

## **Transitioning to Management: Challenges and Opportunities for the Millennial Generation**

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*This study examines twelve factors which are important for the large number of potential managers in the Millennial Generation sector. The new role as manager may be overwhelming for a younger manager. With proper training and other factors, the Millennial Manager may be as an asset to the organization. Important advice for the Millennial generation includes developing self-awareness and understanding differences among team members. Other recommendations are having a mentor and being transparent, fair, a good listener, and a cheerleader. The manager should set high standards, acknowledge mistakes, and focus on goal achievement.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Having a successful, rewarding career as a team member and/or technical employee often offers the opportunity to transition into management, thus providing unique rewards, as well as different challenges. While technical skills that contributed to organizational success are essential, managing and directing others requires an additional skill set (Cummings et al., 2008). Administrators often refer to the new position as supervisor, project manager, director, or others. Not only is this transition to a managerial position a promotion, but, in reality, it is a change in one's career path. In the new role, the focus should remain on customer service and organizational success; however, achieving the goal must now be accomplished through helping and directing others to facilitate their contributions. This transition is often challenging and demanding with long hours, stressful job demands, and pressures from top management, as well as new employees. In addition, if one remains in the same department and assumes a supervisory role, coworkers may indeed have difficulty accepting this change in roles. In addition, when making this transition, challenges with former co-workers may be few, but many of the same issues may exist. The primary challenge remains as to how an individual may make an effective transition and embrace the new role.

The new manager may be a member of Generation Y--the Millennial Generation. Much attention has been given to this generation in terms of their strengths, weaknesses, and values which may affect the workplace. This generation may need special management skills, as it is possible the Millennials will be managing five generation in the workplace. These are called frequently referred to as the Traditionalists,

Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and those beginning to enter into the workplace, Generation Z/Centennials. Therefore, the new manager may have several unique challenges as he/she transitions from worker to manager/supervisor. Organizations must understand this large sector of the Millennial Generation in the context of managing a diverse workforce with multiple generations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Early research predicted the Millennial Generation would be significant, since these individuals may be the largest generation coming into the work force. Much research has been conducted regarding challenges in managing this new generation. However, little research has been conducted on Millennials who may become managers themselves. Such studies have shown both positive and negative characteristics of this generation in the work force.

One study reported that this generation may lack important communication and decision-making skills. On the positive side, they mentioned this generation was well educated (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007).

Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance (2010) studied generational differences in the workplace. They reported challenges with Millennials (Gen Y) in that this generation seemed to be more individualistic with individual values, rather than organizational values. These value differences may be important to managers, as the Baby Boomers are retiring. Another study found that this generation values leisure time which could affect such dependent variables as job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment (Rosenzweig, 2010).

Much attention has been given and shown that the Millennial Generation is skilled in using many types of technology. In fact, the use of technology is an integral part of their lives (Stillman, 2002). Research also found that millennials may place value on positive reinforcement, diversity, and autonomy (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). In addition, another study on motivation found the Millennials' needs were at the social, self-esteem, and self-actualization levels (Meola, 2016).

Calk (2017) found that Millennials appeared to be more positive and collaborative than previous generations. In addition, the study recommended that organizations should promote a collaborative, team-based work environment, as well as challenging and meaningful work. One study described this generation as feeling entitled, narcissistic, self-interested, unfocused, and lazy. Challenges were mentioned in managing and retaining this generation. This observation is important especially in the nursing profession, since it is estimated that one-third of the nursing staff are in the Millennial Generation (Weirch, 2017).

Meola (2016) reported the challenges for managers as this large generation of Millennials come into the workplace. These challenges include building relationships with the Millennial Generation, as well as understanding their motivation to work.

Other challenges for managers are finding methods to retain those Millennials with talent (Waikar, Sweet & Morgan, 2016). They categorized the Millennials to be frequent job hoppers as compared to other generations. Also, important variables to this generation are career satisfaction, teamwork, flexibility, and workforce diversity. Finally, the study indicated other challenges for managers are in the areas of developing loyalty and improving employee job satisfaction and commitment.

Meister and Willyerd (2010) reported that the Millennial Generation place a high value on the following: teamwork, personal productivity, self-management, personally fulfilling work, and social consciousness. In contrast, another study analyzed the millennial generation as related to the nature of organizational culture (Stewart, Oliver & Cravens, 2017). Rather than a negative focus, this research suggested that performance evaluations should include a variety of job related characteristics and traits.

Meola (2016) recommended different types of training in the workforce. Such training could be centered on improving managers' effectiveness with Millennials, thus leading to increased retention rates, stronger loyalty, and decreased costs. In addition, this training may be important in gaining employees' acceptance of the organizational goals and values.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MILLENNIAL MANAGER**

Twelve suggestions are offered to the new Millennial Manager which were developed from our collective experience and literature review. These following specific guidelines come from the “firing line” of practical experience and have facilitated many individuals in the transition to a managerial position. Further, these twelve guidelines are important to any new manager making the transition; however, they should be particularly valuable for the GenY/Millennial Generation.

### **1. Be aware of one’s strengths and weakness.**

Since all individuals have strengths, weaknesses, and differences, self-awareness is essential to successfully supervising others (Bushardt, Glascoff & Doty, 2010). According to Goleman (1998), self-awareness is an essential quality for a leader, as those individuals understand their capabilities and are less likely to set themselves up for failure. Self-awareness and personality inventories are considered useful tools in effective leadership development (McCarthy & Garavan, 1999). One excellent tool is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Bower, 2015). Different versions of MBTI are available on the Internet, as well as in college and university career centers.

In the new role of supervisor, utilize strengths as often as possible while working to overcome weaknesses. For example, one manager was aware of her introverted personality and discomfort with public speaking in unfamiliar groups. Therefore, public speaking was a task that she delegated to someone else who had a strong extroverted personality. In order to overcome this weakness, participating in Toastmasters or enrolling in a speech class would be beneficial. Regardless of the approach, self-awareness is an important requirement.

### **2. Know and understand team members.**

Different personality types and a diverse set of strengths and weaknesses within several generations will exist among team members. In the new role of manager, being successful requires responding to these different needs in order to ensure effective work performance and engagement. Recognizing these differences facilitates task assignments and an efficient use of resources. Equally important, by recognizing each member’s uniqueness, the manager can demonstrate that one cares about team members’ personally and their well-being. The MBTI may be a valuable aide towards understanding individual personalities and preferences (Hautala, 2006). Likewise, numerous personality inventories are available for the team members. Certainly be aware of perceptual biases, such as stereotyping, which may come into play in management decisions.

### **3. Listen to the team members.**

Good managers spend more time listening to employees, rather than talking to them. Using active and empathetic listening techniques allows one to better understand employees and effectively identify potential barriers to productivity and job satisfaction. In addition, the manager who takes time to listen sends a message that team members and their ideas are valued. It has been said, “God gave us two ears and one mouth as he wanted us to listen twice as much as we talk”. Through an effective feedback process, managers may learn more about strengths and weaknesses in leadership skills (Allen & Hartman, 2008).

Having empathy has become critically important within the last decade due to the increased use of teams and a growing need to retain talent (Goleman, 1998). Being an active and empathetic listener is critical to being an effective manager. A leader with empathy may better understand subordinates and thus provide needed support to be successful (Mahsud et al., 2010). Karnes (2009) suggested that lack of empathy from the leadership may result in employee discontent and employee abuse.

#### **4. Be a cheerleader.**

Let the team members know that they are valued and respected as individuals. Pearce (2004) found that when complex and highly interdependent tasks are needed, an empowered team (Huang et al., 2010) performs better when the leader plays the role of a cheerleader and not a dictator. As a cheerleader, the manager provides abundant praise and recognition to team members. In addition, members need to see the manager telling other managers how great the team is. A positive approach tends to be far more effective in motivating followers toward efficient and high-quality work. Of course, occasions may arise when the manager needs to correct, provide feedback, and even reprimand or redirect while using a positive approach.

People enjoy working in a positive and supportive environment. Research suggests the importance of enthusiasm in the workplace with implications toward improving job satisfaction, morale, and organizational commitment (Choi, 2006). Such enthusiasm will be a major step in showing concern for employees and creating a positive work environment.

#### **5. Set high standards as a manager.**

An effective supervisor should display a level of integrity which is consistent with the expectations of the team members (Craig, 1998). In addition, leader integrity has an impact on the ethical intentions of team members (White & Lean, 2008).

From the first day in the new managerial position, communicate through actions that high standards exist. In so doing, team members are more likely to emulate the manager's behavior. It is important to understand that this is not about "talking the talk," but about "walking the walk." After assuming the new position, the demands may seem overwhelming, thus requiring one to arrive early and to remain later than others.

While this behavior signals the commitment to excellence and job performance, the manager should be sensitive to work-life balance issues which are also an important value to transmit to followers. Work-life balance is critical to long-term management success. The manager should set clear expectations as to what is important and never lose sight that goal accomplishment is the top priority but not forgetting work-life balance issues.

#### **6. Be transparent and fair.**

As a leader, fairness has a positive influence on team effectiveness and performance. By the same token, subordinates' intention to engage in organizational citizenship was found to be associated with leader fairness (Williams et al. 2002). Organizational citizenship behavior occurs when an employee does more than expected, goes the extra mile, and exhibits behavior not in the job description (Robbins & Judd, 2015). Those team members who engage in "good citizenship" help others, volunteer, and respect rules and regulation.

Not only should the supervisor demonstrate fairness in dealing with team members, but the behavior should be coupled with transparency. If team members do not have access to needed information, then the "rumor mill" tends to create a subjective information base that often times is not related to reality. While personal issues must remain confidential, the more employees are informed, the more likely they are to grant their trust and support to the leader.

A potential hurdle for the new manager may be having previous peers who now report to the new manager, resulting in resentment. Some may attempt to use these past relationships for their own advantage; however, these past networks should be avoided (Leicher, 2016). However, one can avoid these associations by redefining roles and clearly communicating the changes to members of the old network while letting them know that they are valued. However, new positions often require new roles which is a normal part of the growth process.

#### **7. Be demanding from the start.**

As one begins a new managerial position, he/she should be demanding from the start, as one may always soften the approach over time. Team members will appreciate this all the more (Schaffer,

2010). If the manager is not demanding in the beginning of a new role, it may be difficult to increase standards later and to become more demanding. Initially, one may have a “honeymoon” period where team members are waiting to see what the new leadership style will be. This time period may be useful to demonstrate that one may be demanding while adapting as they meet objectives.

#### **8. Acknowledge mistakes and move forward.**

The leadership literature suggests that leaders need to move beyond the hero myth by being open to their own limitations (Weick, 2001). This humility in leadership improves leader-follower relationships and opens new pathways for engaging followers (Owens & Hekman, 2012). When assuming the new responsibilities of supervisor or director, he/she will be involved in making decisions in areas where one may lack experience and inevitably mistakes may occur. The new manager should not hesitate to seek advice and input from other decision makers. It is best to leave emotions at the door and develop talking points to remain focused. When one makes the wrong or suboptimal decision, it is best to (1) recognize and acknowledge mistakes, (2) make changes, and (3) move forward. Employees do not expect the new manager to be perfect but appreciate honesty and transparency. Therefore, acknowledge the mistakes and move on to other issues. In the process do not let the mistakes set forth a cycle of self-doubt, since failures and mistakes are a natural part of every new position.

#### **9. Have a thick skin.**

During this process, employees will not love you all the time as they may have bad days and communicate their negative feelings both positive and negative. From a nonverbal perspective, employees may avoid contact, roll their eyes, ‘huff and puff,’ or even ignore e-mails. In addition, employees may complain verbally about their pay, lack of support, or a non-supportive climate. One needs to have a “thick skin” and allow employees to vent emotions without reacting and taking it personally. At times, negative attitudes are apparent; however, just “let it go” and keep the focus on the efficiency and effectiveness of the team. Any negativity definitely distracts from the real objectives; therefore, do not waste time in over analyzing while keeping focused. Whatever else, do not take it home, as negativism may have a corrosive effect on personal relationships.

#### **10. Never be vindictive.**

Although organizations rely upon people performing their tasks accurately and efficiently, mistakes do occur due to an imperfect plan or other reasons (Roberts, 2007). Love and forgiveness are critical virtues for a leader to help team members to achieve their best performance. A person in a managerial role should never be vindictive to team members, no matter how badly they have behaved. This is part of having a “thick skin.” When one uses the power of the position to “even the score,” team members will likely lose respect for a new manager. This destructive behavior may well be detrimental to the group’s effectiveness and success (Caldwell & Dixon, 2010).

Occasionally when team members make errors, they should deal with it and then let go of it. The manager’s goal is to correct or redirect the employees’ behavior, not to punish them. Research has shown that abusive behavior and threats impact retention and job satisfaction factors (Cameron & Caza, 2002)

#### **11. Do not over rely on a single team member.**

As a new supervisor, he/she will find identifying and relating to some members in different generations more than others. However, it is important that one does not rely on one or two team

member, as this perceived favoritism may often result in jealousy and lower job satisfaction. Hence, team members may feel undervalued and unrecognized; therefore, the manager should reach out to all team members and avoid any perception of favoritism, as this potential bias may be highly destructive to the team.

#### **12. Find an experienced mentor.**

Mentors are individuals who can provide guidance and advice as one engages in a new role (Solansky, 2010). The new manager may find he/she is isolated, since important issues will emerge and need a different perspective with an experienced manager. Therefore, a mentor may be a valuable aide to the individual's success. A mentor with managerial experience can advise a new supervisor, help in avoiding inevitable problems, and point out potential pitfalls that may not be obvious to the novice manager. One purpose of mentors is to help their mentees be more comfortable and secure in their roles as leaders (Reiss, 2007). Such a mentor may or may not be a member of the organization but should be an individual who has one's confidence.

### **DISCUSSION**

The advice presented here is provided to new Millennial Managers who differ from other generations in their values toward work and life. Working as a team member may provide a rewarding and challenging career where customer service and group effectiveness are the major focus. However, as one transitions to a supervisory role, the rewards and challenges may change. Such a transition allows managers to multiply their impact on customer service and organizational effectiveness by influencing and facilitating other professionals in their efforts. The challenges of coordinating and directing other generations with different values, strengths, and weaknesses may be incredibly difficult, as well as rewarding. This paper sheds light on important variables and advice which may affect management development and improved leadership effectiveness of this generation.

When the Millennials make the transition to the new role, it may seem overwhelming. However, with time and utilizing proper techniques, the new manager may adapt and discover equally rewarding experiences. When a member of this generation makes the transition to the new role of supervisor, he/she may discover that after the initial start and with the passage of time, job satisfaction and career development are indeed enhanced.

### **FUTURE RESEARCH**

Future research would do well to examine management development programs and training to increase understanding among the five generations. For instance, Meola (2016) suggested equine assisted learning (EAL) programs as an effective training tool that many organizations are currently using to bridge a gap between older managers and the Millennial employees. Current research shows that EAL improves competency development in leadership, communication, relationships, and team building. In addition, research should be conducted after this generation has had a few years as managers. Therefore, such longitudinal studies would be possible to determine other factors leading to job success.

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