



# Why You Absolutely Must Train Millennials

**Training leads to higher productivity for everyone – but especially for the millennial generation.**

*By Evan Hackel*

**W**hen baby boomers took their first “real” jobs upon entering the workforce, their demands and expectations were ridiculously low by today’s standards. On their first day on the job they got an employee handbook that they took home and scanned while eating dinner or watching TV. Training, if there was any, was minimal.

For the most part, they accepted the idea that it was normal to feel ignorant and unskilled in the first weeks or months on a new job. They expected to learn the ropes by making mistakes.

When it came to promotions, most boomers were equally willing to proceed by trial and error. Nobody told them, “Here’s what you need to do to get ahead in our organization” or “Here’s the next position we’ll be considering you for.” One day in the hazy future, they hoped that their bosses would call them in and say, “We just gave you a promotion.”

Was there feedback? Of course, there was. There were quarterly, semiannual, or yearly job reviews that usually followed the script, “Here’s what you’ve been doing wrong, here’s where you need to improve; so do it, session over.”

In short, many baby boomers were happy to toil away in black boxes, learning jobs and building careers in a loose way that would seem absurd to the members of today’s millennial workforce.

## **Millennials Have Far Different Expectations & Demands**

Boy, have things changed. Today, most millennial workers would object strenuously to what baby boomers (and members of the generation that preceded them) thought was normal. If millennials discover such conditions, they’ll be looking for new jobs in a matter of hours.

Ample research shows that millennial attitudes are different. One major study from Gallup, “How Millennials Want to Work and Live,” reports these findings:

**60% of millennials** say that the opportunity to learn and grow on the job is extremely important. In contrast, only 40% of baby boomers feel the same way.

**“Training can do much more than teaching skills.”**

## **“Use training to give millennials the things they long for.”**

**50% of millennials** strongly agree that they plan to remain in their jobs for at least the next year. That might sound like a big percentage, but 60% of members of all other groups plan to stay in place for at least a year. Baby boomers and others are planning on sticking around, while millennials are weighing their options.

### **Learning & Training Are Key to Engaging & Retaining Millennials**

Findings like those – and you can easily find more – document that millennials are more likely to stay on their jobs and be productive workers if they have opportunities to plan their career paths and learn. Here are the trends:

**It's important for millennials to feel capable and confident in their jobs.** They hate feeling like rookies. Many think of themselves as leaders – or as leaders who are waiting to be discovered. They want to look good, and they thrive on being able to confidently contribute from the first day they arrive on the job. The right kind of training – for both new and current millennial employees – makes that happen.

**Millennials are usually skilled students.** They like to apply the learning skills they built while they were in school. To them, learning feels as natural as eating three meals a day. As the Gallup study found, they're eager to learn. In contrast, getting baby boomers to believe in training can be a hard sell. They tend to view training as a burden, something they have to endure. Millennials say, “Wow, when can I start?”

**Millennials are tech-friendly.** Most of them love to be trained on their mobile phones and tablets, which are the most powerful training options available to many organizations today. The result is better knowledge transfer, even to groups of employees who work in multiple or far-flung locations. Baby boomers, in contrast, are more tech-resistant. They're likely to freeze and resist when they hear they're going to be taking training on their smartphones.

### **Training Is the Place to Build Productivity**

A lot of training focuses on teaching needed skills. It should. But training can accomplish a lot more than that, if you use it to establish some of the following things that many millennials are looking for:

**They want mentoring relationships with their supervisors.** Gallup found that 60% of millennials feel that the quality of the people who manage them is extremely important. With that in mind, set up mentoring, not reporting, relationships between employees and their

managers. Explain how often check-ins and job reviews will happen and what they'll cover. And schedule frequent check-ins rather than “on the calendar” pro-forma reviews that people find boring, or worse.

**They're seeking a sense of belonging on an innovative team.** Millennials expect to be part of an interesting team. Letting them get to know their teammates during training, and fostering a sense of group identity, can help convince them that they've joined the right organization.

**They like to know their next steps as they build their careers.** Consider creating a personalized career development plan for all new employees (the exception being seasonal or other short-term workers who will probably not remain with your organization for long). Another idea? Enroll new employees in management training programs from their first days on the job. Millennials are looking for a well-defined career path, and training is a fine place to provide that for them.

Millennials are the most energized, skilled, and capable generation ever to enter the workforce. Train them well and they'll become your organization's brightest future. 

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### **More on Millennials in the Workplace**

For more information on motivating millennials (and others) through training, see articles such as these at NonprofitWorld.org:

**Take Your Training into Your Hands** (Vol. 29, No. 6)

**Three Steps for Getting the Most from Millennials**  
(Vol. 34, No. 4)

**Motivate Workers with Training Opportunities** (Vol. 33, No. 3)

**Manage for Today, Mentor for Tomorrow** (Vol. 23, No. 5)

**Let's Take the Mystery Out of Training Millennials**  
(Vol. 36, No. 1)

**What Makes a Great Team?** (Vol. 32, No. 6)

**How to Present Training Workshops that Educate and Inspire** (Vol. 29, No. 4)

**Tapping into the Next Generation** (Vol. 37, No. 3)