



What are corporates doing to capture the ideas of their outstanding young talent? **Dawn Murden** finds out

The founders of Snapchat and Airbnb were aged 21 and 26 respectively when they launched their companies. This shows when it comes to disrupting a market – or creating entirely new ones – age is merely a number.

“We thought you could only get value from people after they’d been in the business for five to ten years, but we’re breaking down those perceptions,” says **Dominic Samengo-Turner**, CEO of Jardine Lloyd Thompson (JLT) Asia, a subsidiary of the JLT Group.

Reflecting on the way the company changed its approach to career development 12 months ago, **Dominic** continues: “We take our quality graduates after a year and put them with senior executives as an executive assistant. Their thinking and observations then start to influence the business in a more informal way.”

The success of this now means the company is taking it to another level. “We then put that generation in junior management positions of influence.

We’re creating new management roles that didn’t exist before so that they can add value to the business,” he says.

This is hugely valuable to JLT which, as a legacy business, has a number of employees whose length of service spans two to three decades. **Dominic** explains: “We don’t need millennials to have deep, technical competence – the older generations have that. We need to help facilitate the operational running of the business. We feel we’ll move much faster than originally thought.” >



Different voices, views and generations need to be heard at board level; this is something **John Brisco**, Senior Vice President, Chief Information Office and Chief Operations Officer at Manulife Asia, welcomes.

"Many boards today have a very traditional make-up of constituents who quite rightly have thorough industry and career experience. However, the pace of change driven by data and digital innovation means there may be a requirement for the make-up of a modern board to have a new mix," he says.

"There may have to be a wider dispersion of board constituents, that may involve millennials but it could also involve 35 to 40 year olds, who I would say aren't represented on boards that well. I would ask: 'How can boards expand their thinking, what type of skillsets do they need and how can they make sure that age isn't a barrier?'"

In light of this, **John** is currently exploring the advantages of an advisory board – made up of a range of individuals from millennials to entrepreneurs – to support Manulife's Asia-based leadership team.

"It will independently challenge us on our ideas. Some will come from an entrepreneurial mindset, others from a consumer background or technology mindset. That will create a healthy tension," he says.

Joanne Thompson, CEO of Penrillian, says: "Having a millennial on the board is a constructive way to ensure that fast moving changes and new opportunities in technology are always on the board agenda... However, we need to be

careful to not just add millennials onto the board as a box-ticking exercise; they must possess the right skills, motivation and experience."

The notion of millennials on the board may be a step too far for some, especially in the context of a regulated environment.

Romana Abdin, CEO at diversified healthcare company Simplyhealth, says: "The role of a director in the boardroom is to challenge, critique and support; I don't think many millennials would possess the experience and gravitas to make that kind of contribution unless they are supported through coaching and mentoring. It is our responsibility to develop the outstanding leaders of the future."

Yet **Romana** agrees that the onus is on the board to seek a fresh perspective. "Our board spent a day being customers by visiting different retailers and bringing those experiences back into our organisation," she comments. "It's about understanding the aspirations and behaviours of all generations, including millennials. It is only by understanding customers and their lives that we can be valued and valuable."

According to **Charlie Wagstaff**, Managing Director at Criticleye: "Boards, executives and HR functions need to think about how to blend talent of all ages." Indeed, the belief that all the best concepts come from the top of the organisation is outdated.

"Leaders need to ensure a company's employees reflect the diverse customer base it's targeting and welcome the fact that ideas can come from anywhere within the business," **Charlie** notes. "Each

organisation will have its unique set of challenges, but diversity of thought is hugely important."

Disruptive Minds

There's no doubt that there are some supremely talented millennials out there. Evan Spiegel, CEO of mobile app Snapchat – estimated at a net worth of \$2.1 billion – is just one of them. He knocked it out of the park early in his career but there are others waiting to make their impact.

Most millennials can't be expected to lead a complex legacy business today, but they are the leaders of tomorrow. By giving them a voice, you can harness perspectives that better represent your customer base, allow you to innovate and look to the future. ■

Featuring Commentary From:



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