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MANAGEMENT &amp; LEADERSHIP

## Get the best from millennials

Struggling to get the best from the millennial generation? Managing youth has always been tough, not much has changed.



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It's common to hear leaders complain about the challenges inherent in keeping millennial workers engaged and with their business. Often described as being impatient, demanding and even narcissistic, many leaders struggle to understand, let alone, influence these younger members of their workforce.

The reality is, however, young people have always been more demanding. As reported by Bruce Pfau in the *Harvard Business Review*, ["The small differences that do appear are likely attributable to factors such as stage of life more than generational membership."](#)

There is a growing body of evidence to support the view that differences have always existed between younger and older workers, and what we are observing now has little to do with the millennial generation per se.

Researchers from The George Washington University and the US Department of Defense, for example, undertook an extensive review of over 20 published and unpublished studies looking at generational differences at work. They concluded that there are no meaningful differences among generations in the workplace.

What we are dealing with is youth. As Elspeth Reeve wrote in *The Atlantic* journal ["It's not that people born after 1980 are narcissists, it's that young people are narcissists, and they get over themselves as they get older."](#)

Despite the poor rap they often get, in my experience millennials are just as likely as any other worker to make a positive contribution to your business, if they want to.

Here are 4 essential steps you can take to inspire them to do so include these.

**1. Be prepared to answer questions.**

Before they are likely to 'get on board', millennials want to know why they should. Understanding the thinking behind what you are asking them to do is essential to their willingness to comply. "Just do as you told" rarely works with anyone, let alone a millennial.

**2. Connect with a bigger purpose.**

Millennials want to have an impact on the world through their work. Typically, they want to know they're making a worthwhile difference and are more likely to choose to work for an organisation that does something they believe in.

**3. Enable freedom and autonomy**

Like the youth of generations gone by, millennials are independent minded and want to be empowered. Millennials expect you to let them get on with it - free of unnecessary oversight and direction. Achieving the balance between providing the freedom they want and the supervision or coaching they need can only be achieved by establishing clear boundaries within which they are free to operate.

**4. Be appreciative.**

Acknowledgement is key. If millennials trust that their capabilities, work effort and potential are recognized, they are entirely more likely to be engaged and work hard. Arguably less materialistic than other generations, they typically respond well to being thanked with a pat on the back or a 'step up' opportunity.

While millennials are very much like the youth of generations gone by, one major difference stands out. Change. Millennials are not only typically more comfortable with change, they prefer it.

Having witnessed advances in technology older generations imagined only possible in the realms of science fiction, Millennials expect change, become restless and move on quickly if things slow down. The need for constant stimulation is a very real challenge leaders are wise to address.