

## What Matters Most In Managing Millennials? Communication



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- Where Millennials are concerned, employee engagement begins and ends with their manager's commitment to collaborative communication—frequency, intensity, substance, and style.

*By Dianna Booher*

Millennials, the largest generation in the U.S. population, represent one-third of the total U.S. population. Beyond their sheer numbers, at ages 20-34 in the current workforce,

their preferences, habits, and lifestyles are likely to affect how we do business for decades to come.

They are more connected to technology than previous generations, and according to research gathered and reported to the Council of Economic Advisers for their report published October 2014, a quarter of the Millennials think that their connection to technology is what makes them unique. Not only have they had constant access to technology because of its rapid development; the cost of access has dropped dramatically each year.

Millennials sleep with their cell phones nearby, they communicate about their personal lives with chats and photos to “friends” on social media, and they carry on a running text conversation with parents and friends throughout the day. Such has been their common practice.

So when they enter the workforce, what do they expect from a manager and their work culture?

### **Connection And Community With People Who Care**

Several studies done by Gallup and Pew among this generation report great degrees of closeness between Millennials and their parents—closeness that often extends into the workplace. Quality of life is a key goal for the Millennial generation. To them, that means staying close to family and friends, having plenty of free time for leisure activities, and being leaders in their communities and society.

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Translated to everyday practice, that means managers who want to engage these Millennials at work will need to:

- Communicate concern for people as individuals—not just as employees (showing interest in their families and activities outside of work)
- Practice excellent time-management in running your department or projects so that weekend work doesn't become “the norm”; otherwise, Millennials will burn out quickly and leave
- Plan frequent team get-togethers so that employees feel a sense of community and “family” and develop close friendships that provide contentment on the job

- Develop a personal communication style that demonstrates genuine caring (conversational, approachable, transparent, open, sincere versus aloof, secretive, arrogant, harsh, directive).



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## Opportunity For Input On Meaningful Projects Or Causes

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High school seniors today are more likely than past generations to state that making a contribution to society is important to them and that they want to be leaders in their communities. (Roughly

29 percent of Baby Boomers said the same thing; and 40 percent of Generation Xers reported the same aspirations in high school.)

On the other hand, “having an interesting job” or “career advancement” in and of itself is not as important to these Millennials. For them, contribution to something worthwhile is what counts.

In managing Millennials, supervisors would do well to:

- Help them see the big-picture—the substantial value/good their work contributes.
- Seek community projects that employees can “sponsor” as a team, department, or company.
- Allow time away from work for employees to participate in community projects and social causes.
- Be a role model by participating in community efforts.
- Offer leadership roles and mentoring opportunities in these projects—not just “spade” work tasks.

### **Creativity In Their Assignments**

More Millennials have a college degree than any other generation. What’s more, in 2013, 47 percent of 25 to 34-year-olds earned a postsecondary degree (either associates, bachelor’s or graduate degree). Yes, this rising education level can be 1) an obvious response to their seeing the income differences between the college-educated and the less-educated, 2) the lowered opportunity cost of getting more schooling in a tough job market and 3) expanded financial aid to lower-income students.

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But another change shows up under the education microscope: The degrees they earn. Millennials are much more likely to earn degrees outside the typical education, liberal arts, business, and healthcare fields (the predominant choices by Baby Boomers and Gen Xers). Instead, Millennials have preferred degrees in the social science or applied fields—like communications, criminal justice, engineering and library science.

So what does this wider variety say to managers in today's workplace? Millennials have diverse interests and backgrounds to bring to their workplace as well. From my personal circle of friends and family, here are a few examples: After her internship at a law firm, Anna, at age 23, has just accepted a clerking position for a Federal Judge, with her goal to become a Supreme Court Justice. Courtney, at 21, wants to supervise riding stables and currently competes in and teaches dressage. An electrical engineering graduate, Dave, at 32, owns a general contracting firm, building high-end homes.

To manage such ambitious, creative Millennials as these in your workforce, engagement means

- Giving workers opportunity to explore their varied interests

- Allowing freedom to shape how a task gets done—as long as the outcome meets appropriate standards
- Collaborating with them to hear their creative ideas on a project or assignment (ways to save money, make money, improve operations, increase customer satisfaction, improve the product or service itself)
- Offering opportunities to develop their skills with formal and informal training and mentoring programs

## **Frequent Feedback On Their Performance And Ideas**

The majority of Millennials have stayed in closer contact with their parents than any other generation. According to Pew Research (2014), in 1965, fathers spent 2.5 hours and mothers spent 10.2 hours per week with their children. In 2011, fathers spent 7.3 hours and mothers spent 13.5 hours with their children—a 60 percent increase in time with parents.

The bond has held, with young adult Millennials staying closely bound to their parents, texting often and preferring to live and work nearby. Based on the reported preferences and facts identified in the PEW research, Gallup research, and The Council of Economic Advisers (Executive Office of the President), we can safely assume that such closeness includes frequent communication about their personal plans, schedules, activities, and ideas.

In the workplace, these Millennials expect similar communication patterns from their manager or supervisor. If the communication is infrequent, inconsistent, or lacking in warmth, these young workers often wonder:

- How am I doing in my job?
- Is there something I should do differently?
- Why is there no direction coming from my boss? Does silence mean I have failed or disappointed him/her?
- Should I leave?

Where Millennials are concerned, employee engagement begins and ends with their manager's commitment to collaborative communication—frequency, intensity, substance, and style.

**Dianna Booher** is the bestselling author of 46 books. Her latest books include *What More Can I Say? Why Communication Fails and What to Do About It*; *Creating Personal Presence: Look, Talk, Think, and Act Like a Leader*; and *Communicate With Confidence*. For more information, please see [www.BooherResearch.com](http://www.BooherResearch.com), [www.WhatMoreCanISayTheBook.com](http://www.WhatMoreCanISayTheBook.com) and @diannaboohier.

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