

The Next Generation: How to Effectively Manage Millennials





Introduction

It's all about the team.

Today, it seems like everyone is up-in-arms in one way or another about millennials.

Now that they are the majority of the U.S. workforce, employers are looking at how this new generation of employees will change businesses everywhere with much anticipation — and some nervousness.¹

Given the already high employee turnover rate in the restaurant industry, it's critical to increase efforts to retain millennial workers, especially since only half of all millennials plan to still be working for their current employer a year from now.²

But 66 percent of millennials see themselves in a management position of some sort within ten years (with 28 percent reporting they already are).³

This tension between generations and their expectations for the workplace is nothing new, but there are ways to approach your younger staff that can result in better leadership for your restaurant down the line.



**Hiring managers
say that it's difficult
to find and retain
millennial employees.**



Who are millennials really?

Are millennials really all that different from those that came before them in the Gen X and baby boomer generations? In some fundamental ways, not at all. The goals of the millennial employee — which can broadly encompass anyone between

18 and 35 — are not really all that different than those of their older, more seasoned colleagues.

Like any employee, they want managers that support them, they want to be recognized as successful, and they want to move up the ladder as time goes on. How millennials today will reach these three goals, however, is different than the rest of the current workforce.

Motivation isn't the issue with millennials. They are characteristically highly motivated and highly adaptable to new and unfamiliar situations. But like anyone else early in their career, they need clear and concise direction. Don't assume they understand unspoken rules or conventions your older staff may take as a given.

Along those lines, **here are five ways to foster better work results** — and ultimately, stronger leadership — from your millennial employees.

As young professionals, millennials:

- Have less on-the-ground business knowledge.
- Spend less time with any one employer (although take note: even older professionals are embracing mid-career shifts and more frequent moves).
- Want to distinguish themselves uniquely from their peers — perhaps the most important difference of all.



1. Let them learn how they learn best.

Once upon a time, employees entering the workforce took a steadily prescribed path toward acquiring their first job. Business majors went into business. Marketing majors took marketing jobs. Culinary school graduates moved right into prep or line cook positions. Basic off-the-job knowledge came from reading books and manuals, or through formal training like classes or seminars. That's not how millennials are used to learning.

Today, millennial employees enter the business world from all manner of backgrounds and disciplines. But said backgrounds also bring a diverse set of influences to the work that they do, and those influences are even more diversified by their primary path to knowledge: the Internet. As the first generation who grew up exclusively in the Internet age, millennials have a unique propensity for using technology to learn and manage their lives.

To manage these young professionals effectively, you have to let them do that. As a manager, you have to be patient with your millennial employees and realize that they will not learn the way you have learned. And that's OK. You'll get better results leaning into technology in training your millennial employees, even if it feels more comfortable to rally against it.





2. Show them technology isn't everything.

That said, a supportive manager needs to get their millennial employees to see past technology and envision the bigger picture. It takes more than technology to grow your business. It takes an understanding of financial profit and loss, and how the behaviors of real people impact your bottom line.

communicate. Let them do the research and discover for themselves what makes others tick.

The results will be much more easily incorporated into their thought process — and behavior — going forward.

It takes more than technology to grow your business.

It may be difficult at first for millennials to understand how to speak or market to your customer base (or others in your organization) when it's not to those in their own age bracket. They too need to build tolerance for how other people learn and





3. Set a professional tone.

Setting the tone in how to speak and dress professionally is very important for your entire staff, especially as we have seen casualness in the workplace grow over the past few years. Millennials have grown up with baby boomer parents that encouraged them to treat everyone equally and fairly; and they have heard from baby boomer managers that they should want to break down bureaucracy in the workplace.

This is absolutely a positive when combating workplace discrimination, but it has also resulted in an atmosphere of no boundaries something that ironically raises the hackles of baby boomer managers in particular.

There is a need, no matter how casual the workplace, to respect your company's corporate culture. Open door policies, very popular among sincerely well-meaning managers, don't mean employees shouldn't respect authoritative boundaries.

Cultivating a healthy respect for hierarchy, while still encouraging both collaboration and offering ideas from the bottom up, can help millennials understand and aspire to higher levels of management.





4. Foster stronger communication skills.

Above all else, just be direct and clear in your expectations for professionalism, through your words and your own behavior as well.

As a generation that grew up communicating just as much (if not more) online than off, millennials may need more direction in how to express their ideas clearly — and diplomatically. Encourage your staff to meet face-to-face over issues rather than over text or email, particularly as problems become more and more complex.

Reading non-verbal body language and intonation will be a critical learning curve for many millennial employees, and it's important for them to recognize that formal presentations to clients, staff, or their managers, are just that — formal. Understanding that is key to earning the respect of their older peers over time.

It's also critical as a manager to offer cues on how to handle difficult situations. If your staff always sees you running around from one disaster to another in a panic, they'll have more trouble modeling calm behavior in a crisis.





5. Teach them patience.

Give your aspiring millennial employee opportunities to manage crisis communication and present in front of an audience. Positive, but critical, feedback will ensure they improve and adapt over time.

We learn from failure and innovate as a result.

Millennials have to learn to trust the system, which can be a challenge. They have been conditioned to believe the system is always going to fail, and sometimes it does — or they do.

The perception that millennials entered the workforce during a time when jobs were harder to find is pervasive, although historically inaccurate. But millennials have

come into the restaurant industry with greater education (although not always from culinary programs) and expecting higher, more stable wages than previous entry-level workers.

But these perceptions do have a tangible result: worrying about making a mistake is directly connected to worrying about the state of their employment.


It's important to ensure your millennial employees — those future leaders of your business — know that failure is OK. We learn from failure and innovate as a result. It's how we grow in our career path and do better next time.

Endnotes

¹ "Millennials surpass Gen Xers as the largest generation in U.S. labor force" – Pew Research Center; pewresearch.org

² "3 Trends That Will Disrupt Your Workplace Forever" – Gallup.com

³ *ibid.*



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