

Managing and Leading Millennials
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ABSTRACT

Millennials grew up with cell phones, laptops, internet access, and a highly socially-networked world that has become increasing smaller. Millennials send over 50 texts per day! They grew up being told they are “special” and as a result tend to be confident, entitled, and sometimes even narcissistic. 50% of millennials consider themselves politically unaffiliated, job satisfaction matters more than monetary compensation, and work-life balance is considered essential. So, how do we as project managers engage, motivate, and lead millennials? The answers might surprise you.

In this presentation we will first review studies of worker motivation that have been conducted for decades and then use those findings to consider ideas to truly motivate a typical millennial. We’ll discuss how to apply servant leadership principles to embrace young people, help them grow, and exploit their values on morality and ethics in the work place. Finally, we’ll explain a modern-day management model called **Results Only Work Environment (ROWE)** that is under experiment by employers such as Best Buy, GAP, and even the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

PAPER

Millennials have grown up with cell phones, laptops, internet access, and a highly socially-networked world. They grew up being told they are “special” and as a result tend to be confident, entitled, and sometimes even narcissistic. 50% of millennials consider themselves politically unaffiliated, job satisfaction matters more than monetary compensation, and work-life balance is considered essential. So, how do we as project managers engage, motivate, and lead millennials? The answers might surprise you.

Steven Covey said “you must first seek to understand, then to be understood”. So, let’s first look at the findings of traditional studies on motivation and morale building. These studies have been around since post World-War II and the findings are generally consistent: a solid team-member is passionate, confident and wants to make a difference. The Happy Carpenter demonstrates this below:



Sir Richard Branson, the English billionaire, business magnate, entrepreneur and philanthropist said “.. If you find people who are fun, friendly, caring and love helping others, you are onto a winner...” You’d think he would look for the most technically competent people on the planet but he understands that people with a passion to improve the common good should serve as the foundation of his workforce. Most of us baby-boomers spent our entire career trying to find our passion and confidence in the work we do. We’ve worked for organizations and employers thinking if we simply work hard and demonstrate commitment we will always have a home. No way Jose!

Now, let’s look at millennials and how they were raised. I’m the fathers of 7 children and 1 son-in-law, all between the ages of 23-31 (4 from my first marriage and 3 step children from my second). We’ve had more than our share of millennial moments in my house! Like many baby-boomer parents, we told our children they were special and unique in their own way. Educators told us that children with a high degree of self-esteem learn faster, better and even enjoy school. We encouraged our kids to embrace school and participate in athletics and other extra-curriculum activities to help build their confidence and prove to themselves that they had skills and expertise. Yes, we have a closet full of trophies!

We weren’t alone, many parents did the same thing, and you know what? **IT WORKED!** Our kids, and young people around the nation entered the work force as free thinkers, confident, passionate, comfortable with technology, and ready to conquer the world!



Sound familiar? Millennials “show up” with all the right attitude traits found in great team members! Why are we all so surprised when we raised them to have those traits! The problem is that we as leaders and managers are simply overwhelmed by millennials. We expect them to earn those traits the hard way, just like we did. We want them to listen, learn and do as their told! This is a recipe for failure because millennials aren’t afraid to “take their ball and go home”. They need to be stimulated at all times.

Don’t fret, all is not lost! We certainly can’t give up the ship because the deck hands think differently than we do. Let’s explore some tips in working with and encouraging our millennial workforce:

- Consider delegating creative activities that they can handle. Let them run with these tasks, set the expectation and encourage them to come back to you with questions. Hold them accountable if they fail but use a coaching style not a dictatorial style.
- If you’re an autocratic leader then be prepared for turnover of your millennial staff. They don’t respond like robots and won’t engage with a manager that dictates. They want to be heard and taken seriously, so listen to them, ask questions, engage with them. Remember their showing signs of a great team member.
- Remind your millennial staff that although you appreciate their enthusiasm and confidence they may have to slow down. Tell them you’d like to “pick up” where their parents and teachers left off. You too can provide them with guidance, learning and opportunities to grow in their careers. Millennials that refuse this offer may have to find another place to work.
- Consider sending them text messages with simple tasks you want them to do. This will save you time and it’s a communications medium they embrace and understand.
- Never allow cell phones into your meetings. Your millennial staff is still competing in a world that values good old-fashioned face to face communications and they have to learn to build relationships this way. 7% of communications is the words we use and the remainder is non-verbal in nature. They may be mis-communicating if their always sending texts.
- Encourage don’t discourage. Celebrate positive approaches to getting work done as well as results.

There are other options being considered to engage millennials, especially in public service. The Office of Personnel Management, Best Buy, and GAP are experimenting with an innovated management model called the **Results Only Work Environment (ROWE)**. “ROWE it is all about fostering a performance-based work culture that is laser focused on results, productivity, and efficiency”. In summary ROWE is a management strategy where employees are evaluated on performance, not presence. Managers focus on results and only results – increasing the organization’s

performance while cultivating the right environment for people to manage all the demands in their lives...including work.”

Whatever approach you buy-into, millennials are our future and I believe they will improve our future. They're civic minded, environmentally conscious, believe in work-life balance, and committed to making a difference in everything they do. I think we taught them well.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joseph (Joe) D. Launi, PMP is the President of Project Management Experts (PME) which provides project management, leadership, and strategic and business management training. They specialize in supporting federal agencies and contractors. Mr. Launi is a proven project management executive with over 30 years of progressive experience encompassing: project management office (PMO) leadership; development and management of PMO policies, best practices, and methodologies; development and presentation of project management training; implementation of project management software solutions; information technology project and program oversight; and research and development into motivation and morale building programs. He has lead numerous consulting practice areas.

Mr. Launi has published numerous works in areas such as software implementation, project planning, and team motivation. PME specializes in providing organizations with the skills, knowledge, and experience needed to improve their project management competency.