

NOT YOUR GRANDMA'S MENTORING PROGRAM:

TIPS & STRATEGIES FOR MENTORING MILLENNIALS



A THOUGHT PAPER BY MANAGEMENT MENTORS

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Introduction

Every generation has its own label—Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z—and accompanying characteristics, both good and bad. Of course, members of the younger generations, especially those new to the workforce, often find themselves on the short end of the bad-characteristic stick. People are quick to point out the newer generation’s flaws while waxing poetic about the good and honorable older ones.

This, of course, is part of life. Someday, Millennials and Gen. Z “kids” will be doing the same thing to the generations that come after them. In the meantime, however, we all need to find a way to live in harmony. Building bridges between generations, especially in the workplace, is essential.

This leads us to the topic for today’s white paper: how to mentor Millennials. As people evolve, so do the methods for training, leading, and mentoring these people. If your organization finds itself with an influx of Millennials (those typically born between 1980 and 2000; also known as Gen. Y), then how you approach mentoring will and should be different from how you did it ten years ago.

This white paper will serve as a guide.

Choose a Mentoring Model That Makes Sense for Millennials

Bloomberg Businessweek published an article in March 2013 called "[The Misery of Mentoring Millennials](#)." While we don't think the title is productive to the conversation, the article made some valid points, including the fact that this younger generation favors a team approach. Instead of seeking one person to guide her on her career path, the Millennial worker prefers having a group of people to turn to, choosing the person who best fits whatever scenario the Millennial is dealing with in that particular moment.

The article goes on to note that members of the younger workforce gravitate towards more egalitarian forms of mentoring as well, where everyone is considered equal rather than "senior" or "junior." They also prefer conducting these mentoring moments in more casual settings, including virtual ones.

Given this, the "traditional" one-to-one model might not be the best fit for an organization that's mentoring Millennials. (The one-to-one model pairs a senior member of the organization [the mentor] with a newer member [the mentee] for nine to twelve months.)

And some point out that it's not just Millennials who would benefit from a different approach. The authors of an article appearing in *The Wall Street Journal* called "[A New Approach to Mentoring](#)" state that, "The traditional mentoring arrangement just doesn't work anymore. A single senior colleague can't possibly keep up with all the changes in the fast-moving world of work." The authors go on to say a better approach is developing a network of people who can offer mentoring support. "Think of it as your personal board of directors."

So how does a person go about creating a network? And what are viable alternatives to the one-to-one model? There are two other models to consider: group mentoring and situational mentoring (or what we call "[Anytime Mentoring](#)," based on our software product of the same name).



- **Group Mentoring.** In this model, there's one mentor for a group of mentees (anywhere from three to eight). This resembles the team approach where mentees not only learn from the mentor, but also one another. The meetings themselves are a bit more casual, just by virtue of the fact the spotlight isn't placed on one individual. Instead, all of the mentees in the group share the spotlight.

- **Situational Mentoring.** In this model, a mentee seeks out a mentor for a specific task. For example, perhaps the mentee wants to work on his public speaking skills. He might seek out the organization's PR director for some guidance in this area. Situational mentoring is short term, hyper-specific, and akin to coaching.

So what should you do if you've been running a successful one-to-one mentoring program, but now you're starting to see more and more Millennials enter your organization? Consider a hybrid solution. Continue offering your formal one-to-one program but also offer a situational mentoring option. Then, let the Millennials themselves choose the model they're most comfortable with. Be aware that some Millennials might want to be involved with both programs. They might like the idea of having one dedicated mentor ([studies suggest they still value mentors](#)) and having access to other people who can coach them in specific areas, when needed.

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Keep track of activity as well. Your one-to-one program might eventually phase out, and that's OK. Mentoring people—nurturing them professionally and personally in a safe, open, and honest setting—will always be important. How someone is mentored will change and evolve, as we're seeing with Millennials, [but there will always be a need for some form of mentoring](#).

By the way, if the thought of adjusting methods and investing in new ones has people in your organization squawking about the budget, think about this: the cost of recruiting a Millennial employee costs \$6000 while [the cost of replacing that employee costs \\$24,000](#). (And those are based on figures from 2008; the cost is likely more than that in 2014 dollars.) And guess what? Studies suggest Millennials seek organizations that show their commitment to training and developing their employees. A PwC survey from 2011 called "[Millennials at Work: Reshaping the Workplace](#)" reveals that training and development programs trump cash bonuses when it comes to Millennials evaluating an organization's perks and benefits.

Re-think Communication (But Don't Sell Your Soul)

In a formal mentoring relationship, mentors and mentorees work together anywhere from nine to twelve months, so agreeing how mentors and mentorees will communicate with one another is an important point to discuss early on, ideally during the first meeting.

But even in group mentoring or situational mentoring models, mentors and mentorees obviously need to communicate with one another, so the issue of communication is still relevant, regardless of the model.

The key is flexibility (in any mentoring relationship, not just one involving Millennials). Millennials text, tweet, Instagram, and communicate in a dozen other ways (at least). They're big fans of technology. In fact, ["41% say they prefer to communicate electronically at work than face to face or even over the telephone."](#) Boomers and Gen X-ers shouldn't be surprised if Millennials schedule, confirm, or even cancel a meeting via text. They shouldn't be offended either. While it might be easy to think a text is too informal for professional communication, Millennials don't view it that way—they see it as efficient.

That said, it's not fair to dismiss, out of hand, professional protocols that have been in place and generally accepted for years. Some senior mentors might not be comfortable communicating regularly via text, for example. Should they have to accommodate for their Millennial mentorees' proclivity for text messaging?

There's no one right or wrong answer here. It depends on the two individuals (or more, in the case of a group setting) who are involved in the mentoring relationship. Honest communication is essential, as is the willingness for both sides to compromise and respect where the other person is coming from. Perhaps for meeting confirmations, you agree that texting is OK. But for anything involving more serious matters, email or phone calls are preferred.

Regardless of what's decided, "face time" should still be a major component of any mentoring relationship. All mentoring models need and benefit from face time, so it's important not to let the relationship, no matter what the model is, devolve into a purely virtual one.

Being physically present is essential to successful mentoring, because mentors and mentorees learn so much from reading body language and nonverbal gestures. Also, meeting in person helps ground the relationship and the entire experience in reality, not a string of texts and tweets, which is important. That said, we do believe it's possible to carry on a successful relationship through a medium like Skype since the essential face-to-face



component still exists. And who knows? Maybe in twenty years we'll be able to beam holograms of ourselves to different locations.

Bottom line: mentors should be open to nontraditional forms of communication, but neither mentors nor Millennial mentorees should compromise on face time.

Communication, of course, goes beyond the devices used to set up meetings. It involves the words people use to convey ideas to one another. Keep in mind that language evolves just like anything else. Words that might have been considered innocent enough ten or twenty years ago may develop new connotations over time. Take the word "advice," for example. According to an article in *Forbes* titled ["Warren Buffet Wants to Be Your Mentor,"](#) focus group research revealed that "Millennial women say the word 'advice' feels belittling." The piece goes on to say that, as a result, one organization re-named its advice-oriented stories as simply "articles."

Another point with Millennials: [they want and value frequent feedback.](#) Traditional one-to-one models where the pairs meet for an hour once a month or every other week might not provide enough contact that Millennials crave. While daily interactions aren't feasible for most people, especially those in upper management, offering to provide more casual check-ins could prove beneficial. This is where a senior member might need to adjust his or her approach just a bit, but could experience positive results by doing so. For example, if the mentor is working with a Millennial mentoree, sending a quick text asking the mentoree how her presentation went provides the regular contact the Millennial craves yet doesn't disrupt the boundaries of the mentoring relationship. In other words, it's an easy compromise.

Embrace the Millennial Generation

Businesses that want to remain competitive and succeed in the long-term need to embrace this newer generation of employee. As the PwC Survey points out, it's not really a choice: "Millennials matter because they are not only different from those that have gone before, they are also more numerous than any since the soon-to-retire Baby Boomer generation—millennials already form 25% of the workforce in the US and account for over half of the population in India. By 2020, millennials will form 50% of the global workforce."

Does this mean you need to revise your entire organization right now? Of course not. No one is suggesting that. What is being suggested is that organizations—and the people within them—remain aware of the changes that are occurring, including the shifts in language and cultural mores.

[Learn from companies that are doing things right in attracting and retaining Millennial talent.](#) Engage the Millennials already in your organization and ask them what they want and what they're looking for. Subscribe to print and online publications that discuss Millennial issues.

To the last point, here are ones we recommend:

- [Chief Learning Officer Magazine](#)
- [The Harvard Business Review Blog Network](#)
- [Larissa Faw](#), contributor to Forbes who writes regularly about Millennials, among other topics
- [Talent Management Magazine](#)
- [Workforce Development Blog from ASTD](#)
- [Our blog: Business Mentoring Matters](#)



Understand that Mentoring Isn't Dead... for Millennials or Anyone Else



Mentoring, at its core, is a humble philosophy. Simply put, mentoring involves nurturing and encouraging another person in a way that allows the person to transform and grow in order to reach his or her full potential.

Mentoring has taken place since the beginning of time. (The word “mentor” comes from Greek mythology.) And it will continue long after the Millennial generation becomes the “old” generation and a new one with new ways and new challenges enters the workforce.

The way we mentor will continue to evolve, as it has, and as it should. But the concept of mentoring is one that will stand the test of time. And that’s a good thing.

About Management Mentors

For over two decades, [Management Mentors](http://www.management-mentors.com) has been designing and implementing world-class business mentoring programs and helping companies attract and retain high potential employees. Based outside of Boston, Mass., Management Mentors’ corporate mentoring programs develop future leaders and create a more diverse workforce by removing the barriers to equal opportunity. Management Mentors has achieved a 90% success rate with pairs it matches using a thoughtful, proven process. Current and past clients include Enterprise Rent-A-Car, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, The New York Times Corporation, The City of Tallahassee, Cooper Tire, FedEx Kinkos, Quaker Oats, Schering Plough, TJX Corporation, and Sony Music Corporation. For more information on how your firm can enjoy greater success through mentoring, contact us at 617.789.4622 or visit us at www.management-mentors.com.



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