

DOB:
1981-1997

LEADING MILLENNIALS IN YOUR WORKPLACE

BY ANNE BONNEY

IN THE LEADERSHIP seminars I facilitate, “millennials” always come up. Managers in the room groan and gripe, millennials get offended (understandably!), and the once-happy atmosphere I work hard to create, is destroyed. I see this happening in the workplace too! Here’s how to be a positive leader of millennials in your workplace:

STEP 1: DROP THE STEREOTYPES

No human fits into one neat little box, so the first step toward influential leadership with millennials is to drop the stereotypes. We want to create a workplace where people feel good about contributing based on the positive leadership environment.

If we’re writing people off and making them feel judged just because they happened to be born between 1981 and 1997, they’re much less likely to have a positive attitude and give their all. (There are several schools of thought on exactly how the generations break down. For the sake of this article, I have used the Pew Research Center’s dates.)

STEP 2: UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCES

Due to the pervasive child-rearing philosophies that the millennial generation was raised in and the differing social and cultural changes during their formative years, many Millennials entered the workforce with a different set of expectations, values and skills than those from previous generations.

For example, people in the younger generation may have spent the first 18 years having more successes (earned or unearned), resulting in the expectation of more frequent reinforcement than the older generation may have been accustomed to.

In addition, Millennials may value self-fulfillment and self-expression over traditional loyalty and work structures. They came of age in an era of freedom and self-expression, along with the immediate gratification of the internet and a retail marketplace, both of which play a factor in their expectations.

Also, due to the heavy increase in technological communication, Millennials may lack confidence in having difficult face-to-face conversations and choose different means for interactions.

Neither is right or wrong, it is simply different than what the older generations may be used to. Understanding this can help leaders mentor millennials.

STEP 3: FORGET “SHOULD”

I hear this all the time: “They SHOULD know” or “They SHOULD do that.”

When someone learns one thing for 18 years of her life and then is dropped into a world with a whole different set of expectations, your belief about what they SHOULD know is irrelevant and unproductive. They DON’T know, and the more we cling to our expectations, the longer they flounder. Plus, you stay frustrated, creating high turn-over and high stress and lowering morale and engagement in your workplace.

The first step is recognizing our unproductive thought processes and increasing our patience.

Then, let’s teach!

STEP 4: BE A MENTOR

If someone on your team isn’t doing what she needs to do to be successful, teach her! Help her! Explain why it’s important for the organization, for the team and for them and their future.

Show that you are not just a nagging manager. Show them that you care about their success. No matter when you’re born, you will always work harder for someone who cares and wants to work with you to maximize your success.



STEP 5: HOLD YOUR TEAM ACCOUNTABLE

Showing that you care doesn’t mean that you don’t hold them accountable when they don’t do what’s required. You can show you care, mentor them and still follow through with consequences if they don’t correct the behavior.

The key is in the delivery.

Don’t approach the difficult conversation with a punitive mindset. Be sure they know of any potential consequences during preliminary conversations and that they can make the decision of what to do on their own.

Then, if they don't correct the behavior, let them know that they made the choice, and this was the next step you discussed.

Along the way, discuss what challenges they may be having and share your intent to help make them stronger, rather than wagging your finger at them. You will have a lot more success with this approach -- with any coworker!

One of the keys to being an influential leader whom people want to work for is having these tough conversations well. If you want to get better at tough conversations at work or even at home, I highly recommend the book *Crucial Conversations* by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan and Switzler.

EVERYONE'S IN

Whether we like it or not, we need everyone to contribute in a positive way to the success of our workplace. You can sit and complain about the unique views that millennials bring to the workforce, or you can make it better.

Shifting your mindset is the first step toward a more productive approach to leading everyone in your workplace, including those born between 1981 and 1997.

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