



How to Keep Millennials Engaged and Productive in the Workplace

“The practice of identifying and developing people compounds the positives of your organization, because bringing out the best in a person is often a catalyst for bringing out the best in a team. Developing one person for leadership and success lays the foundation for developing others for success.”

- John C. Maxwell

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One of the most significant personnel challenges facing human resource leaders in business today is generational diversity. Millennials now make up the largest percentage of working Americans. With Baby Boomers retiring and Generation X workers not far behind, the core of the American workforce will soon be comprised of those *born after 1980*.

Jamie Gutfreund, chief strategy officer for the Intelligence Group¹, notes that 86 million Millennials will be in the workplace by 2020—representing a full **40% of the total working population**.² In his book *Fast Future: How the Millennial Generation is Shaping our World*³, David D. Bernstein describes the current generational wave that is revolutionizing the workplace: “Millennials are more global, more tolerant, more diverse, more educated, more connected, and bigger than any generation before them,” said Bernstein.

In other words, connecting with Millennial employees—*eventual leaders*—will determine the future of your business success.

What Do Millennials Want in a Job?

We hear a lot of speculation, and even criticism of Millennials about what they want in life, but what do they really want in a job? Intelligence Group studies of Millennials found that:

- 64% of them say it’s a priority for them to make the world a better place.
- 72% would like to be their own boss. But if they did work for a boss, 79% of them would want that boss to serve more as a coach or mentor.

¹ <https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-intelligence-group>. Accessed July 2016.

² Rob Asghar, “What Millennials Want in the Workplace (And why You Should Start Giving It to Them,” *Forbes.com*, January 13, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/robasghar/2014/01/13/what-millennials-want-in-the-workplace-and-why-you-should-start-giving-it-to-them/#3dcb620c2fdf>. Accessed July 2016.

³ David D. Bernstein, “*Fast Future: How the Millennial Generation is Shaping our World*,” Beacon Press: Boston, MA, 2013.

- 88% prefer a collaborative work-culture rather than a competitive one.
- 74% want flexible work schedules.
- 88% want “work-life integration,” because work and life now blend together inextricably.⁴

Millennials are, in essence, “venture consumers,” Gutfreund says. They don’t want to be another brick in the wall. They are searching for opportunities that will grant them purpose in a meaningful position. For Human Resource recruiters, it’s important to advocate within your company to create positions that appeal to these desires—and then to frame the job opportunities with messaging that appeals to what Millennials want.

For leaders from previous generations, this desire may seem like wishful thinking, but a little empathy from high-level leaders in a company can go a long way toward connecting with Millennials. Without this connection, the younger workforce will experience disengagement and chronically job-hop until they find a place of meaning.



BOTTOM LINE: If you ignore what Millennials want, you soon won’t be able to find and keep good employees.

A Gallup news report, “How Millennials Want to Work and Live” found that “Those born between 1980 and 1996 are the most likely to look for and change jobs...⁵” Another study shows ⁶ that an overwhelming majority of all workers—93%— left their employer the last time they changed roles. Only 7% took a new role in the same company.

Along these same lines, Dr. Brandon Rigoni and Amy Adkins wrote in *The Harvard Business Review*, “Millennials largely want the same things from their employers as most generations ... When organizations can provide these attributes, they may keep their millennial employees from continually searching for—and pursuing—the next best thing elsewhere.”⁷

⁴ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/robassghar/2014/01/13/what-millennials-want-in-the-workplace-and-why-you-should-start-giving-it-to-them/#271fdf732fdf>

⁵ <http://www.gallup.com/reports/189830/millennials-work-live.aspx>. Accessed July 2016.

⁶ J. Brandon Rigoni and Bailey Nelson, “When Making Career Moves Americans Switch Companies,” October 22, 2015, *Business Journal*, http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/186311/making-career-moves-americans-switch-companies.aspx?g_source=switch&g_medium=search&g_campaign=tiles. Accessed July 2016.

⁷ Brandon Rigoni and Amy Adkins, “What Millennials Want from a New Job,” *hbr.org*, May 11, 2016, <https://hbr.org/2016/05/what-millennials-want-from-a-new-job>.

5 Ways to Maximize Productivity for Millennials

Engaging and inspiring young workers takes initiative; however, **you can develop and motivate them to engage, achieve, and lead.** John C. Maxwell knows something about developing people. The founder of The John Maxwell Company, he is a #1 *New York Times* bestselling author, coach, and speaker who has sold more than 25 million books in fifty languages. Often called America's #1 leadership authority, Maxwell was identified as the #1 leader in business by the American Management Association® and the most influential leadership expert in the world by *Business Insider* and *Inc.* magazine in 2014.

Maxwell offers 5 things you can do to maximize productivity for millennial employees who want more from their jobs than previous generations—and the list begins *before* you hire them:

1. Recruit—Find the right people. You can't develop people without potential—no matter how hard you work at it. You can't ask a horse to climb a tree. It just isn't going to happen. If you want a potential tree climber, find a squirrel. If you want a potential leader, find someone with the traits of a good leader. When John Maxwell looks for potential leaders, he uses the four C's:

Chemistry — Character — Capacity — Contribution

2. Position—Place the right people in the right position. Even more than just recruiting good players, a leader must understand how those players best fit on the team. To do that he or she must have a clear picture of each person's strengths and weaknesses and how he or she fits the needs of the team. For that reason, using proven strengths and skills assessments as part of the hiring and screening process is essential. Positioning people correctly is a process, and you have to treat it that way. But if you don't do it, you will never help your people to reach their potential.

3. Model—Show Millennials how to lead. Some leaders make the same mistakes as some parents: they expect people to do as they *say* and not as they *do*. But here's the problem: *people do what people see*. If you want dedicated, thoughtful, productive people on your team, leadership must model those characteristics with integrity. Here are some key attributes leaders in the company should model in order to help people develop—and they are especially true for Millennials who are looking for genuineness:

- **Authenticity**—This is the *foundation* for developing people.
- **Servanthood**—This is the *soul* for developing people.
- **Growth**—This is the *measurement* for developing people.
- **Excellence**—This is the *standard* for developing people.
- **Passion**—This is the *fuel* for developing people.
- **Success**—This is the *purpose* for developing people.

4. Equip—Help Millennials do their jobs well. It's not enough simply to tell people what they need to do. That's *not* developing their potential. Instead, a leader must *help* them to do their jobs well. Millennials especially want leaders who will facilitate, rather than dictate. As Peter Drucker pointed out, "The largest single source of failed promotion is the failure to think through and help others to think through what a new job requires." How does a leader equip people to do their work and succeed at it?

Maxwell recommends a 5-step method to engage and teach millennials. Here's how it works:

- **Step 1**—I do it (*competence*).
- **Step 2**—I do it, and you are with me (*demonstration*).
- **Step 3**—You do it, and I am with you (*coaching*).
- **Step 4**—You do it (*empowerment*).
- **Step 5**—You do it, and someone else is with you (*reproduction*).

If your company adopts this simple but effective paradigm for training, not only will you equip leaders, you will begin teaching them how to equip others, which sets them up to be influential leaders themselves.

5. Develop—Teach Millennials how to succeed at work. One of the recurring things we hear from leaders in America who work with Millennials is how talented they are—and *how few soft skills they possess*. No matter what the cause may be, it is the responsibility of every company to factor this need into the hiring equation. To retain good employees, consider offering ways to empower them with the soft skills required to "do life" well. The Human Resource department in any company must rethink its role in light of this reality if it is going to keep Millennials engaged and productive.

3 Key Steps to Developing Millennials as Leaders

The Center for Creative Leadership has observed that three key steps drive leadership development: assess, challenge, and support. What do these things mean for leaders trying to develop Millennials?

1. Assess: Know their strengths—and their challenges. The days of trying to fit a square peg in a round hole are gone. Thank goodness, because such efforts were never effective, no matter how hard someone worked. By optimizing the assessment process in hiring, you can position Millennials—and all employees—to work in positions that suit their strengths. Likewise, given that Millennials want a boss who serves as a coach or mentor, leaders should always be on the lookout for a person's weaknesses and wrong thinking—not to exploit that person, but to strengthen and help him or her succeed in the context of a healthy work relationship.

2. Challenge: Ask leaders in your company to intentionally invigorate Millennials by inviting them to read books and engage online resources related to their areas of strength; attend conferences that will inspire them; take on new, challenging tasks in their sweet spot; practice difficult disciplines that slowly build character; or meet with you on a regular basis for mentoring. The idea is to challenge them in every area of their lives where they need improvement. Just be sure leaders build relationship and gain permission *before* starting the process.

3. Support: One of the great privileges of leading is helping new leaders navigate through life's difficulties. The primary way Maxwell does that is by allowing the people he mentors to request a personal meeting whenever they need it. When they meet, they drive the agenda by asking specific, difficult questions. Encourage leaders in your company to practice an open door policy as much as possible. Nothing will turn off a Millennial employee like being ignored or stonewalled when trying to engage. In this highly competitive workforce, your company cannot afford to ignore Millennials—or any employee—who asks for help. A closed-door approach will soon result in a job opening.

When someone becomes actively interested in developing them, Millennial employees become more engaged with that leader's goals. Millennials don't like to think of themselves as part of a monolithic company, but rather as part of a more granular team built on authentic relationships.

To develop Millennials as leaders, you and your company don't have to learn a brand new way of leading; you simply need to become more intentional about understanding, connecting, and developing. By doing this, you can foster a sense of community and meaning where victories are celebrated, gratitude is evident, and loyalty is shared. By making your workplace inviting for the next generation of leaders, you can multiply Millennial leaders who not only produce impressive results, but to empower impressive people across all generations.