



Book Managing the Millennials

Discover the Core Competencies for Managing Today's Workforce

Chip Espinoza, Mick Ukleja and Craig Rusch
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Recommendation

Those difficult 20-somethings in your workforce address the CEO by first name, talk out of turn in meetings, and show up late but gladly pull all-nighters. They bristle at your suggestions but thrive on complex challenges. They’re special – that’s what their parents and teachers always told them. They’re the Millennials, complex, multitasking, technologically savvy, exasperating, bright but entitled new employees entering the workforce by the millions. Consultants and professors Chip Espinoza, Mick Ukleja and Craig Rusch offer tactics and strategies for managers confused by this unpredictable generation. Though the authors don’t mind painting this or any other generations with a very broad brush, they still present much useful advice. *BooksInShort* suggests throwing out the rule book and adopting the authors’ nine strategies for getting the most out of your youngest workers.

Take-Aways

- Millennials have different expectations about work than their predecessors. To maximize their potential, practice these nine core management competencies:
- First, show flexibility by working with “autonomous” Millennials on mutual goals.
- Second, use affirmation and positive feedback as incentives for “entitled” Millennials.
- Third, provide the freedom for these “imaginative” workers to express themselves.
- Fourth, develop relationships to engage “self-absorbed” Millennials.
- Fifth, disarm their “defensiveness” by focusing on their achievements.
- Sixth, separate yourself from Millennials’ “abrasiveness,” and don’t take it personally.
- Seventh, mentor them even if they are “myopic” about the results of their actions.
- Eighth, “unfocused” Millennials think they are multitasking. Issue clear directions.
- Ninth, motivate “indifferent” Millennials by helping them find meaning in their work.

Summary

Generation Traits and Gaps

Millennials form the “most educated and technologically savvy generation ever.” Their parents sheltered them and gave their lives structure. The US workforce now includes 31 million Millennials, and that number will increase steadily in the next five years. When people of the same age experience high-impact events, they develop a similar mind-set that shapes lifelong perspectives and values.

“Managers cannot bring themselves to believe that someone can listen to an iPod, manage their fantasy football team and be focused on work at the same time.”

People born between 1925 and 1945 form the Builders generation and were shaped by The Great Depression, Roosevelt’s presidency, World War II and its aftermath. They respect authority, value a strong work ethic and expect to wait for rewards. Builders often worked for one company their entire careers.

“It is fascinating that each generation has a set of values, attitudes and beliefs that inform their behavior.”

Following the Builders came the Baby Boomers, the more than 80 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964. They experienced the emergence of television and rock and roll, the Vietnam conflict, the civil rights and the women's movements. For Boomers, work is about accumulating material wealth and creating a professional identity.

“Millennials are the first generation that can access information without an authority figure.”

Arriving between 1965 and 1977, Generation Xers – 38 million strong – bridge Baby Boomers and Millennials. They grew up with video games, MTV and computers. Two working parents, a high divorce rate, AIDS and a lack of corporate loyalty shaped the lives of Gen Xers. They value independence, mobility and work-life balance.

“They do not know how to fail because they were never allowed to fail.”

From 1978 onward came the Millennials, a generation weaned on technology, social media and iPods. They were praised by their parents for every accomplishment. Millennials have high opinions of their own capabilities and high expectations of their employers. They want direct input, creative challenges, immediate feedback and instant autonomy. Traditional management techniques will fail with this staff segment.

“The familiarity that Millennials exercise is perceived by many managers to be a lack of respect for position and titles.”

To remain relevant, strong and vital, companies must understand and motivate Millennials. Every new generation questions authority, seeks alternative paths and upsets the status quo. However, Millennials are unique: They don't need their elders to provide information; the world's knowledge awaits them at the click of a mouse.

Effective Millennial Management

“My way or the highway” won't work with Millennials. Today's effective managers create an environment in which Millennials can adjust and succeed. They strive to see things from the Millennials' point of view and “suspend the bias of their own experience.”

“One of the quickest ways to turn Millennials off is to invite their participation and not really mean it.”

Working well with Millennials requires an adaptive management style, rather than forcing Millennial employees to change. Confidently seek common ground, allowing subordinates to question and challenge you openly. Forge relationships with your 20-something employees, and honor your role as a mentor and enabler. When managers understand the motivation behind Millennials' perceptions, they can build bridges of trust within their departments. Successful managers practice nine core competencies to get the best from Millennials:

1. “Flexing with the Autonomous”

Millennials prioritize work-life balance, so their managers must be flexible. Millennials will not sacrifice everything at the career altar. They will switch companies before abandoning their personal interests. Managers attempting to mold Millennials in their image will fail. Many managers place the onus of making sacrifices on new employees instead of learning to be flexible. After all, managers put in years of hard work and feel younger employees should listen to and respect them. They find Millennials undependable; they know younger employees might vanish during rigorous training or tough times.

“Though Millennials value simplicity, they are not simplistic.”

“Flexing” does not mean allowing employees to call the shots. Flexing refers to initiating conversations with Millennials about how you can work together toward mutual goals. These conversations generate a relationship in which managers can share their knowledge and experience with new hires. A willingness to be flexible in scheduling, methods and approaches gives Millennials a sense of autonomy as they meet their obligations.

2. “Incenting the Entitled”

Because Millennials feel entitled and value rewards, managers must offer incentives. Employee reward and recognition programs are nothing new. But the “entitlement orientation” managers perceive in young employees can cause conflict. As one manager commented, “We just didn't have the expectations Millennials do or, if we did, we would never verbalize them.”

“The idea that leaders and managers are going to change members of the current generation into what they want them to be is a strategy destined for failure.”

Millennials thrive on affirmation and positive feedback. They received both throughout their childhoods, and they expect both in the workplace. Yet they disdain employee-of-the-month programs, plaques or titles. They want to receive something they value, and they want it right away. However, getting a trophy just for showing up is a policy best left on the soccer fields of their youth. Take three steps to institute effective incentive programs for Millennials:

1. Develop incentives Millennials value.
2. Enumerate clear and specific required goals.
3. Assess their performance in a transparent, fair and timely manner.

3. “Cultivating the Imaginative”

Millennials are imaginative and emphasize self-expression, so their managers must cultivate their natural propensity for thinking outside the box. They're not change-averse and they flourish when creating, innovating or problem solving. But creativity seldom thrives in environments constrained by processes and procedures. Managers who grant Millennials freedom to be imaginative, unhampered by organizational policies, will reap the benefits.

“Tapping into Millennial creativity and the energy that accompanies it can be both incredibly satisfying and productive.”

Millennials get bored quickly, so offer new tasks, and allow them to have fun while they work on projects. This generation draws no line between work and play. Don't ask for their input unless you're ready to respond to it. Millennials are easily frustrated if you don't incorporate their ideas, but become energized and motivated when you do.

4. “Engaging the Self-Absorbed”

Self-absorbed Millennials expect attention. Their managers must engage them. Because their parents emphasized nurturing rather than training, Millennials grew up in an atmosphere of attention and affirmation. At work, they expect managers to assume the supportive roles once held by mom and dad. Previous generations understood that their wants and needs were secondary to those of the organization. Millennials work under no such assumptions. One manager explained, “[My boss] just told me what was expected of me, and if I couldn't do it, they would get someone who could.”

“The best way to reduce tension is to communicate.”

Managers will get the most from their young staffers by showing an interest in them, finding common ground and soliciting their input. You shouldn't become their drinking buddies, but try, within limits, to engage them on a personal level. This runs contrary to traditional management practices that eschew building personal relationships with subordinates. However, Millennials work much harder for – and are more loyal to – managers they like and who like them in return.

5. “Disarming the Defensive”

Millennials are defensive and prioritize achievement. Managers must disarm their low threshold for negative feedback. When Millennials hit bumps during their childhood, their “helicopter” parents swooped in to their rescue. Human resources departments report that it's not unusual to hear from parents of Millennials who receive a less than stellar evaluation. Older managers of today credit their success to superiors who occasionally got tough with them. They have a hard time understanding why Millennials wither under this approach.

“An organization's future vitality is dependent on its ability to attract, retain, motivate and develop Millennials.”

When these workplace novices receive criticism or constructive critiques, they respond defensively, shifting responsibility, assigning blame or becoming hurt and angry. Managers can defuse defensiveness in 20-something employees by applying the following seven techniques:

- Don't argue.
- Recognize their emotions, grant their points and honor their competence.
- Rather than bargain over blame, discuss mutual problem solving.
- Avoid embarrassing them or hurting their pride.
- Give them a chance to offer “constructive criticism.”
- Tell them how much you value your work relationship with them.
- There is no “win”; your goal is a more effective workplace.

6. “Self-Differentiating from the Abrasive”

Millennials can be unknowingly abrasive, but they value informal give-and-take, so managers cannot take their cockiness personally. Baby Boomers questioned authority and challenged traditional ways of conducting business. They raised their children as equals, encouraging them to speak up and giving weight to their input. So, unsurprisingly, their offspring resist kowtowing to higher-ups. Millennials speak their minds in meetings, address bosses by their first names and question instructions. Managers often perceive this overly familiar communication style as rude. Department heads able to self-differentiate – that is, separate their professional position from their selfhood – better maintain their equilibrium and manage more effectively.

7. “Broadening the Myopic”

Millennial employees can be short-sighted about the consequences of their actions. Good managers teach or mentor via broadening – taking advantage of daily situations to facilitate the learning – and thus help Millennials connect their job responsibilities to the overall goals of the organization. Because Millennials enjoy creative thinking and problem solving, utilizing exercises as teaching tools can also be effective. For example, the “consequential thinking model” requires listing three approaches to a challenge and considering three possible outcomes. Generating scenarios and thinking through possibilities helps Millennials connect the dots between their actions and resulting potential consequences.

8. “Directing the Unfocused”

Millennials pride themselves on their multitasking ability, but managers can find their behavior fractured and unfocused. Both groups benefit when managers provide a high level of direction and then let young employees apply their know-how. Millennials dislike ambiguity and respond best to clear and detailed instructions. Don't leave anything unspoken – assuming that it falls under the category of common sense – because these employees do not share your frame of reference. Issue concise directions that cover the what, where, when and how of the task at hand. Provide timely feedback on the results. How to instruct Millennials:

- Don't assume they understand your directions: “Ask clarifying questions.”
- Quickly provide feedback in conversation and as per company procedures.
- When you know they know what you want, let them go do it.
- Make sure everyone understands the goals and necessary outcomes.

9. “Motivating the Indifferent”

Millennials need to find meaning in their work. For them, a paycheck means less than valuing what they do. Once they understand the role a task or responsibility plays in the greater scheme, they are happy to comply. You can motivate Millennials by showing them that their work matters.

About the Authors

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