



Let's Take the Mystery Out of Training Millennials

These actionable tips will make training more effective.

By Evan Hackel

“What’s the best way to train millennials?” That’s probably the question that training professionals hear more often than any other today.

To those of us born before 1980 — the year when the first millennials came into the world — the answer to that question can seem mysterious and complex. We look at millennials and see a group of young people who seem addicted to texting on their phones, who sometimes seem skeptical about the lessons we want to teach them, and who are prone to changing jobs frequently.

That’s what we see, or what we *think* we see. But do these rough observations really reflect who millennials are? Do they offer useful insights on how millennials should be trained?

The answer is, not really. So let’s decode the millennial mindset more strategically and see what we can learn about how to train them effectively.

Meet the Millennial Cohort

The so-called millennial generation (also called “generation Y”) includes people born between 1980 and 1998. Many older millennials, now in their 30s, are already established in their careers. It’s likely that a number of them are already working throughout the ranks of your organization. They’ve already taken part in your training, maybe even *designed* parts of your training, and you probably understand their learning preferences better than you might first expect. Another factor to consider is that some of the millennials who work for you are currently training your other millennials. So while you might think you don’t understand them, you likely do.

What Are Their Key Traits?

Let’s focus on younger working millennials. Chances are they’re the group that’s causing you to feel the most uncertainty regarding training. They’re young and fresh-

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faced and new to the working world. If you're a generation or two older than they are, you may have hit some roadblocks when creating training programs that work well for them.

Although generalizations tend to be flawed, here are some attitudes that training professionals have found to be shared by significant members of this cohort:

An entrepreneurial mindset. Millennials want to stake out an identity and space for themselves, even in larger organizations.

Risk tolerance. Not only are they confident risk-takers, but they're happy to help their employers take systematic chances too.

A love of technology. Millennials are highly mobile and like to access information and training on smartphones and tablets.

Social consciousness. They tend to be compassionate and respond positively to working for organizations that embrace social causes.

Openness. Many of those in the millennial generation welcome being part of a diverse workforce. Furthermore, they're more welcoming of alternative lifestyles than preceding generations were.

Career mobility. Your assumptions that millennials are job-hoppers could be correct. Many don't hesitate to change jobs as a way to achieve personal goals.

Critical Steps to Take when Training Millennials

Here are some ways to make your training more compelling and effective with younger millennial workers:

Deliver lessons and modules in short “digestible” chunks that millennials can absorb swiftly. They're generally fast-moving and quick to tune out as soon as training seems irrelevant.

Use animations, videos, and other moving images to deliver key concepts. Images often work better than words or text to convey important take-away concepts to millennials.

Provide training on platforms that millennials prefer and already use, including smartphones and tablets. Remember, millennials grew up using mobile devices.

Ask for their ideas and suggestions before and during training, because millennials think like entrepreneurs, value autonomy, and like to shape the content of their jobs.

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Express your organizational values in your training. You can explain, for example, that your organization is trying to support employees and do good in the world. When millennials see that their work supports those objectives, they'll want to continue working for you in the long term.

Remember that Training Fundamentals Still Apply

Don't let the fact that you're training millennials worry you. Even though they may differ in some ways from your other trainees, the fundamentals of all good training still apply. That means knowing who your trainees are and what they do, understanding the results you want to achieve, identifying metrics to measure before and after training, and delivering information in empowering and interesting ways. No matter who you're training, those principles still apply. So be brave about training your millennial newcomers, go out, and get the job done. 

*Evan Hackel is the CEO of Tortal Training (tortal.net), an executive coach, speaker, and author of *Engaging Leadership: A New Approach to Leading that Builds Excellence and Organizational Success*. Tortal Training specializes in developing interactive e-learning solutions to make effective training easier by specializing in engagement. As CEO, Evan promotes the *Engagement philosophy*, which has helped countless organizations create a culture of partnership and common purpose to drive success.*

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