

Millennials, Harley-Davidson and the Sense of FREEDOM!

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This publication has been inspired by my recent conversations about the future of Harley-Davidson, talks of the Millennials generation and even a radio show I was listening to this morning about our kids today.

My job every day is exploring marketing strategies and business development processes with Harley-Davidson and Power Sports dealers across the nation. As we all have heard that Harley-Davidson has cut salary positions and have announced their plans to invest in their marketing efforts. These efforts are targeted primarily to the Millennial generation, to entice them and interest them in owning a Harley-Davidson (or even motorcycles as a whole industry) – we ask ourselves how are we going to do this?

Harley-Davidson has been a legendary brand that promotes the feeling of freedom - riding on the open road. Harley-Davidson a USA made brand that has in the past been able to sell itself so much so that not long ago Harley-Davidson could not keep up with customers' demands and waiting lists were commonplace.

I grew up in a biker family, which meant not only were my parents my family but so was their biker friends - as our extended family. This concept is not too far off from today's millennial generation – the sense of family and the desire of belonging. So what is the difference?

The difference is that not only the millennial generation but kids today do not own the same sense of value as my generation and elders do. They do not know the sense of working hard for something earning their way up a ladder – we have made it easy for them. Somewhere along the lines everyone got a star for participation no matter what their level of efforts have been, their level of respect for authoritative figures or the ability to adjust to feedback and the learning of discipline. Everyone has learned to expect praise just for participation. We have given our children and this generation big ticket items without working for them because it has become a social norm which they have come to expect. If they are lost or broken, no worries - we will just get a new one! We have lost the value of earning rewards. Going to McDonald's was a treat when I was a kid, now it's a commonplace hang out for play dates.

We have seen a rise in generalized anxiety disorders and obesity in our children because we have conditioned them to expect the answers to be yes and they do not know how to hear no. These kids' lives lack the structure that was once in place. How often are we parenting to say “no – this is not appropriate?” Or teaching our children how to overcome failure by working harder? We tell them it is okay you tried. Trying is only a portion of success. Every successful person will tell you they have failed, and then overcame to bring about success.

By all means I am not saying make it difficult for a child to succeed or expose them to harsh measures (which are valid coping and defense mechanisms for generalized anxiety disorders and obesity), but life was different for my generation prior to instant entertainment via the internet and instant connections to friends via phones and instant messaging. We adventured, we desired – we had to work and earned our way, we did not get a star for just participating. The generations before us even had it harder, with more physical work in the job force which required endurance and adhering to shift benchmarks or farm work sun-up to sun-down. Work was work and life was harder. Life is hard. But the sense that it is hard has been lost – the sense of freedom to adventure to explore to reward ourselves of the hard work has been lost – in a world where we can post something instantly gaining likes and mentions of constant praise - what are they working towards? Dreams take time to accomplish - they are not instantly gratifying and entitled for dreaming of them.

So how will Harley-Davidson market to the millennial generation and upcoming generations no one knows? The

key in their success is to create the desire for these easy made generations to help them smell the sense of freedom and the wind on their face of the open road. It is going to prove to be difficult thing in a time where everything that is needed or desired is at a touch of a button.

I am excited to see what engineers and marketing strategies become and they turn it around as a girl, now woman, raised in Milwaukee in biker family with a dad who owned his own shop as a side job.
