

Supervising Millennials (Generation Y)

It's time to stop whining about the Millennials, the generation born from 1980 - 2000.

Reason: This group of roughly 80 million (larger than the 72 million Baby Boomers) began entering the workforce five years ago and are here to stay. And if you're a supervisor, it's your job to get the most out of them at work.

Millennials have different priorities and values than Baby Boomers and Gen Xers. This does not need to turn into a battle over principles (it will be a losing battle, anyway), but should be approached as a management challenge. Below are several strategies to help the older generations work effectively with the Millennials.

Millennials and Information Processing

Because of immediate and multi-faceted MTV and CNN type of venues, "pop-ups", drop-down menus, and readily available resources from the internet and I-Pods, Millennials process information *selectively, quickly*, and as a result *not always completely*. The responsibility of the supervisor is to help make sure the Millennials not only "get it" but "get it all". Several ways of doing this are:

- Offer several options in which to collect and view information.
- Ask for e-mail or voice mail confirmations
- Utilize technology to keep track of to-do lists and stay in constant communication (webcasts, pod-casts, I-pod downloads).
- Ask for frequent updates.

With these tactics, the supervisor will learn of any gaps before it's too late, and will have an opportunity to provide informal mentoring as it is needed. You'll also be providing the immediacy that Millennials like and are used to.

Millennials as Partners

Millennials will come to the full-time workforce more educated and with more work experience (because of volunteer opportunities and internships already experienced in school) than any of the other four generations immediately preceding them, so they don't necessarily view themselves as newbies to the organization. They don't buy into the concept of "paying your dues" as a way to move up, and are comfortable with being involved in new projects.

Allow the Millennials a certain autonomy and space in which to grow and make mistakes. And they will not be afraid to make mistakes. This is the generation that coined the term "my bad" when they did something wrong. They didn't let a goof-up stop them, they learned from it and went on. Because of their experiences and their non-fear of mistake making, they are independent and self-driven; however, sometimes not always driven in the right direction.

Ways to work within this independence and yet exert a certain amount of control is to:

- Instill certain parameters as necessary (spending limits, deadlines, people to check in with, etc.).
- Make the goals very clear. Get confirmation then leave them alone, but require frequent updates.
- Don't insist on having them do it your way. Allow them to explore different processes.
- Don't take an "I told you so" stance when they make mistakes. Help them process what went wrong.
- Don't get nervous when they make mistakes.
- Ask for frequent updates.

Millennials and Problem Solving Skills

Millennials are getting a reputation for being "know it alls." But they're not being arrogant—they're hard-wired that way. They actually do know a lot. They will come to the supervisor with not only a problem but a possible solution to the problem. It may not always be the right or possible solution, but this should not be seen by the supervisor as threatening or proof that they really don't know what they're talking about. The better technique is to partner with the Millennials, ask for their opinion, let them try it out if it's safe and within policy, and then ask for an update.

Transversely, Millennials may not be able to see any problem solving options unless they are in front of them (remember they are a product of the "drop-down menu" mentality).

Ways to work within the Millennials way of problem solving:

- Do not immediately dismiss their solution with a "we've already tried that before" type of attitude. Allow the Millennial to explore the possible solution. You may be pleasantly surprised when they develop a new and better process.
- Do not be threatened with their ability to come up with solutions. Show appreciation for their intuitiveness. This will help instill loyalty within the Millennials.
- Where you can, give the Millennial authority for certain projects. Remember to set parameters as needed.
- As a way to get them started if they're stuck, they may need several options from you. Because of their "drop-down menu" mentality, if it's not in front of them, they may not see it. Don't let this frustrate you as a supervisor. Look at it as a training session from you, and a learning session for the Millennial.

Millennials and Authority

Millennials respect authority, but respect credibility more. ("Just because you've been there 25 years, doesn't mean you're competent", is what Millennials think.) They've seen scandal and mis-management in the President, CEOs, law enforcement, judges, community leaders and even teachers, just to name a few. Where Traditionalist and Baby Boomers were fiercely loyal to bosses, companies and countries, Millennials (and Gen Xers) will not assume that a station of power ensures knowledge and good direction.

Credibility will carry more weight with the Millennials than authority. You can establish credibility by:

- Pitching in.
- Sharing experiences, including and especially when you learned from your mistakes.
- Not resting on “years of service” as your ticket to power.
- Informal mentoring as opposed to formal mentoring.
- Be consistent with stated values and work ethics.

Overall, when working with Millennials:

- Forget about engaging in a power struggle. They know you are in charge—and they don't care.
- Forget about lecturing with authority-Millennials will be keyed into informal mentoring more.
- Forget about trying to prove them wrong to show that you know more. When they make a mistake, they consider it a learning experience, not a blow to their self-confidence. They will move on to the next challenge and will see you as petty and wasting time.
- Ask for frequent updates. Ask for frequent updates. Ask for frequent updates.

You can accomplish more for your company by making nice with Millennials, an enormously optimistic, educated, energetic and compassionate generation.