



MENTORING

in a Millennial World

By Randy Emelo

Millennials' craving for mentoring is high, but the way in which the generation prefers to connect, learn and share expertise leaves traditional mentoring programs ill-equipped.

Millennials have grown up in an environment with highly involved baby boomer parents, passionate teachers and other influential authorities telling them that mentoring is vital to a successful professional career. As a result, arguably more than any other generation, millennials are more conscious of mentoring's role in navigating their careers and accelerating skill development.

In fact, according to a 2012 consumer insights study from MTV, roughly three-quarters of millennials say they want to engage in a mentoring relationship. In response, talent professionals have dusted off their spreadsheets, dug up personality tests and initiated the task of hand-matching millennials with older, more experienced mentors.

But just because millennials have shown an interest in mentoring doesn't mean a traditional mentoring program will do the trick.



ON THE WEB

For millennials, work and life are the same thing, and they want to stay connected to colleagues, see their photos and keep in touch with their personal lives long after the work day is over: talentmgt.com/GenYonline.

Millennials want mentoring, but not the traditional kind — at least not exclusively. According to Philip Antonelli, learning strategist at Xerox Corp., many organizations are missing the mark when it comes to building mentoring programs that will help them learn and develop.

READER REACTION

What kind of mentoring are millennials looking for? What tips do you have for those who mentor them?



@ocomfly:
IMO millennials want their mentors to show them how their work can be meaningful.



@haribhat:
Millennials are smart and motivated. For mentoring, commit quality time, give opportunities and trust them. Don't patronize them!



Kyshira Moffett:
As a millennial, I am interested in mentoring related to career development. The most influential mentors I've had have shared personal stories with me of missteps they have experienced throughout their career and lessons learned.



Jim Delaney:
Mentoring is important for millennials as the rate of talented professionals retiring increases and knowledge flows out of the building. To make the most of mentoring is to make it a holistic experience. It can't just be tactically focused on job performance and avoiding the pitfalls of climbing the ladder.

What do you think? Join the discussion at tinyurl.com/mentoringmillennials or follow us on Twitter @TalentMgtMag.

"Millennials reject the idea that one person is capable of assisting in their growth and development," he said. "One can hardly blame them — modern business is extremely complicated and consistently evolving. Who can reasonably expect that a single person has all the answers?"

Having grown up using social networks and mobile devices to crowdsource information and wisdom, millennials are most likely to seek a broad array of learning relationships to support them at work.

"Millennials like to learn through collaboration," said Wendy Murphy, co-author of "Strategic Relationships at Work." "Since they have grown up with information and access to others at their fingertips, they will naturally leverage their networks to discover new ideas and learn from others' expertise."

Additionally, the networked way in which millennials learn and their views of authority and expertise as something based on relative knowledge instead of hierarchy have spilled into their approach to mentoring. "In the eyes of millennials, mentoring has become democratized," Murphy said. "They see it as a learning process that occurs across a range of relationships — senior leaders, peers, junior colleagues, clients and customers — rather than just in a one-on-one traditional format."

A Generational Disconnect

The way millennials view mentoring can be attributed to a difference in generational views (Figure 1). The 1980s and '90s ushered in the idea of formal mentoring in the workplace, in large part because of diversity initiatives.

Because these programs were exclusive and designed to give high-potential individuals greater access to senior leaders for formal sponsorship, mentoring was assumed to be a one-to-one relationship between a more experienced mentor and a more junior mentee, often with a focus on career satisfaction and advancement.

In the early 2000s, technological advancements brought about the growing use of websites, e-learning, email and video conferencing. Generation X started pushing baby boomers to experiment with virtual relationships and electronic media communication, which allowed them to engage in their mentoring relationships virtually and to more easily collaborate with their peers.

Today, millennials have shaken things up again. For them, mentoring is collaborative, networked learning that includes many people. It is a process where they use technology to connect with people across an organization so they can share knowledge and skills, and solicit advice and opinions. They use it as a way to provide practical context to their daily work.

Xerox's Antonelli said that unlike previous generations, "Millennials reject the traditional mentor/protégé relationship." Instead, they will

FIGURE 1: MENTORING DIFFERENCES BY GENERATION

Perceptions of	Traditionalist 1922–1945	Baby Boomer 1946–1964	Generation X 1965–1980	Millennial 1981–2000
Work	Hardworking and loyal	Hard work for personal gain	Work-life balance	Multitasking Web surfers
Authority	Respectful of authority	Participative management	Skeptical of authority	Hopeful
Mentoring	Obligation	A way to get ahead	Collaboration	Learning connections

Source: Triple Creek

engage in mentoring to gain knowledge and address development needs on an ongoing, just-in-time fashion by “seeking out many people to assist them with their career growth and establishing ties with peers and mentors who can help them perform a current task or solve an immediate problem. As a result, their learning networks tend to be informal and social in nature and are governed by mutual need and reciprocity rather than someone in the HR department.”

No longer about one-to-one relationships, millennials have helped drive mentoring forward to be a practice focused on removing the barriers between people and engaging them in learning opportunities in a broad, networked environment.

Unfortunately, this concept of mentoring is foreign to many organizations — often because the ones designing the programs are baby boomers or traditionalists. Therefore, when tasked to develop a mentoring program, leaders’ thinking is typically limited to mentoring in its traditional form.

Putting Modern Mentoring Into Practice

Certainly millennial employees are not the only ones who stand to benefit from engaging in a process designed to help them tackle work-related development and knowledge needs by learning through the experiences of others. In fact, an April 2014 study by the Welsh government showed that 84 percent of employees across generations are willing to use technology to share knowledge — suggesting the entire organization would be best served by modernizing mentoring programs to reflect millennial preferences.

The following steps will help organizations create a culture of modern mentoring for all employees.

Avoid traditional mentoring jargon. To lessen the impact of the multigenerational workforce’s perceptions about what mentoring can do, it’s imperative to use terms that all employees can understand, despite their generational perspectives.

In this way, organizations would be better served to use terminology like social, collaborative or networked learning to describe mentoring programs. This provides a broader scope to the practice simply by changing what it is called. In fact, organizations should aim to position the program as a tool where employees can engage in learning relationships of varying types, from more private and intimate ones focused on career development to large groups discussing best practices for a specific topic.

Along the same lines, removing the terms “mentor” and “mentee” from the vernacular and using “adviser” and “learner” instead will also help lessen the room for error in the perceptions of what each role entails.

Wrap modern mentoring around formal programs (outside of compliance). If organizations have traditional mentoring programs attached to

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Modern Mentoring and the Employee Life Cycle

Organizations can use modern mentoring to support employee development at all stages of the employee life cycle.

Entering: Onboarding is a natural starting place for modern mentoring — especially since many millennials will continue to enter the workforce in large numbers in the next decade. Upon entering the organization, employees of all ages naturally need many learning opportunities to help them gain the necessary knowledge to perform their new role. By engaging in social learning relationships, employees can connect with advisers and other peers to help them assimilate culturally as well as gain the right insights and skills to help accelerate their speed to performance.

Emerging: As employees mature, some will begin to emerge as natural leaders. Modern mentoring is a great way to support high potential leadership development and managerial programs. Instead of limiting who the best and brightest can learn from, organizations can allow these individuals to engage in all types of learning relationships, including those where natural leaders can practice leadership skills by advising others or learn from others who have already mastered those skills.

Organizations can use learning cohorts or mentoring groups to help make high potential, managerial or similar training stick by allowing participants to connect with their fellow trainees before, during and after training. This allows trainees to learn through each other’s applications, successes and failures with the material or subject at hand.

Expert: Once employees have developed to the point of being an expert in their area of focus, they can help facilitate the development of others. Experts can take on the role of adviser and engage in group mentoring to help other employees increase their level of skill in the expert employees’ area of mastery. It is important to keep in mind that experts will span generational, hierarchical and functional lines, because being an expert in an area doesn’t necessarily mean having years of experience. Experts on social media or other emerging market trends, for example, are more likely to be found at the bottom of the organization rather than at the top.

Exiting: Modern mentoring becomes a key practice for organizations to use to capture employees’ knowledge before they leave the organization due to retirement or attrition. It can be used in support of succession planning or other programs aimed at sharing tacit understandings and insights of members poised to exit. Organizations should use modern mentoring as a way to codify and reprocess implicit knowledge held by employees who will be exiting in 24 to 36 months so these individuals don’t walk out the door with knowledge that may be business critical. Mentoring or social learning groups in support of functional areas of the business — like understanding a particular product’s sales cycle or how research is best gathered for a specific industry — can help not only recycle knowledge held by soon-to-exit employees but also help employees across the life cycle to learn and develop.

— *Randy Emelo*

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formal training programs — like onboarding, high potential development or succession planning — these programs can be a great starting place to expand into modern mentoring. Adding the modern approach will mean that the people who are participating in paired or “traditional” mentoring can also have the freedom and access to connect with other participants independently and as dictated by learning needs.

If an organization’s formal programs don’t have an accompanying mentoring program, organizations can use the formal program as a launching point for modern mentoring by creating a technology-enabled environment where participants can connect and learn from one another around topics and skills based on formal program curricula or objectives. Moreover, organizations can use a “land and expand” model to socialize the practice of modern mentoring with employees who participate in formal programs first, then expand beyond those participants at a later date.

They can use the momentum gained in these programs to one day create a single social learning environment, where the whole employee enterprise — from those entering the organization to those poised to exit — can participate in modern mentoring.

Foster continuous learning through modern mentoring. Modern mentoring cannot be accomplished by solely bringing in a technology and hoping employees will use it to learn and collaborate. In this way, it’s not a “build it and they will come” scenario. Employees must know where to go and how to engage in this type of learning, and talent professionals must consistently promote the program and draw in new or inactive participants.

To increase the program’s overall visibility, talent professionals can enlist the help of the marketing department or draw upon their own employee experience to help them market the program in ways that will speak to their organization’s culture. Additionally, talent professionals can take on the role of learning facilitator and help enrich or “seed” the learning environment by creating groups focused on popular organizational topics and skills — like “Best Practices for New Managers” or “Microsoft Excel Tips and Tricks.”

They then can recruit advisers to help set learning goals, devise an agenda and drive the group’s discussion accordingly. That way, when new participants arrive to the environment, they already have a number of pre-formed learning opportunities to choose from, and if none of the options fit their needs, they can start their own groups and conversations.

Ultimately, modern mentoring is most successful when the entire employee base participates, creating a rich, cross-functional, cross-geographical and cross-generational approach to learning and development. **TM**

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development to become fully competent in the new role. And if the CEB wealth management study is any indicator, this could take time.

From the employee perspective, transparency of a succession planning process is critical. Employees understand that planning for the future is smart, but they worry about how the process will influence their career advancement. They want to know what information will be evaluated, who has access to it and how it will be used to make decisions about the future.

This is an area where organizations can make a lot of improvement. CEB data shows that only 23 percent of leaders and 27 percent of high potentials report that there are future opportunities with their current employers. More alarming, nearly 40 percent of high-potential employees say they will leave the organization due to changes in aspiration or to pursue opportunities with another employer.

Beyond transparency related to succession planning, employees want to know what’s in it for them — especially if they have invested time into a structured measurement activity that feeds into a talent review. Organizations should be sure to deliver on promises of development and investment, and explain to employees that their participation in the process not only helps them grow professionally but also helps the organization prepare for the future.

Talent leaders should encourage a mix of development techniques to be used when preparing potential successors. The majority of effort should be focused on experiential learning and providing opportunities for successors to interact and learn from the incumbent.

With so many employees on the brink of retirement, time is precious, and organizations should prioritize activities that allow all generations of employees to work more closely together. Mentoring and coaching are also important tools; they provide a support network that is familiar with the job and work environment.

In the end, the news for talent managers looking to prepare on this front is more promising than it might have been. Though the number of workers over age 65 is growing, the pace at which they’re exiting the workforce is likely trending slower than it might have had the financial crisis and recession — which drained the savings of many pending retirees — not happened.

As one massive crisis withers into the past and investments in talent management appear more stable, the table is set for the function to act on creating a succession framework that prepares the economy for a less traumatic but still significant business transformation. **TM**

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