



# MILLENNIALS



## Three Steps for Getting the Most from Millennials

Millennials have entered the workforce en masse, and many organizations are still struggling to incorporate them. Here are concrete steps to make the transition easier.

**By Kate Zabriskie**

***“Did you see what she wore to work today? What was she thinking? This is an organization, not a club!”***

***“How does he not know to bring a notebook and a pen to a meeting? Do I have to tell him everything?”***

***“What would make her think it was okay to party with the clients until three in the morning? Does this woman have no understanding of boundaries?”***

***“Did you know his mother called HR to find out when he would be getting a raise? Unbelievable!”***

If you have new hires fresh out of school in your workplace, some of that may have a familiar ring.

So what’s happening? Are these new hires just bad employees? Are you just unlucky? Probably not.

Rather, the source of the surprises most likely has to do with the lack of training related to workplace expectations. Before you say, “But they should know,” don’t waste your breath. Maybe they should know, but they don’t. New hires are called new hires for a reason. They are freshly minted employees who don’t know much about the workplace because most of them haven’t been in it that long.

As someone with more experience than the people you hire, you have a responsibility to get them off to a good start. By consistently following three steps, you can short-circuit many of the problems people encounter when they start working with new hires, especially millennials.

### Step One: Understand something about them.

Millennials as a generation are different from those who have come before them. More than a few still live at home and don’t plan on leaving soon. Besides, if they borrowed money for school, they may already owe as much as what amounts to a mortgage. That doesn’t mean they’re clueless about life outside of the nest, but their circumstances are probably very different from yours at the same age.

Next, you must understand these people grew up surrounded by ever-present technology and in an era of instant answers. Sure, you may have had an Atari or Nintendo, but it’s not the same thing. They have always had Google. They’re used to being able to find information and find it quickly. Raised in an era of parents as friends and answers at their fingertips,

**“It’s challenging to work with new hires, especially those from a vastly different generation.”**

“When the parade of fashion crimes starts, you’ll have no one to blame but yourself.”

many of them have no problem questioning authority. In the workplace, you may see a new hire ask questions and interact with senior leaders in ways you don’t expect. Maybe you already have.

Another difference between millennials and other generations is how they view praise. As children, this generation of people played on sports teams where everyone received a trophy just for showing up. They were also rewarded and recognized with ribbons and certificates at school for being polite, having integrity, and displaying common courtesy. Millennials expect lots of feedback larded with praise.

Longevity in an organization is another difference between this generation and others. Years ago, it was a major taboo to job jump or have gaps on a resume. These days, you’ll find that this generation will gladly take six months off to go hiking along the Appalachian Trail or volunteering somewhere overseas. Strangers to delayed gratification, they aren’t saving those activities for retirement, and they don’t expect to spend a lifetime with an organization. Instead of pretending that millennials will be part of your team for a decade or more, look for ways to make the most of the time you have together while they are.

### Step Two: Spell out everything.

Assume nothing. Take workplace dress, for example. There was a time not too long ago when women wore hose to work and wouldn’t consider crossing the office threshold in open-toed shoes. That was then. These days, if you offer no guidance, some will come to work in footwear you wouldn’t wear outside your house. And when the parade of fashion crimes starts, you’ll have no one to blame but yourself. You need to tell people that, contrary to what they may see online or in a magazine, the flip-flop is not the new Ferragamo.

Once you’ve thought about the basics, you’ll need to anticipate the times “on the job” when the new hire will interact with people outside your organization. Is the new hire attending a client function with you? If so, it makes sense to review your expectations before you head out the door. Whereas most people might do fine on their own, that’s not the point. If you expect a certain set of behaviors, you need to make clear what they are.

### Step Three: Use praise, and do it often.


Most people like praise. As mentioned earlier, the difference between millennials and other generations is that they’re used to receiving it.

To get the most out of your new hires, you must learn how to give feedback more often. A word of caution: Millennials know when they’re being patronized just as well as the next person, so choose your words wisely. At this point, a lot of them will have figured out that the trophy thing wasn’t such a hot idea. Instead, you’re going to have to pay attention and recognize good work. It’s more time consuming, but if you put in the effort, you’ll see more of what you want to see.

Don’t rely solely on feedback on the fly. The reality is it’s easy to get busy. Make the time to have structured conversations with your new hires about their development. Thinking of skipping this step? Don’t. Regularly scheduled one-on-one meetings will ultimately benefit the new hire, the organization, and you.

### Final Thought

Developing any employee takes time, and working with new hires has its own set of challenges. There are few shortcuts along the road to success in the workplace.

How much effort you put in to another person is certainly up to you. But think back to your first days in the world of work. If someone spent the time to work with you early in your career, you were lucky. If you didn’t have that opportunity, don’t you wish you had? 

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**See upcoming articles** on the great generational shift and what it will mean for you, including the new employee recruitment, training, and retention tools you’ll need to put into place.

### More Help with New Hires

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**Keeping Your Best and Brightest Workers** (Vol. 28, No. 6.)

**The Boomer-Millennial Workplace: How to Defuse the Tension** (Vol. 28, No. 5)

**“Cool” Is the New Recruiting Tool** (Vol. 29, No. 3)

**The High Cost of Employee Turnover – and How to Avoid It** (Vol. 31, No. 3)

**Are You Prepared for the Multigenerational Workplace?** (Vol. 28, No. 6)

**Why Your Employees Are Losing Motivation – and What to Do about It** (Vol. 29, No. 4)