

LET A MILLENNIAL MENTOR YOU

The benefits of mutual mentoring by Tamara Thorpe

TAMARA THORPE

I am a Life Guide, Leadership Expert and Organizational Development Consultant.

I devote my time and energy to helping Millennials realize their untapped potential to become effective and authentic leaders.

I believe that when people receive the guidance they need to make extraordinary choices they are able to lead exceptional lives.

WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT?

Diversity has taken on a new meaning in the demographics of the modern workplace; race and gender take a back seat to today's multi-generational workforce. Organizations are facing new challenges managing four generations of employees: Traditionalists (1925-1946); Baby Boomers (1946-1964); Generation Xers (1965-1980); and Generation Ys or Millennials (1980-2000).

Millennials are the fastest growing segment of today's workforce, while senior generations are retiring much later. However, this will change in the next five years as Traditionalists and Boomers retire in greater numbers, and the number of Millennials increases from 40% to 60%. As a result, organizations have an increased sense of urgency to invest in strategies for success today and tomorrow.

“Mutual mentoring is a non-hierarchical developmental relationship based upon mutual reciprocity between two individuals.”

One strategy is mutual mentoring, a non-hierarchical developmental relationship based upon mutual reciprocity between two individuals. The traditional paradigm of the older professional mentor who espouses their wisdom onto another younger professional does not address the growing needs of the multi-generational workforce. Mutual mentoring can be used for succession planning and the transfer of knowledge and skills as Traditionalists and Boomers prepare to retire. For Millennials, mutual mentoring can be a tool for recruitment, development, engagement, and retention. Collectively, it will foster a culture of learning and inclusion to help organizations increase performance overall and maintain a competitive edge.



Generations



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INTRODUCTION

The term diversity has been most commonly used within organizations to define the characteristics of individuals based upon their race, gender, sexual orientation, cultural background, and/or ability. Today, the definition of diversity has expanded in the modern workplace; now race and gender take a back seat to age diversity and today's multi-generational workforce.

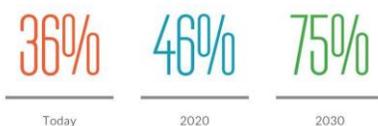
Organizations are managing up to four generations in the workplace. This includes Traditionalists (1925-1946); Baby Boomers (1946-1964); Generation Xers (1965-1980); and Generation Y's or Millennials (1980-2000). Millennials are the fastest growing segment of today's workforce, while senior generations are retiring much later. However, this will change in the next five years as Traditionalists and Boomers retire in greater numbers, and the number of Millennials increases from 40% to 60%. As a result, organizations have an increased sense of urgency to invest in strategies that allow their multi-generational workforce to succeed presently while planning for stronger Millennial workforce in the future.

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE WORKPLACE

Every 20 years, give or take a year or two, a new generation is born. Each generation shares a set of shared experiences, social and cultural, that shape their beliefs and behaviors and establish common values and perspectives about the way they live and work. Understanding how different generations view the worlds is important to bridging differences. However, generalizations, while grounded in research, are not finite. Generalizations made of any specific group can be seen as typical or common, but do not bind all affiliated individuals to these characteristics, values or behaviors.

Millennials are the most recent generation and are shaped, more so than any other generation, by the changes in technology. This generation is tech savvy having grown up with technology, they are more reliant on it and prefer electronic communication to more traditional forms (Everett Community College, 2011). Chatting, texting, and using online interfaces like Facebook and webinars fall well within their comfort zone. They find new and creative uses for technology, and do not see it as a deterrent to the development of their interpersonal skills, but rather as a tool for facilitating new and existing relationships and diversifying their skill set.

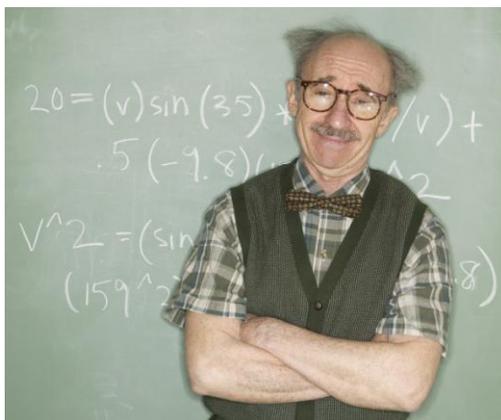
Millennials in the Workforce



Millennials are a very ambitious generation; they have mastered the life-work balance. They prioritize family over work, and would rather work a flex schedule or trade high pay for fewer hours (Everett Community College, 2011). This generation is not afraid to question authority and ask for what they want, which is to be included and involved. They are also achievement oriented as they were raised by parents with very high expectations. Uniquely this generation has great relationships with their parents and family (Tooker, 2006, p. 20). The close familial relationships have birthed a generation which is confident, and used to being pampered and nurtured. Because of their family systems, Millennials want to have the same nurturing experience with employers. They seek constant feedback and validation and expect employers to mentor. Additionally, they expect employers to support meaningful work and for the workplace to be an environment for learning (Meister & Willyerd, 2010, p. 1). They like to receive feedback and input from others, and are quite open to guidance and mentoring, making them ideal for developmental relationships within today's organizations (Everett Community College, 2011).

Preceding the Millennials is Gen X or the “Me” generation, which includes those born between 1965 and 1980. This generation is most identified by putting oneself first, considered the most self-centered generation in the 1980s. Additionally, Generation X is diverse and well educated, with over 60% who attended college (Everett Community College, 2011). This generation was often raised by two-income families, making them the first generation of “latch key” kids; children who came home from school to an empty house. This created an individualistic, independent and resourceful generation who resisted authority. In the workplace, Gen X’ers prefer autonomy with managers who take a “hands-off” approach, and are ambitious and eager to learn (Everett Community College, 2011). This generation was introduced to technology early in their careers so they are comfortable and confident with technology, yet understand the value of a phone call and handwritten note. Gen X’ers aim for a life-work balance, believing one must work hard and play hard. Raised by workaholics, Gen Xers committed less to their employer and have been willing to change jobs or careers to improve their quality of life.

Different from both Gen X’ers and Millennials, Baby Boomers, are well established in their careers, although, as noted earlier, will be soon retiring and leaving the work force in droves. Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964, and earned their name from the post World War II baby boom, marked by 79 million babies being born in this era (Rosenberg, 2012). Baby Boomers currently are in positions of power and authority within our educational and political systems. This generation identifies itself as hardworking and is motivated by position, power, and prestige. Known as workaholics, they are very career focused and goal oriented. They equate hard work with position, and resent those who do not seem to work as hard as they do (Everett Community College, 2011). This generation grew up in the 70s during times of radical change and reform, so they are comfortable questioning authority and the status quo. As a result, Baby Boomers see themselves as agents of change, who are independent, confident, and most importantly, self reliant. (Everett Community College, 2011). This generation was introduced to technology late in their careers, and it has been embraced by some and resisted by others. Most put more value in face-to-face interactions, and perceive the reliance on technology as a lack of interpersonal skills (Hall, 2007, p. 22).



Finally, Traditionalists, also known as the Silent Generation, were born between 1927-1945. This group is diverse in their retirement plans and will retire in their sixties, seventies, and eighties. This generation was raised at the turn of the century and believes that privilege is earned. They are characterized as hardworking and loyal (Everett Community College, 2011). Traditionalists are most comfortable in traditional learning and work environment, and have spent their career working for a single employer, and maintain a strong respect for authority. In the workplace they are considered good team players who avoid conflict. They value safety, security, conformity, and consistency. Traditionalists are slower to change work habits, and are typically less adept with technology (Everett Community College, 2011).

Today, 1/3 of workers report to a younger boss.

MUTUAL MENTORING

The multi-generational workforce must balance and integrate these generational differences to foster healthy and sustainable organizations. Similar to other areas of diversity, generational differences create layers of complexity that impact collaboration, communication, engagement, performance, and retention. Multi-generational teams require innovative strategies for intergenerational understanding and collaboration, retention and engagement, and succession planning. Mutual mentoring offers a contemporary approach to diversity that will also facilitate organizations ability to cross-train, increase engagement, and build capacity.

Mutual mentoring between more seasoned or senior members of an organization and their younger colleagues can be used to strengthen organizational intelligence, build sustainable communities of knowledge, promote collaboration across

differences, and sustain the organizations competitive advantage. It enhances organizational performance and encourages knowledge transfer and career growth.

It goes without saying that more seasoned and senior members of an organization have a lot to share. Their years of experience contribute to a greater understanding of processes procedures, politics, power structures, decision making. However, this vast amount of knowledge and experience can overshadow the attitudes, skills, and knowledge a Millennial team member has to offer.

In her article Maximizing Millennials, Jessica Brack (2012) suggests that Millennials can offer mentoring for technology, social media, trends, philanthropy, new ideas-innovation, research, global perspectives, facilitation, group dynamics, team work and collaboration (p. 12). I surveyed twenty-five of my Millennial colleagues and clients to articulate the attitude, skills, and knowledge Millennials can to offer in a mutual mentoring relationship. The respondents represent eight nationalities, have a minimum of an undergraduate degree, and are working professionals or entrepreneurs. The respondents were asked, “What values, attitudes, skills, or knowledge could you share with an older or more seasoned colleague as their mentor?” The overwhelming response from this group was that they have new and different perspectives

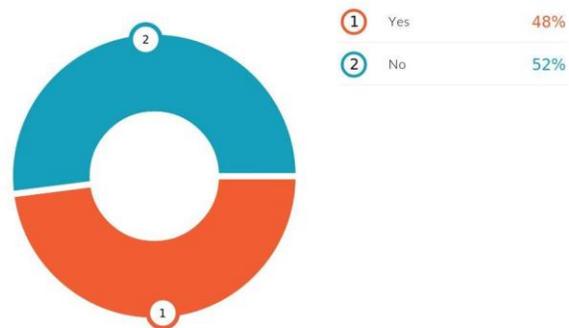
on life and business to share with their more seasoned colleagues. Specific attitudes identified by the respondents were adaptability and flexibility; specific skills and knowledge they identified were collaboration, problem solving, intergenerational understanding, current trends, marketing, digital and social media, and the use of technology to problem solve, collaborate, and create new work flow processes.

Among this group, 48% indicated that they have had experience mentoring a more seasoned colleague (see Figure 1), while 52% have not. When asked why they had not mentored a more senior colleague, 100% of those respondents said it was because they did not have the opportunity, and only 2% said it was because they were not confident that they had something to offer.

MENTORING BENEFITS

- Strengthen organizational intelligence.
- Build sustainable communities of knowledge.
- Promote collaboration across difference.
- Sustain a competitive advantage.
- Enhance performance and career growth.

Have you mentored?



Presented with the opportunity, mutual mentoring relationships between Millennials and their senior counterparts has the potential to increase a multi-generational team’s ability to communicate, team build, foster relationships, and create a culture of learning. Through mutual mentoring, multi-generational teams can learn to understand and respect difference and be open to new ideas and ways of working.



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Organizations may also see a shift in age bias as individuals gain a better understanding of generational differences and learn to value the experiences each individual has to offer the organization.

CROSS TRAINING AND SUCCESSION PLANNING

Mutual mentoring is also a means to increase employee engagement when used for cross-training. Author Michael E. Brunner defines cross-training as teaching employees the job of another so they could fill in, and/or gain a deeper understanding of systems and processes and the roles of their counterparts (2007, p. 58). Cross-training in organizations ensures that employees at all levels understand the various roles within the organization. Organizations can avoid individuals and teams working in silos, and as a result have employees who understand the systems and processes that impact their role and the bigger picture. When employees have the opportunity to gain new perspective, knowledge, and know how, organizations will see an increase in performance as well as loyalty, satisfaction, and engagement (Adeyemi, p. 370). In an article by Healthcare Registration (2013), it is stated that engaged employees have a sense of ownership and are invested in the outcomes and success of the organization (p.8).

Mutual mentoring can also be used as a tool for succession planning and thus fostering a successful multigenerational workforce. Succession planning addresses key gaps that will exist when key positions in an organization are vacated (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007, p. 353). As Traditionalists and Baby Boomers continue to retire and leave the workforce, organizations can use the mutual mentoring relationships to transfer their skills and experience to a new generation of employees. This empowers an organization to build a more competent team and retain institutional knowledge.

CONCLUSION

One of the greatest assets Millennial employees bring to the workplace is their desire for mentors, coaching, and feedback. They are eager to achieve and learn, and their engagement is increased when they are learning and have a career path to follow. Cross-generational mutual mentoring is a strategy easily employed by organizations to foster a collaborative learning

culture. Organizations will have employees of all ages who are more skilled and well performing, and continuous development and learning are key to the retention of Millennial employees.

Mutual mentoring among multi-generational teams can create attitudinal changes with generational perspectives or stereotypes. Employees will learn to empathize with their counterparts and reduce conflict to foster greater cooperation, collaboration, and inclusion. Through mutual mentoring, multi-generational teams can develop shared values, team work, and increase morale which results in greater productivity and the development of future leaders. Mutual mentoring also facilitates the retention and engagement of Millennial employees while increasing organizational capacity and meeting the needs for succession planning.

**CONTACT ME TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MENTORING AND MAXIMIZING YOUR MILLENNIAL
TALENT!**

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