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FEATURE

By Meagan Johnson



Meagan Johnson



WHAT MILLENNIALS WANT FROM LEADERSHIP

Full disclosure...I am a Gen Xer (Gen Xers also known as Generation X are people born between 1965 and 1980). My generation is the smallest generation. We are the “middle child” in the generational lineup. If this were the 1970s hit TV show *The Brady Bunch*, Gen Xers would be Jan. Like Jan, who was stuck between her cute baby sister Cindy and her more popular sister Marsha, Gen Xers are squeezed in between the two behemoth generations—Baby Boomers and the Millennial Generation.

As a past Gen X employee and now a Gen X business owner, my belief has always been “no news from management is good news.” I always felt, along with many of my Gen X peers, “just tell me what you want done, give me the tools to do it and then leave me alone!” The less I saw or heard from my team leader, the better.

As a generational speaker and humorist and as an employer of Millennials, I have discovered the Gen X, lone-wolf leadership style does not often resonate with the Millennial Generation.

The Millennial Generation is made up of the 80 million people born between 1981 and 2002. Their numbers have surpassed the mighty Baby Boomers and they are expected to represent 40 percent of the workforce in five short years. They continue to baffle organizations and turn “the way we have always done it” on its head.

Leadership is no different. The Millennial Generation is reinventing leadership and demanding the corporate world does the same. Does this mean we sacrifice the multiple generations in the workforce to meet the demands of the younger workforce? No! What it does mean is we all have to challenge our own leadership styles to help everyone reach a little higher and achieve success.

What is the Millennial Generation looking for in a leader?

Millennials do not define a leader in the traditional sense. When I first entered the corporate world back in the 1990s, my managers practiced a top-down style of leadership. Their style was autocratic, they did not appreciate having their expertise questioned and they definitely had zero interest in my life outside of work.

Today, Millennials describe a good leader as: approachable, authentic and a team player. According to Deloitte’s fourth annual *Millennial Survey*: “more than 65 percent of Millennials feel a good leader’s focus should be on interpersonal skills, strategic thinking and inspirational qualities vs. financial results.” Moving forward, successful, multi-generational leaders will be a hybrid; a coach, mentor and a leader all rolled into one.

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What can I do today to lead Millennials?

Give them an opportunity to participate ASAP. The Millennial Generation has been participating in family decisions and has had tremendous influence over household spending from an early age.

In 2002, when the 20 somethings and early 30 somethings of today were in their early to late teens, they influenced \$300 billion to \$400 billion of the family spending. They influenced more than 80 percent of the family apparel purchases and more than 50 percent of the family car choices...this was often before they could drive.

Baby Boomers brought teamwork and consensus building into the family and encouraged their Millennial children to participate. Millennials contributed to family discussions that ranged from dinner plans, vacation destinations and technology choices.

In school, Millennials experienced a greater emphasis on group projects and team-oriented tasks compared to older generations. This has given them not just an expectation that they will hit the ground running, but also a genuine interest to engage and a talent for collaboration (This is really good news!).

As a leader, the more involved you can get Millennials in projects, discussions or meetings the better. Do not let your perception of Millennials' greenness keep you from allowing them to engage early on.

Matt Khair, is a Millennial who began working at CRBUSA, an engineering, architecture and construction firm, before he graduated from college. He was offered

a full-time position following graduation and has been at CRBUSA for more than nine years, much longer than the average three years a Millennial stays at one place of employment.

"What surprised me the most going from a full-time college student to a full-time employee at CRBUSA was the culture of responsibility," Khair said. CRBUSA's culture does not let age or experience determine how much responsibility you will be given. Early in my career I was given responsibility my peers at other organizations were not given until later in their careers.

"One of the projects I was given was creating a business plan, presenting it to the core team leaders and receiving feedback. I was 21years old, a recent college graduate and I was in a meeting listening to what the company leaders were discussing. I was floored! I thought I should not even be in this meeting!"

CRBUSA recognizes the importance of getting Millennials involved quickly. CRBUSA also does not allow age or job tenure to influence the level of responsibility it bestows upon their young talent. This does not mean the company disregards seniority. The organization successfully gave Khair an immediate sense of purpose at the company and gave him an opportunity to learn from senior management.

Recognize their existence.

The Millennial Generation is a more transient generation than previous generations. Very few will experience lifetime employment with a single employer and, as stated earlier, the average Millennial job tenure is three years. There is a misconception that the Millennial's migratory nature

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has led to a deterioration of the importance personal relationships have at work.

According to LinkedIn, more than 55 percent of Millennials feel having buddies at work increases happiness and 50 percent believes it improves motivation. On the flip side, Baby Boomers feel friendships at work do not impact happiness or motivation.

Malika Coleman, a Millennial who is an instructional systems design analyst at Navy Federal Credit Union, said, "I love my boss. She is open-minded and really took me under her wing. In the beginning, she and I met once a quarter. I felt disconnected, meeting with such infrequency. I discussed it with her and now we meet once a week. I admit, sometimes I feel needy, but I wanted to build a relationship with the people I work with."

A good leader is not the Millennial Generation's next BFF. A good leader does however make time for conversations with their younger co-workers that go beyond a text and delve deeper than just market share.

Treat them like a leader too.

Millennials view themselves as leaders and they want their careers to include leadership roles.

According to training company Virtuali, more than 70 percent of Millennials regard themselves as leaders even if their title does not reflect a leadership position.

The Millennial Generation has not only experienced a life of collaboration and consensus building, they have also had a powerful voice from an early age.

Social media has given Millennials the voice and the ability to take the initiative, lead change, lead often and get big results, often all before getting out of bed in the morning. Via social media, Millennials can fund a start-up, popularize a new restaurant or find a bone marrow match for a sick friend.

As leaders, the Millennials want to help others and make an impact. According to *The Millennial Leadership Study*, close to 50 percent of Millennials describe leadership as "empowering others to succeed" and more than 60 percent want to imbue people with a "sense of purpose and excitement."

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How do you help Millennials further develop and nourish the leadership skills they already possess?

1. Give them a variety of opportunities within the organization. Colorado Police Chief John Camper rotates his detectives and officers into different departments or positions. Some rotations are every few years, some rotations are as short as a few months.

2. Tell them about your past mistakes. Transparency is a vitally important trait to the Millennial Generation. Deloitte's global study found that Millennials feel "openness" is one of the top traits they look for in a leader.

"My boss told me about a situation where she had made a mistake," Coleman said. "I really value the fact that she will share with me her past successes and failures. Those discussions are more helpful, insightful and inspiring than any online course."

No matter where we fall on the generational time line, our title or our reign at an organization, we all have a responsibility to be conscientious leaders. The beauty of Millennials is that they want to learn from our past stumbles, tell us who they are and lead us all to a changed future.

If we do all these things I've suggested, just maybe, our Millennials will think we are good leaders after all.

About the Author: Known as the Generational Humorist, Meagan Johnson tackles generational challenges head on. Unwilling to accept standard, by-the-book

generalizations, she demonstrates, through her own in-depth research, that all generations have differences and strengths that go beyond mere age and appearance. Quoted by the *Chicago Tribune*, CNNMoney.com and *U.S. News & World Report*, she has been heard on ABC Talk Live, NPR and profiled on Conde Nast's Portfolio.com. She has become the go-to expert for all things generational. Find her at www.MeaganJohnson.com or call her at 1-800-759-4933.

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