

SHFM

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Consultant's Corner

Graduating to Corporate Dining

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As a foodservice management consultant, I help organizations understand and address their dining programs' financial, operational, and facility-related challenges. Working with both business and industry (B&I) and higher education institutions, I am commonly asked how corporate dining can better appeal to the latest crop of young workers who are, often newly-graduated and entering the working world for the first time. This demographic is highly influenced by past experiences with collegiate dining, and transitioning into the workplace dining environment can sometimes come as a shock. Here are some of the lessons the Brailsford & Dunlavey team has learned through its work interviewing and surveying the Millennial demographic:

- As corporate benefits packages become more expansive and well known (think Google), **dining is becoming a recruitment tool** to attract and retain ideal employees. Colleges have been thinking of dining in this way for years, but this mentality is still relatively new to the B&I market. If your organization collects workplace satisfaction scores, make sure to ask questions about the corporate dining experience to understand how dining can better support your employee recruitment and retention goals.
- Recent grads view corporate dining venues like their old college dining hall or student union – a place for engaging in critical social interaction with fellow employees. Accordingly, B&I foodservice furniture, fixtures, and equipment (**FF&E**) **should entice employees to dine in** and enjoy a break with comfortable seating, an adequate number of tables and seats, and a friendly atmosphere. These facility improvements need not be a major capital expense; something as small as a new coat of paint or better lighting can go a long way.
- Perceptions of personal job security and the organization's financial stability greatly impact participation rates across the board. This behavior is especially true for the recent grad demographic that may be paying off student loans and is generally less financially secure than other, more established employees. One way to mitigate spending concerns is to **offer a wide variety of price points** to appeal to varying discretionary budgets. Thanks to retail fast food marketing, dollar menus and similar incentives especially resonate with recent grads. Item **prices should always be clearly labeled** to avoid a negative sticker shock at the cash register that deters future patronage.
- Millennial survey participants are often subject to the “halo effect,” meaning they say they want to eat healthier items than their real-life actions suggest because they know they “should” be eating better. One method of addressing this disconnect is to **use “stealth health” recipes** that replace a “bad” ingredient with a “better” one – for example, replacing 50 percent of the ground beef in a recipe with ground turkey. These types of recipes appeal to recent grads' health concerns without sacrificing contemporary taste/menu preferences.

Sustainability and social justice issues (organic, fair-trade, Rainforest Alliance-certified) are typically highly popular with recent grads. For example, in our surveys support for these measures often exceeds an 85 percent approval rating. However, it is important to remember that these **philosophical commitments come with a price**. If your organization is not willing or able to financially subsidize such measures and employees must absorb the price difference, be aware that there is a limit. Based on our data, customer support drops dramatically once the price increase exceeds 10 percent over local market prices.