MILLENNIAL LEADERSHIP

How to lead and mentor a multi-generational workforce by Tamara Thorpe

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WHITEPAPER SUMMARY

Millennials are the largest segment of the workforce, surpassing Generation X in early 2015 and Baby Boomers in 2014. As the number of Millennials grows, 45 million Boomers remain in the workforce and Generation X holds strong at 52.7 million. The economic recession has delayed retirement for Baby Boomers and AARP reports that 70% of older workers want to work part-time and half expect to work past age 70 (Hush, Lui, & Pransky, 2006). The multi-generational workforce is a reality and not likely to change given the fact that the youngest Boomers are only 51 years old. Much of the literature addressing the multi-generational workforce has focused on managing Millennials, and little has focused on the Millennials leading and mentoring employees who are older than them.

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Of the 53.5 million Millennials in the US labor force, many are in leadership as managers, Department heads, and C-suite executives. Millennials have an opportunity to excel in leading this multi-generational workforce. Innovation is an attribute of the Millennial generation they can leverage to create an age friendly work environment and a culture of mutual mentoring to increase retention, engagement, productivity, and the bottom line. This paper presents Millennial leaders with a five-step approach to lead and mentor employees of all ages. This leadership approach will enable Millennial leaders to establish their credibility, retain and engage a diverse team, increase their generational competence, foster a culture of learning and growth, and utilize mutual mentoring to elevate individuals within their organization.

INTRODUCTION

Millennials are the largest segment of the workforce, surpassing Generation X in early 2015 and Baby Boomers in 2014. As the number of Millennials grows, 45 million Boomers remain in the workforce and Generation X holds strong at 52.7 million. The economic recession has delayed retirement for Baby Boomers and AARP reports that 70% of older workers want to work part-time and half expect to work past age 70 (Hush, Lui, & Pransky, 2006). The multi-generational workforce is a reality and not likely to change given the fact that the youngest Boomers are only 51 years old. Complicating matters is the fact that more than a third of U.S. workers report to a younger boss (Guiney, 2014). Not only are Millennials becoming the majority generation within the workforce, but they are also emerging as leaders. For Millennials to effectively lead this diverse multi-generational workforce they can apply a transformational leadership approach that enables them to establish their credibility, retain and engage a diverse team, increase their generational

competence, foster a culture of learning and growth, and utilize mutual mentoring to elevate individuals within their organization.

Millennials were born between 1980 and 2001 and represent 36% of the workforce; this will increase to 46% in 2020 and 75% in 2030 (Brack, 2012, p. 2). In addition to dominating in numbers, Millennials bring a new and unique perspective to the workplace that is vastly different from previous generations. There are several generational characteristics that separate this generation from their predecessors when it comes to the workplace. Millennials have a strong desire for their work to be meaningful and expect the workplace to be a learning environment where they can grow and develop personally and professionally (Meister & Willyerd, 2010, p. 1). Millennials are also collaborators and want to work in relationship with others in a less structured and less individualized environment (Brack, 2012, p. 4). These desires and expectations can often clash with other generations. However, it positions millennial leaders to utilize a transformative leadership approach which emphasizes team over the individual and people are empowered to make decisions, challenge the status quote, learn, innovate, take on tasks that challenge them to learn (Yukl, 2002, pp. 131-133). Millennials propensity for innovation is an attribute they can utilize to mitigate generational differences and leverage to create an age friendly work environment and a culture of mutual mentoring to increase retention, engagement, productivity, and the bottom line.

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CREATING AN AGE-FRIENDLY

Creating an age-friendly environment is not about effectively managing a multi-generational workforce, but cultivating and nurturing one by recruiting, retaining, and engaging workers of all ages. Age diversity is not a reality to be managed, but to be leveraged. In Diane Brady's (2014) article *The Bottom-Line for Reasons for Mixing the Young and Old at Work*, she asserts that "hiring people across all age groups reduces turnover and creates a culture of co-mentoring" as well as boosting an organization's bottom line (Bloomberg Management). An age-friendly organization can create a work environment that draws on the strengths of all generations, and gives everyone a chance to continue to be challenged and grow. Brady (2014) concludes that this strategy for age diversity is strategic, not charitable (para. 4). Age diversity facilitates knowledge and skill transfer as well as cross training, both resulting in increased employee engagement and performance. In the article *Is ageism holding back your business*, the author found "a mixed age workforce can lead to dramatic improvements in customer service and sales" (Coleman, 2004). A transformational leadership approach is essential to creating an age-friendly environment where the multi-generational workforce can thrive.

The 5 Step Approach to Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership emphasizes inclusion, growth, development, and mentoring. Millennial leaders can be effective with a multi-generational workforce using this five-step approach to transformational leadership: *Identify, Imagine, Inspire, Innovate, and Impact*. Each step provides Millennial leaders tools and strategies that enable them to establish their credibility, retain and engage a diverse team, increase their generational competence, foster a culture of learning and growth, and utilize mutual mentoring to elevate individuals within their organization. The first step is to identify one's own approach to leadership by defining a Personal Leadership Philosophy (PLP) which outlines an individual's personal approach to leadership in a single statement or series of short statements. A PLP sets the tone, vision, and culture of a team or organization. It guides a leader's behavior and decision making and those who follow them should be able to recognize their PLP in everything they do.

5 STEPS TO TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP:

1. Identify your own approach to leadership

2. Imagine your ideal team & organization

3. Inspire others to follow you

4. Innovate within your organization

5. Impact the present and future of your organization

Creating a PLP is done through a reflective process to identify one's own purpose, values, and vision for how one leads. One must start by asking oneself what it is they value in the world and what their purpose is as a leader. Next, one must identify their strengths and combine them with their values and purpose to define the type of leader one wants to be. The last step is to craft them into a statement or phrase and share it with the organization. Sharing ones' PLP sets expectations for both the leader and their followers. Leaders can use their PLP to self-evaluate to ensure what they are doing as a leader is aligned with their values, purpose, and strengths.

The second step is to imagine a future for the organization and create a vision. The vision drives and motivates an organization, and provides a sense of purpose and direction. However, it is not enough for a leader to have a vision, within organizations there must be a shared vision. The difference between a vision and a shared vision is the level of engagement and commitment the organization has for the vision. The organization has to believe and be equally passionate about realizing the vision. When there is a shared vision, followers will take action to move the organization closer to the vision because they want to, not because they have to.

Developing a shared vision is a collaborative effort, and the amount of time it takes will depend upon the size of the organization and the process used. Either way, it is essential that leaders involve their team in the development of the vision, and listen to their ideas to incorporate them into a vision that everyone can buy-in to. Within a multi-generational workforce there will be a wealth of knowledge, experience, and creativity that can be maximized in this process. It is the leader's obligation to ensure this process is collaborative and inclusive so diverse voices and perspectives are valued. A shared vision should also include milestones to hold the organization accountable. For a shared vision to be effective it has to be more than a quote on the wall, it has to be realized into the culture of the organization. Creating a shared vision will help you make leaders passion contagious, and organizations will experience increased motivation, job satisfaction, engagement, and retention.

The third step is to inspire others to follow, which is done by building trusting relationships grounded in mutual respect and understanding. Leaders will gain followers when they feel understood, trusted and respected. Otherwise, leaders will only get obedience from their followers. Cultivating inter-generational relationships with mutual understanding, trust and respect requires leaders to understand what makes people different, respect those differences, and then leverage them to build strong teams and organizations. Behavior is formed not only by personal life experiences, but the contexts in which they are experienced. This context is also known as culture which can be simply defined as a set of shared values, beliefs, and behaviors, by an interacting group of people (Deardorff, 2006). These groups can include family, friends, co-workers, and community. Groups can be shaped by age, generation, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, ethnicity or race, region, or nationality. To be able to effectively navigate and negotiate the cultural differences, including age and generation, leaders must develop their intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence is "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes" (as cited in Deardorff, 2006, p. 247) and includes "...the ability to shift one's frame of reference appropriately, the ability to achieve one's goals to some degree, and behaving appropriately and effectively in intercultural situations" (Deardorff, 2006, p. 248). Applying intercultural competence to generational differences equips leaders with the knowledge, skills, awareness, and attitudes necessary to understand and respect the diverse perspectives of a multi-generational workforce.

Increasing intercultural competence is a developmental process, requiring time, training, and practice. Millennial leaders should begin the process with awareness of self and the exploration into one's own attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. It is

easier to recognize the differences in others when we can clearly articulate our own perspective and worldview. When a leader is interculturally competent, they possess the abilities and traits necessary to navigate difference more effectively and appropriately across all differences. To practice and increase intercultural competence, leaders must learn to suspend judgment and tolerate ambiguity. Other traits to develop are respect, patience, empathy, flexibility, curiosity, openness, motivation, and humor (Fantini, 2000, p. 28). Understanding how culture informs our own behavior and that of others is an essential tool for Millennial leaders who are committed to fostering relationships with mutual respect and trust.

The fourth step is to innovate within an organization and support individuals to continually learn, grow and adapt to change. By definition, *to innovate* means to introduce something new or to make changes to anything established (Dictionary.com, 2015). People naturally resist change because they associate it with loss, rather than opportunity. Millennial leaders can create teams who can adjust, adapt, and embrace change by developing a learning organization. A learning organization is so committed to learning and growth that change is the status quo and transformation is the norm (Yukl, 2002, p. 173). The result is a group of people who can easily and readily adapt and adjust to change, and thrive in a competitive and rapidly changing environment.

> *"Mentoring is an outstanding strategy for fostering a culture of learning and readiness for change in a multi-generational workforce."*

Mentoring is an outstanding strategy for fostering a culture of learning and readiness for change in a multi-generational workforce. Generational differences create layers of complexity that influence a teams' ability to collaborate, communicate, and engage. Multi-generational teams require innovative strategies to foster intergenerational understanding so teams can work effectively to become high performing teams. Mutual-mentoring offers a contemporary approach to mentoring, because the traditional mentoring paradigm of the more senior professional mentoring the younger professional is outdated. Today's multi-generational workforce challenges the traditional paradigm and requires leaders and organizations to understand and apply mentoring differently.

Mutual-mentoring is a non-hierarchical mentoring relationship where learning is both mutual and reciprocal (Fritzberg & Alemayehu, 2004, p. 294). It can be described as one that is a "flexible, self-directed partnership model" and "promotes the long-term professional development and personal well-being" of those who are being mentored (2010, p. 129). Different from traditional or Reverse Mentoring, mutual mentoring fosters a culture of acceptance, inclusion, and learning necessary in an age-friendly work environment with a multi-generational workforce. As writer Anya Kamenetz (2011) stated, "We need a new model of mentorship…The new model has to be more flexible and forgiving, to allow for the fact that mentorships, like any relationship, come in different flavors and change over time"(para.4).

The fifth and final step for Millennial leaders is to impact the present and future of the organization through feedback and evaluation. Organizational evaluation involves evaluating both organizational behavior and effectiveness. Leaders committed to elevating others understand that evaluation helps organizations improve efficiency and effectiveness. It enables organizations to assess whether or not the organization is reaching its goals, where improvements can be made, and how to increase efficiency and effectiveness. It also enables organizations to plan for the future, establish resources, and set policy and procedures.

CONCLUSION

As Millennial leaders emerge and seek to increase their effectiveness within a multi-generational workforce a clear strategy for leadership is necessary. These five steps will help Millennial leaders apply a transformational approach to leadership that capitalizes on their generational worldview and individual strengths. Because transformational leadership has an ethical and moral foundation it is a powerful strategy for Millennial leaders who want to establish their credibility, retain and engage a diverse team, increase their generational competence, foster a culture of learning and growth, and utilize mutual mentoring to elevate individuals in an age-friendly environment and multi-generational workplace.

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