



# Millennials & the Disruptive World!

Providing feedback with radical candour and other advice for attracting and retaining millennials in a disruptive world



*On August 18, Odgers Berndtson brought human resource executives from a variety of industries together at ONE°15 Marina Club in Sentosa Cove to discuss the challenges of inspiring and providing career support to millennials in a disruptive world.*

Setting the scene for the discussion, Anna Martin, Head of Human Resources Practice for Southeast Asia at Odgers Berndtson, cited that the largest generation of the Singapore workforce was made up of millennials. With reports also indicating that the number was sitting at 1.2million of the entire population, Anna emphasised that it was imperative to find ways of embracing the millennials, whilst keeping them motivated and engaged.

Aliza Knox, a Singapore-based senior executive in charge of Twitter's online business across Asia Pacific and Latin America, echoed similar sentiments. She led the discussion by outlining four areas of interest to millennials that Twitter has tried to address: *culture, community, life and development.*



*Millennials seek value and purpose in their careers and are motivated by companies that strive to make a positive difference in the world. In addition, millennials are lifelong learners who appreciate opportunities for self-enrichment through things like French lessons, improve classes and community service projects.*

Aliza noted the impact the office environment can have on quality of life and workplace culture. A simple thing like decorating the office for a holiday doesn't take much time but makes people feel good. The Twitter office in Singapore is open plan with lots of meeting rooms and communal spaces. The office furniture ranges from bar-height tables to standing desks to beanbag chairs and this facilitates lots of movement and interaction.

*Another millennial trait Aliza highlighted is that they welcome and expect detailed and frequent feedback and praise when they have done well.*

Aliza shared that at Twitter, performance feedback is provided to employees through weekly one-to-one meetings with their manager and through a more formal 360-degree review process every six months. Twitter developed its own platform for this process called Portfolio and employees are required to submit

a self-evaluation along with feedback from peers and their manager. The platform enables transparent positive and negative developmental feedback to be recorded at any time throughout the year as it occurs to the employee or manager.

Aliza explained that giving feedback should be like brushing your teeth – a routine behaviour – not something that happens only a few times a year. Feedback tends to be more effective when it is given in the moment, i.e. right after a presentation, not three months later. Which leaves the question, what constitutes good feedback?

*Kim Scott, formerly an executive at Google, pioneered a concept called "radical candour" and Aliza explained its importance.* When you are radically candid with someone, you care about them and their professional future and you challenge them directly to develop certain behaviours or improve their performance in specific ways. Embracing radical candour as a manager means going beyond just being professional and at times risking hurting someone's feelings in order to give helpful feedback that can actually make a difference in someone's career. Filling feedback sessions with performance jargon or approaching the process with apathy is the ineffective alternative to "giving a damn".





Aliza outlined three less helpful feedback styles that Scott identified and that managers should avoid. One is *ruinous empathy*, where the manager is highly sympathetic but never gives their direct reports the tools to address problems and change outcomes. Another is *manipulative insincerity*, which is neither caring nor confrontational. Finally, *obnoxious aggression* fails to balance caring for the employee with challenging them in a constructive manner.

*Aliza concluded her presentation by noting that even for a strong leader it can be difficult to give honest and transparent feedback knowing that it might upset someone. But it's important to make the attempt and this more straightforward approach seems to be preferred by millennials.*

An HR executive in attendance asked if Twitter is using the 'radical candour' approach globally and, if so, how it resonates with different cultures. Aliza responded that Twitter hasn't formally adopted this feedback strategy globally but they do employ elements of it. In Aliza's opinion, it's not something completely new and different, it's just a helpful way to visualise and encourage the most effective use of feedback. In any culture, people want to know how to get promoted, what they're doing well and how they can improve.

Andie Rees, Odgers Berndtson's Managing Partner for Southeast Asia, asked if Aliza thought ageism was an issue for disruptive, innovative technology companies. And, if so, if companies are missing out

on the experience of older workers.

Aliza responded that there is some ageism present in the tech industry but didn't think the situation was that bleak. Young founders of tech companies often do want to hire people like themselves but they also value experience, especially for COO, finance and operations roles.

Gender diversity is another issue. Aliza noted that, not surprisingly, there are some gender imbalances partly because there are far fewer women graduating with engineering degrees. Over time this will change but the root question is, what is the value of diversity? Aliza explained that we're all looking for diversity of thought which leads to better innovation and problem solving. In the absence of a better tool to measure thought diversity, we use things we can see – gender, race, age – as a proxy. Some things that Twitter is doing to increase diversity include taking applicants' names off their resumes to ensure they end up with a more diverse slate of candidates. One important thing to note is that even women need diversity training. We all have unconscious bias and we all need to work to overcome it, Aliza concluded.

As the session drew to a close, Andie recalled an anecdote related to the importance of training and investing in people. In a conversation between a CFO and the head of HR, the CFO asks, "what if we invest money in this person and train them and then they leave?" And the head of HR responds, "what if we don't invest in this person and they stay?"



*The Speaker and Facilitator: Aliza Knox is a Singapore-based senior executive in charge of Twitter's online business across Asia Pacific and Latin America. She previously led the Commerce & Mobile Wallet business and the Online Sales Group for Google in APAC. She sits on the boards of several listed companies and was previously an advisor to the ANZ Bank Board Technology Committee. She leads SWAT (Super Women at Twitter) and did the same for Women@Google. She has served on two key committees for the Singapore government, and was invited to address the Singapore Institute of Directors on why gender diversity is important to boards. She was named the AWA Singapore International Business Woman of the Year in 2015*

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**Anna Martin** heads the Human Resources practice for Odgers Berndtson in Southeast Asia, covering all sectors. In addition, her search work also has focus on regional leadership as well as a full range of functional roles within Asia Pacific, particularly among Technology vendors in the established sectors and emerging, fast growing disruptive companies. Prior to the acquisition by Odgers Berndtson in 2013, she was the APAC Head of Research for Braithwaite Steiner Pretty. Before joining Odgers Berndtson, Anna managed the Singapore operation for one of the most successful global serviced office companies. With over 15 years of commercial experience, her role revolved around the areas of recruiting, training, developing, leading teams as well as in the formulation and execution of commercial plans.

