



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

## MILLENNIAL CORNER:

### **Forget the stereotypes – Millennials are the future**

*Editor's note: Our continuing Millennial Corner feature on the newsletter gives the younger generation – who in the near future will serve in leadership positions and guide the direction of the association – a larger voice and platform NOW and will help them engage more the entire SEAMS' membership while busting stereotypes.*

**By Mike Sanders**  
**National Sales Manager**  
**Sewn Products Equipment Company**

Hello SEAMS family! I'm Mike Sanders from Sewn Products Equipment Company (SPEC), based in Jefferson, Ga., and I am a Millennial. I was born in 1985, so I guess that technically makes me one of the elder statesmen of the Millennial generation.

Anyway, I have been with SPEC for about eight years now, and I can truly say that I enjoy my job and love this industry. I originally come from the automotive side of things, where there is a lot more glitz and glam, but it is not as tightly knit as what we have here.

To give you a quick background, I graduated from Georgia College and State University with a Bachelor's Degree in Business in 2008. During my sophomore year, I started a magazine company that was all about modifying and racing cars. I have been passionate about cars for most of my life, so this quickly spiraled into something larger than I ever expected. We are now one of the largest tuner style magazines in the U.S., and I actually still own the company.

I came to SPEC because the economy was still in ruin from the 2008 collapse, and it was becoming difficult to live off of what the magazine was bringing in. I was in desperate need of steady income, and the Berzacks – the family that owns SPEC and Ahearn Cutting – were gracious enough to give me a shot. They were looking for some fresh, young blood to pump into the company, so it really worked out perfectly. I started at the bottom and worked my way up to my current position.

I can say with absolute certainty that I would not have been able to be in the position I am today without the help of several key people within this industry. The older generation has been extremely kind and always willing to help when I was in need. I have gained such a vast amount of knowledge and experience from our older generation, so I just want to start by saying "thank you."



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Now, onto the real topic at hand. MILLENNIALS. We have all heard the stereotypes that surround this generation. Millennials are soft, lazy, entitled, weak snowflakes, right? Wrong!

Well, sort of.

See, every generation of people has stereotypes around them, and they are all true to a certain extent, especially if you only look on the surface. As we have seen with recent politics and the state of our great country, it's easy to lump people together into groups to fit a narrative or mindset. This is a barbaric way of looking at problems, and generally does nothing to solve them. In fact, it typically creates a larger divide. EVERYONE involved with SEAMS is better than this. We are all business professionals, each looking out for the best interests of our companies, families and the industry as a whole.

Now, are Millennials a little bit different ... maybe even quirky or strange? Of course we are! We have different experiences than every other generation out there. We have taken part firsthand in the complete invention and rise of the internet, and the crazy ball of yarn that has turned into. Many of us grew up with parents who gave too much and coddled too often, because life was good.

We have seen war, compassion, shootings, innovation, etc. The good and the bad, we had a front row seat for all of it. All of this together has molded us into the generation that we currently are. The general idea of hard and soft generations reminds me of an old quote from Michael Hopf:

“Hard times create strong men, strong men create good times, good times create weak men, and weak men create hard times.”

Millennials are known as a soft generation, and are often ridiculed for it. The funny thing that I have to point out is that Millennials as a whole are evolving. I am not the same person that I was five or 10 years ago. We are beginning to grow up, gain important roles and, in some cases, we are completely taking over entire industries. Remember, we grew up with technology, so most of us are pretty good at incorporating our tech skills into the world of business. Today's marketing, design and sales strategies revolve around the digital world, and for the most part Millennials absolutely knock that out of the park.

Another thing to know about the Millennial workforce is that we are a passionate bunch. This is one of the main reasons that we see high turnover in manufacturing jobs when it comes to young people. My whole life I have heard parents say things like “I work hard so my kids won't have to.” Thanks, Mom and Dad!

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Seriously, it worked for a lot of us. So much of the Millennial mindset comes from the basic level of comfort that our parents created for us. I'm not ashamed of that, either. I did not grow up rich by any stretch of the imagination, but I am proud as hell of my parents for creating a solid foundation for me and my siblings to build on. With that level of comfort comes a bit of a picky demeanor.

If I am going to dedicate 40+ hours per week of my life to a job, then I would really prefer it to be something that I am passionate about, or at the very least enjoy. We view life like an attractive person at a bar. We always have options.

At the end of the day, all Millennials get a bad rap because of the bad apples out there. Just as we see every day on social media, the most embarrassing example is often the loudest. The fact is there are a lot of us out here who really are good people and awesome workers. We bring unique skills to the table that are desperately needed in today's market. Millennials are here and we ARE the future.

Don't feel bad about passing the torch to us. We can handle it.

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