ultimately change my life). Those days, however, I was much more focused on another life-changing bit of kismet law school had thrown my way: my then-boyfriend, now-husband. We were planning a future together and realizing we would compete for the same limited jobs. During our final days of law school, with unemployment looming, we pushed our financial futures out of our heads with optimistic platitudes like "good things come to those who wait" and "hard work always pays off." The next year was a hard time for us as we applied for every job we came across and got rejected for most without so much as an interview. Eventually, we hung our own shingle and practiced law together, but we were both so frightened of making mistakes that we were miserably tense.

We assumed that once we both had experience working as attorneys, we would magically become marketable enough to overcome the fact that hiring was still down. Instead, we continued to deal with chronic underemployment. My husband was finally working for a law firm (with a real office!), but it seemed they never had

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<sup>2</sup> *The Origins of the Financial Crisis: Crash Course*, THE ECONOMIST (Sept. 7, 2013), <http://www.economist.com/news/schoolsbrief/21584534-effects-financial-crisis-are-still-being-felt-five-years-article>

<sup>3</sup> Lauren Stiller Rikleen, *YOU RAISED US—NOW WORK WITH US* (ABA Publishing, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Karen Kosanovich and Eleni Theodossiou Sherman, *Trends in Long-term Unemployment*, U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS (March 2015), <http://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2015/long-term-unemployment/pdf/long-term-unemployment.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> *How the Great Recession Hhas Changed Life in America: Section V*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (June 30, 2010), <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/06/30/how-the-great-recession-has-changed-life-in-america/>. Among adults ages 50 to 61, 60% say they may have to delay retirement because of the recession.

enough work and he was paid on a contingent basis, which turned out to be no better than working for ourselves. As I made the long-overdue decision to attend library school, I would be lying if I said that reimbursement checks from graduate-level student loans weren't a factor in my decision.

But don't fret, dear readers, as we have now come through the storm to the rainbow on the other side. It took nearly six years, but we are both gainfully employed with two wonderful daughters who will never remember the dark days of hoping against hope that there was enough credit left on our cards to pay for groceries. One thing they will remember, hopefully, is the day, nine and a half years from now, when the balance of my student loan debt is forgiven after ten years of public service and regular payments.<sup>6</sup> Because coming through a storm is one thing, but it's something else entirely when you have to fill the pot-of-gold yourself.

After all that time job- and soul-searching, I am astounded by the negative attitude that Millennials face from older workers, and even from their own peers. Stereotypes that Millennials have to overcome at work include being "entitled" "easily sidetracked by technology" and "job-hoppers."<sup>7</sup> The Pew Research Center reports that 59% of Millennials would describe their *own* generation as "self-absorbed."<sup>8</sup> In my opinion, these perceptions are just an overreaction to Millennials' desire for instant gratification, which has been cultivated by an ability to obtain, use, and discard information and entertainment instantly. Millennials have had to work hard to keep up with rapidly changing technology, social constructs, and expectations in the workplace, both in what we expect from our overwhelmed employers and what they expect from us in doing jobs with much longer descriptions to compensate for our missing coworkers. We are dealing with an unstable future where not everyone with a college degree can find work and where student loan debt statistics are staggering. We were also children in the prosperous 1990s and, because of that, many of us have no experience witnessing our parents and mentors endlessly search for jobs or struggle to pay bills. It may have been naivety, but I expected my life to take the same path I witnessed in my own family—people work for a long time and then they retire (hear that Baby-Boomers? They *retire*). I did not expect it would take me so long to get off the ground.

Given that the first five years of my professional life were spent experiencing more rejections than successes, it's understandable that my confidence is shaken. I am truly enjoying my work as an academic law librarian, and I have found some wonderful mentors to support me. The problem is that, sometimes, when I am given a new project or have a new idea for a project, the same voice of doubt creeps into

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<sup>6</sup> If you work full-time for a "qualifying employer," the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program forgives the remaining balance on your Direct Loans after 120 months of payments. For more information, look here: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service>.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Bortz, Millennials, These are the 5 Stereotypes You're up Against at Work, MONSTER.COM, <http://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/how-Millennials-can-debunk-stereotypes-at-work> (last visited Aug. 15, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Most Millennials, *supra* note 1.

my head that was there with every rejection letter my husband and I read over tearfully. How do I and the rest of my professionally-delayed cohorts banish insecurities and become confident enough in ourselves and our work to be leaders in our fields? I can't say I know the answer, but I have some suggestions to help both Millennials and their Boomer and Generation X supervisors overcome the problems I suspect they're facing.

## The Changing Landscape of the Labor Market

Periods of recession are nothing new in United States history. The National Bureau of Economic Research reports there have been ten recessions in the U.S. since 1948.<sup>9</sup> However, none of those periods have been as far-reaching or as long-lasting as the Recession of 2008.<sup>10</sup> In order to truly understand what Millennials lost (both in perception and reality), it is important to look at the numbers of the 2008 Financial Crisis and its current recovery.

In the 30 months preceding December 2007, unemployment rates had held steady around 5.0%. Brief increases in 1991–93 and 2002–03 notwithstanding, unemployment rates had been between 4% and 6% since 1987. From 2008 to 2009, unemployment rose from 5.8% to 9.3%, with the economy losing more than five million jobs.<sup>11</sup> And, while that is a startling figure, economists believe that the long-term unemployment rate in the United States might have made an even bigger impact on American lives.<sup>12</sup> The long-term unemployment rate reached an all-time high in 2010, with over 6.7 million workers (or around 45% of the unemployed population) having looked for work for over six months. Statistically speaking, the longer a person is unemployed, the more difficulty they have finding work.<sup>13</sup>

The number of job openings in the United States decreased 44% from 2007 to 2009, falling by 2.7 million in just two years.<sup>14</sup> The rise of unemployment in the 2007–2009 recession also happened more rapidly than other recessions in the last 50 years, giving Americans entering the workforce less time to prepare for the harsh job market ahead and, as a result, the percent of the workforce that was “under-

<sup>9</sup> *US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions*, NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH (June 16, 2016), <http://www.nber.org/cycles/>.

<sup>10</sup> Kosanovich and Sherman, *supra* note 4. The Pew Research Center describes the 2007–2009 Great Recession as “the worst Recession since the Great Depression” for two reasons: the “surge in long-term unemployment” and the “meltdown in household wealth.”

<sup>11</sup> *The Recession of 2007–2009*, BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS (Feb. 2012), [http://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2012/recession/pdf/recession\\_bls\\_spotlight.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2012/recession/pdf/recession_bls_spotlight.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> *How the Great Recession* *supra* note 5.

<sup>13</sup> Kosanovich and Sherman, *supra* note 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Recession of 2007–2009*, *supra* note 11. People are classified as “unemployed” by the Bureau of Labor Statistics if they do not have a job, have actively looked for work in the prior 4 weeks, and are currently available to work. The “long-term unemployment” rate is determined by the number of people who have been unemployed for 27 weeks or longer.



utilized” or “underemployed” rose above 20% in 2009 and stayed there for more than four years.<sup>15</sup>

Even more telling for the impact of the recession on Millennials was that jobs for “young adults” fell to 82% for men and 73% for women.<sup>16</sup> The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) defines “young people” as those individuals turning 25 and 26 years old at the start of the recession and 28 and 29 years old at its end.<sup>17</sup> This is interesting because it aligns with my view of a down-and-out early-1980s subset of Millennials.<sup>18</sup> This group spent the vast majority of their lives enjoying a prosperous time in American history. Most are too young to remember the recession of the early 1980s, and the brief periods of economic stagnation in 1990 and 2001 pale when compared to their more severe counterparts.<sup>19</sup> When this group of Millennials chose their career paths in the early 2000s, the job prospects of graduates differed greatly from what they would be just five years later.

Looking at specific subsections of the workforce can further illustrate why Millennial librarians have struggled to get their footing. The BLS reports that from 2007–2016 the number of jobs for librarians in the United States fell from 380,000 to 295,000. In terms of current career outlook, librarians can expect 2% growth in employment in the next eight years, due in large part to budget constraints in local government and educational institutions. The average growth rate for all occupations is 7%.<sup>20</sup>

To make analyzing future job prospects more difficult, the age of retirement in America is becoming harder to estimate for several reasons. The first is that 55% of Americans suffered some sort of loss because of the financial crisis, whether it was a period of unemployment, loss of pension or investments, or plummeting home values.<sup>21</sup> Americans’ confidence that they would have enough money to live comfortably through retirement hit record lows between 2009 and 2013. And while that confidence index has begun to steadily rise, only 21% of 2016 workers were confi-

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<sup>15</sup> Leif Jensen and Tim Slack, *The Great Recession and America’s Underemployment Crisis*, SCHOLAR STRATEGY NETWORK (March 2014), <http://www.scholarsstrategynetwork.org/brief/great-recession-and-americas-underemployment-crisis>. Jensen and Slack contend that unemployment statistics fail to capture the true picture of America’s labor market hardships because they do not include underemployed workers, or workers that are not employed full time, only because they cannot find full-time work.

<sup>16</sup> *Recession of 2007–2009*, *supra* note 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> Anna Garvey, *The Oregon Trail Generation: Life Before and After Mainstream Tech*, SOCIAL MEDIA WEEK (Apr. 21, 2015), <https://socialmediaweek.org/blog/2015/04/oregon-trail-generation/>. This subset of Millennials often tries to distance themselves from their counterparts due to a negative connotation with their name. They prefer to be called the “Oregon Trail Generation” in reference to a computer game that introduced many of them to technology.

<sup>19</sup> US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions, *supra* note 9.

<sup>20</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2016–17 Edition, Librarians*, U.S. Dept. of Labor (Dec. 17, 2015), <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/education-training-and-library/librarians.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> *How the Great Recession Has Changed Life in America*, *supra* note 5.

dent that they would have enough money to live comfortably in their retirement.<sup>22</sup> Nearly half of the Baby Boomer generation say they don't expect to retire until they are 66 or older, and when asked about their projected retirement dates, 10% of workers believe they will never retire.<sup>23</sup>

Another reason Americans are retiring later seems to be the generational characteristics of those people currently entering retirement age. As the Baby Boomers enter their 50s and 60s, their reputation for being hard-working and competitive is proving itself in their unwillingness to leave their jobs in someone else's hands.<sup>24</sup> Boomers think of themselves as being forever youthful, with the typical Boomer believing that old age doesn't begin until 72. Sixty-one percent of Boomers also say they feel younger than their actual age, with the average Boomer reporting they feel nine years younger than they should.<sup>25</sup> Because of the Boomer's reluctance to leave their positions, even those Millennials lucky enough to find work quickly often face stagnation in jobs they once believed would lead to opportunities for advancement. And, contrary to what younger generations might like to believe, workforce productivity has *not* suffered in the wake of an aging workforce, so engaged Boomers are unlikely to be encouraged to leave work any time soon.<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately, unemployment and an overcrowded workplace are not the only problems plaguing newly-working Millennials and, in particular, those with advanced degrees. To keep up with the staggering rise in the cost of education, students have borrowed four times more money in student loans than they did in 1989, and the average borrower has spent 3–4% of their monthly income on student loan payments since 1992.<sup>27</sup> Balances on outstanding student loans are now higher than those on credit cards and auto loans, and more than 70% of students carry student loan debt after graduation.<sup>28</sup> This debt can have serious implications on the lives of its borrowers. A study published in the Rutgers School of Planning and Policy Journal concluded that 40% of students have put off major purchases because

<sup>22</sup> *2016 Retirement Confidence Survey*, EMPLOYEE BENEFIT RESEARCH INSTITUTE (March 2016), [https://www.ebri.org/files/RCS\\_16.FS-1\\_Conf.pdf](https://www.ebri.org/files/RCS_16.FS-1_Conf.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Jim Harter and Sangeeta Agrawal, *Many Baby Boomers Reluctant to Retire*, GALLUP (Jan. 2014), <http://www.gallup.com/poll/166952/baby-boomers-reluctant-retire.aspx?version=print>

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at 1.

<sup>25</sup> D'Vera Cohn and Paul Taylor, *Baby Boomers Approach 65—Glumly*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (Dec. 20, 2010), <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/12/20/baby-boomers-approach-65-glumly/>.

<sup>26</sup> Gary Burtless, *The Impact of Population Aging and Delayed Retirement on Workforce Productivity*, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTE AND THE CENTER FOR RETIREMENT RESEARCH AT BOSTON COLLEGE (May 2013), <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2013/05/impacting-aging-population-workforce-productivity>. Burtless reports that while the pay premium for older workers is between 10 and 20%, those workers are, on average, 60–74% more productive than young workers, making them well worth the added costs.

<sup>27</sup> Beth Akers and Matthew Chingos, *Is a Student Loan Crisis on the Horizon?* BROWN CENTER ON EDUCATION POLICY AT BROOKINGS (June 2014), <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2014/06/24%20student%20loan%20crisis%20akers%20chingos/is%20a%20student%20loan%20crisis%20on%20the%20horizon.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Doug Rendelman and Scott Weingart, *Collection of Student Loans: A Critical Examination*, 20 WASH. & LEE J. CIV. RTS. & SOC. JUST. 215 (2013).

of their student loan debt, and more than 25% of students have moved in with family to save money.<sup>29</sup> Many borrowers have taken multiple menial jobs to make payments on their loans, and many are still struggling to do so. Of all of the major types of debt in America, student loans have the highest rate of delinquent payments, 11.5%.<sup>30</sup>

The Federal government has introduced Student Loan Debt Forgiveness programs to curb the damage done by high loan balances. Several of these plans are available, including the Income Contingent Repayment Plan, the Income-Based Repayment Plan and the Pay-As-You-Earn plan. With these plans, borrowers can pay 10–15% of their disposable income if they provide yearly certification of a partial financial hardship. If the lessened payments are made on time, Federal Direct loans can be discharged after 20–25 years of standard repayment. However, this discharge will count as taxable gross income and will require the borrower to pay a steep fee to the IRS in the year of the forgiveness.<sup>31</sup> This process can also be complex and confusing. In their article on the collection of student loan debt, distinguished law professors Doug Rendleman and Scott Weingart explain student loans in depth. The article covers different types of student loans, repayment plans, and how to avoid default and bankruptcy.<sup>32</sup> The article also runs 83 pages, a length at which a generation of mostly visual micro-learners would likely balk.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, loan servicers are so overwhelmed with customer service calls that wait times for speaking with representatives can reach an hour or longer.<sup>34</sup>

The net result of a stagnate job market and a mountain of student loan debt to pay off is that Millennials have built much less wealth than their parents did in their youth.<sup>35</sup> The average wealth of those in Generation X and Generation Y in 2010 was 7% below that of Baby Boomers in 1983, when that group was in their 20s and 30s.<sup>36</sup> Although younger generations out-earning their predecessors is a long-standing trend in the United States, the accumulation of wealth has become so

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<sup>29</sup> Charley Stone, Carl Van Horn & Cliff Zukin, *Chasing the American Dream: Recent College Graduates and the Great Recession*, RUTGERS SCHOOL OF PLANNING & PUB. POL'Y at 13 (May 2012), [http://media.philly.com/documents/20120510\\_Chasing\\_AmericanDream.pdf](http://media.philly.com/documents/20120510_Chasing_AmericanDream.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> Rendelman and Weingart, *supra* note 28.

<sup>31</sup> *Income-Driven Plans*, FEDERAL STUDENT AID: AN OFFICE OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/understand/plans/income-driven> (last visited June 15, 2016).

<sup>32</sup> Rendelman and Weingart, *supra* note 28.

<sup>33</sup> Lenny DeFranco, *Why Millennials Love Micro-learning*, GROVO BLOG, <http://blog.grovo.com/millennials-love-microlearning/> (last visited June 15, 2016). Microlearning is a teaching technique created in response to the short attention-span of the modern learner. It involves delivering content to learners in short, specific bursts. This shortening of materials can lead to a 20% increase in information retention.

<sup>34</sup> At least, they can take that long in my own personal experience.

<sup>35</sup> *Lost Generations? Wealth Building Among Young Americans*, URBAN INSTITUTE (March 2013), <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/412766-Lost-Generations-Wealth-Building-among-Young-Americans.PDF>

<sup>36</sup> *Id.* at 1.

stagnate that Generation X'ers born from 1970–1978 have no more wealth accumulated than the prior cohort.<sup>37</sup>

All of this “doom & gloom” is not to say that the economic prospects of America’s “young people” aren’t improving; it is just happening slowly. Since 2013, unemployment has fallen a percent or more each year.<sup>38</sup> The latest jobs report indicates that nearly 750,000 jobs were added to the economy in the first five months of 2016 alone. Millennials, as a whole, are feeling optimistic about the future, with 85% of individuals from the ages of 18–29 believing their financial situation will improve.<sup>39</sup>

Because Millennials remain confident even in the face of some of the worst economic statistics in the country’s history, is it possible that I am imagining the Post-Traumatic-Rejection Disorder I struggle with? Am I, perhaps, just too sensitive? And, if other Millennials *are* feeling the same way I am, are there any possible explanations for our collective inability to deal with the stress of a difficult financial situation? The answer to all of these questions is “possibly,” and the best way to find out for sure is to examine the origins of Millennial confidence and how it affects their performance in the workplace.

### Confidence in the Workplace

In the 2011 book, *A Very Short, Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book about Studying Leadership*, authors Brad Jackson and Ken Parry identify five qualities usually found in people who are leaders. Confidence is the first of those qualities.<sup>40</sup> Jackson and Parry opine that confidence is what creates the essential sense of self-worth needed to “put oneself forward in order to lead and to sustain oneself in a leadership role.”<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately for unemployed job-searchers, many of whom are Millennials, research has also shown that much of the psychological empowerment that accompanies a desire to lead is derived from experience.<sup>42</sup> But, even more worrying for Millennials is the fact that the lack of opportunity to build experience and confidence isn’t likely to change after they enter the workforce, as

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> *The Recession of 2007–2009*, *supra* note 11.

<sup>39</sup> How the Great Recession has Changed Life in America, *supra* note 5.

<sup>40</sup> Brad Jackson and Ken Parry, *A VERY SHORT, FAIRLY INTERESTING AND REASONABLY CHEAP BOOK ABOUT STUDYING LEADERSHIP* 18 (Sage Publications, 2011). The other four qualities found in natural leaders are integrity, connection, resilience and aspiration.

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> Stephanie Solansky, *Education and Experience Impact Leadership Development Psychological Empowerment*, 35 *LEADERSHIP & ORG. DEV. J.* 637 (2014). Study showing that leadership experience was significantly, positively related to the psychological empowerment of leadership development.

employers are spending significantly less money training employees than they were pre-Recession.<sup>43</sup>

Self-confidence isn't just important for those in leadership roles, as studies have shown a direct link between low self-confidence and lower earnings and social status.<sup>44</sup> Millennials are known for their unwavering confidence, but research suggests that may be an incorrect generalization. In fact, 24% of all young adults say that the global recession has affected their long-term career goals.<sup>45</sup> If Millennials were truly overconfident, wouldn't they feel justified in saying that the recession was only a temporary setback in their ultimate success, not a permanent game-changer? Millennials also have trouble deciding on a profession, which doesn't necessarily indicate a self-assuredness that would allow them to march into any career and take the reins.<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps the jarring juxtaposition between a truly overconfident generation and one that suffers from failure-to-launch is simply a problem of semantics. The level of someone's self-confidence measures how confidently they usually feel and act, not how they view the likelihood of their actual success at a particular task. For that measurement, it's far more appropriate to assess a person's self-efficacy, or their "belief in [their] capability to complete a certain task."<sup>47</sup> Self-efficacy is a strong indicator of the amount of effort a person will put into reaching a goal and their likelihood of successfully coping with demands and challenges.<sup>48</sup> Low self-efficacy can lead people who are faced with difficult tasks or even constructive criticism to feel depressed and, ultimately, to give up on the goal at hand. Self-efficacy can be damaged by the consistent performance of unchallenging tasks, receiving praise for mediocrity, and being offered unsolicited help.<sup>49</sup>

Many scholars have recognized that Millennials are often lacking self-efficacy and have posited several reasons for this deficiency; the most common explanation is the self-esteem boosting tactics used by parents and teachers of young Millennials, including grade inflation and lightened responsibilities for students.<sup>50</sup> In

<sup>43</sup> Rikleen, *supra* note 3, at 76 (quoting the 2011 Accenture "Skills Gap Study" determining that while a majority of workers in the U.S. felt pressure to develop new skills in their current jobs, less than a quarter of those workers had actually acquired skills through company-provided training).

<sup>44</sup> Christy M. Glass, Steven A. Haas and Eric N. Reither, *Heavy in School, Burdened for Life*, N.Y. TIMES (June 2, 2011), [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/03/opinion/03glass.html?\\_r=2&scp=1&sq=christy%20glass&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/03/opinion/03glass.html?_r=2&scp=1&sq=christy%20glass&st=cse). Study tracking more than 10,000 people who graduated from Wisconsin High Schools found that overweight women who reported low self-confidence were significantly less likely to be professionally successful.

<sup>45</sup> How the Great Recession has Changed Life in America, *supra* note 5.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Taylor, THE NEXT AMERICA: BOOMERS, MILLENNIALS AND THE LOOMING GENERATIONAL SHOWDOWN (Public Affairs, 2016).

<sup>47</sup> P.A. Heslin and U.C. Klehe, *Self-efficacy*, in ENCYCLOPEDIA OF INDUSTRIAL/ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY Volume 2, at 705 (S.G. Rogelberg ed., SAGE Publications, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> *Id.* at 706.

<sup>49</sup> Jason S. Palmer, "The Millennials are Coming!" *Improving Self-Efficacy in Law Students through Universal Design in Learning*, 63 CLEV. ST. L. REV. 675 (2015) (quoting Heslin and Klehe, *supra* note 47).

<sup>50</sup> *Id.* at 676.

1968, only 18% of United States college freshmen stated that they had received an "A" average in high school. In 2004, that number had jumped to 48%. Today's teenagers are also employed at much lower rates, adding to their increased free-time and lack of responsibilities.<sup>51</sup> This jump has also correlated with declining student workloads across all education levels. A 2006 study of American University students found that only a third of freshman studied for six or more hours a week, compared to nearly half of freshman students in 1968.<sup>52</sup>

Something else likely affecting Millennial's self-efficacy is the fact that they are living at home with their family in record numbers. For the first time since such numbers were recorded, living with a parent is the most common living situation for 18-to-34 year-olds.<sup>53</sup> While that statistic may be due, in part, to the drop in Americans finding a long-term romantic partner before the age of 35, it can also be attributed to the close relationship Millennials have with their parents.<sup>54</sup> And while having a close relationship with your children can be a wonderful thing, parents of Millennials often toe the line between parental involvement and "over-parenting." In a 2012 study on the correlations of over-parenting in college students, researchers Jill C. Bradley and Julie B. Olson-Buchanan identified a sharp contrast between two modern parenting styles. Over-parenting, or "helicopter parenting," often leads to students with low self-efficacy, maladaptive job search skills and job behaviors.<sup>55</sup> Conversely, parental involvement that does not reach the level of over-parenting leads to wholly positive college experiences, including stronger social skills and more frequent graduate school intentions.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, there is no hard-and-fast rule for accomplishing "involvement" and leaving the "helicopter" behind, but Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan caution against intervening in decisions made by your children's professors and employers, for a start.<sup>57</sup> The issue of over-parenting is so pervasive that Universities themselves have begun to create "Family Engagement" offices to help guide both students and their parents into independence from one another.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Tanaz Ahmed, *Pew Study: Teen Employment Rates are Falling*, USA TODAY (June 29, 2015), <http://college.usatoday.com/2015/06/29/teen-employment-falling/>. A Pew Center Reports that employment among 16–19 year olds hit at all time low at 30% in 2010 and 2011. In 2014, that number was approximately 44%, compared to 58% of teens in 1978.

<sup>52</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *GENERATION ME: WHY TODAY'S YOUNG AMERICANS ARE MORE CONFIDENT, ASSERTIVE, ENTITLED—AND MORE MISERABLE THAN EVER BEFORE* 56 (Atria, 2006).

<sup>53</sup> Richard Fry, *For First Time in Modern Era, Living with Parents Edges Out Other Living Arrangements for 18- to 34-Year-Olds*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (May 24, 2016), <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/05/24/for-first-time-in-modern-era-living-with-parents-edges-out-other-living-arrangements-for-18-to-34-year-olds/>

<sup>54</sup> *Id.*

<sup>55</sup> Jill C. Bradley-Geist and Julie B. Olson-Buchanan, *Helicopter Parents: An Examination of the Correlates of over-Parenting of College Students*, 56 EDUC. + TRAINING 314 (2014).

<sup>56</sup> *Id.* at 325.

<sup>57</sup> *Id.* at 326.

<sup>58</sup> The University of Tennessee's Family Engagement Office lists their mission as "To educate and engage families through cultivating partnerships to enhance student learning and success and developing long-lasting connections to the university." The Office offers parents of UT students

Other than the declining self-efficacy of young employees, cross-generational coworkers are also dealing with the rise of workplace bullying, most often due to age differences.<sup>59</sup> Because many Millennials missed out on character-building failures due to grade-inflation and participation trophies, they are unequipped to handle workplace harassment and will often give up on a job before they fully demonstrate their skill set.<sup>60</sup> This trend, coupled with the frightening job market previously discussed, can make entering a new career the first true risk a Millennial is asked to take. Facing rejection after deciding to take that step only adds to the depression and despondency that Millennials lack the coping mechanisms to manage.

## What Is There to Be Done?

Whether you are a Millennial struggling to gain self-efficacy after a lifetime of ego-boosts or a Baby Boomer delaying your retirement to protect your hard work from that same Millennial, there are things that can be done to help your work environment cross generations successfully. To start, in the new “gig” economy in which we find ourselves, there are plenty of opportunities young librarians can seek out to build confidence by keeping themselves busy and avoid long-term unemployment.<sup>61</sup> Millennial Librarians, specifically, can find contract positions that help polish their writing, or they can improve their teaching skills by signing up to author continuing education and leadership courses.<sup>62</sup> Attending these courses is also very valuable for Millennials, as courses on leadership can have just as much positive impact on a person’s confidence as can workplace experience.<sup>63</sup>

Millennials should also not be hampered by the fact that a “gig” hasn’t been created yet. As a generation, Millennials have not shied away from entrepreneurship, and successful examples of that fact can be found everywhere from Mark Zuckerberg to Andrew Mason (the slightly lesser-known founder of Groupon) to Susan Gregg-Koger (a personal favorite of fashionable librarians, as the founder of

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the chance to meet one another at events and gives detailed information on the University calendar and scholarship opportunities. More information can be found at: <http://parents.utk.edu/>.

<sup>59</sup> *CareerBuilder Study Finds More Workers Feeling Bullied in the Workplace* (Aug. 29, 2012), <http://www.careerbuilder.com/share/aboutus/pressreleasesdetail.aspx?sd=8%2F29%2F2012&id=pr713&ed=12%2F31%2F2012>.

<sup>60</sup> Palmer, *supra* note 49, at 684.

<sup>61</sup> Elka Torpey and Andrew Hogan, *Working in a Gig Economy*, BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS (May 2016), <http://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2016/article/what-is-the-gig-economy.htm>. This Career Outlook article from the BLS discussed the rise of a “gig” economy in the United States in which workers are independently contracted to do certain jobs on demand, often through a digital marketplace.

<sup>62</sup> Flexjobs.com provides contract (and often remote) opportunities for students and recent graduates, and Libraryjuice.com is a wonderful place to look into piece-mail library skills courses, for both potential students and potential instructors.

<sup>63</sup> Solansky, *supra* note 42, at 639.

ModCloth, a vintage-inspired online clothing store).<sup>64</sup> With the internet connecting Millennials with billions of potential partners, clients, and customers around the world, new ideas have more potential for success than ever before, and Millennials are taking advantage of that fact.

Another way to gain experience without the threat of confidence-damaging rejection is by volunteering, and Millennials, as a whole, seem to either understand this fact or genuinely have a well-defined sense of generosity (or perhaps both). A 2015 study of more than 2,500 Millennial employees found that more than 80% of them had made a charitable donation in the previous year.<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, Millennials who make financial donations are much less likely to have those donations deducted from their paychecks than their generational predecessors, making the process more time-consuming, but also giving Millennials more control over where their donations go. This same report also found that 70% of Millennials spent at least an hour of their time volunteering in 2014, and more than a third of those surveyed had volunteered 11 hours or more of their time.<sup>66</sup> Millennials who face difficulty finding paid work shouldn't take the experience that comes from volunteering for granted, as the most successful leaders are those who use "any experience as a learning experience."<sup>67</sup>

Volunteering can also be valuable towards the all-important goal of professional networking. This is especially true if the potential employee is interested in working in the non-profit sector, and research suggests that many Millennials are so inclined. In fact, in 2012, nearly 60% of Millennials reported that they were willing to sacrifice a higher salary to work for an organization whose values they shared.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, 86% of Millennials surveyed said that it was "important to them to have a career that does some good in the world."<sup>69</sup>

Millennials can also improve their self-efficacy and lower anxiety by taking more risks and learning to accept constructive criticism.<sup>70</sup> One way in which Millennials can find opportunities for these career-building activities is through membership in professional organizations. Librarians are lucky to have numerous groups based on a wide range of criteria from geographic location to specialty to even, yes, generation.<sup>71</sup> These organizations often offer some sort of mentoring program

<sup>64</sup> Josh Dunlop, *Young Rich List—30 Under 30 Internet Millionaires*, INCOME DIARY, <http://www.incomediary.com/top-young-entrepreneurs> (last visited Aug. 11, 2016).

<sup>65</sup> Brigid Schulte, *Millennials Are Actually More Generous Than Anybody Realizes*, WASH. POST (June 24 2015), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/06/24/Millennials-are-actually-more-generous-than-anybody-realizes/>.

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*

<sup>67</sup> Solansky, *supra* note 42, at 639.

<sup>68</sup> Rikleen, *supra* note 3, at 157.

<sup>69</sup> *Id.*

<sup>70</sup> Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan, *supra* note 55, at 692.

<sup>71</sup> The American Library Association is a wonderful resource for new librarians and can direct you to other groups for professional development. They also offer webinars and online courses, webinars and on-line communities for networking. More information can be found here: <http://www.ala.org/>. Librarians in Special Libraries can join SLA (<http://www.sla.org/>), and I feel like I



wherein a new librarian can be matched with someone more experienced who will help them navigate everything from the job search to the hiring process and the daily life of an employed librarian. My own such involvement in these organizations and the subsequent mentor-mentee relationships that have come out of them is something I have found to be invaluable in my career.

As for what Baby Boomers can do to adjust to the new generation of professionals entering their lives, the first step, in my opinion, is to reframe the perspective that the only thing different about Millennial workers is their attitude. In fact, the world today is a very different place than it was in 1965, when some of the oldest Boomers were beginning their careers. For starters, unemployment rates from 1966–1969 were less than 4%.<sup>72</sup> The average retirement age from 1965–1990 ranged from 62.2–64.1, meaning that rapid career advancement was an actual possibility through the start of many Boomer's careers.<sup>73</sup> Simply acknowledging the fact that Millennials have had a tough time making their way into the same place that Boomers possibly stumbled into in their youth could go a long way to cure the tension between the two groups.

More concretely, Boomers should take advantage of the previously discussed *positive* Millennial traits in order to leverage a more productive workforce. For example, Boomers can and should use the Millennial generation's strong sense of social responsibility as a tool for recruitment and retention.<sup>74</sup> Allowing Millennial employees to take part in building the charitable image of a company can benefit both their professional confidence and the image of the business itself. Boomers can also take advantage of the Millennial's entrepreneurial spirit by allowing them to have creative freedom to whatever extent is reasonable. Boomers should also recognize that Millennials are not as sensitive as they are perceived to be, and that what they (we) truly want is feedback on our performance, be it positive or negative. As the children of helicopter parents, we are often looking for reassurance before jumping into unknown territory, but that doesn't mean we won't take the leap.

## Conclusion

As the job-market continues to improve, it is reasonable to think that Millennial self-efficacy will improve. Baby Boomers will be a force in the labor market for years to come, but in order to successfully partner with their younger coworkers, I believe they will have to practice empathy. Though it's true that they worked hard for their positions, they were also rewarded for their hard-work soon after it was completed,

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would be missing an opportunity if I didn't mention my own organization, the American Association of Law Libraries (<http://aallnet.org>).

<sup>72</sup> *Current Population Survey*, BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, [http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNU04000000?years\\_option=all\\_years&periods\\_option=specific\\_periods&periods=Annual+Data](http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNU04000000?years_option=all_years&periods_option=specific_periods&periods=Annual+Data) (last visited Aug. 19, 2016).

<sup>73</sup> Murray Gendell, *Trends in Retirement Age in Four Countries, 1965–95*, BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, <http://www.bls.gov/mlr/1998/08/art2full.pdf> (last visited Aug. 19, 2016).

<sup>74</sup> Rikleen, *supra* note 3, at 159.

rather than waiting months or even years to see the returns of their education or their work. Going the extra mile to give Millennials the feedback they crave will help foster a long-lasting and successful working-relationship between the two largest generations in history, while also allowing the work the young workers to be faster and better.