

Teaching Millennials How To Be Leaders

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The trailing edge of the Millennial generation is just now entering the workforce. Since the turn of the new millennium, their possible contributions, work ethic, and general demeanor have been scrutinized. Questions and stereotypes have been met with economic hardships, college degree saturation, and new ways of thinking about work-life balance.

One question warrants close consideration: how can Millennials become good leaders? This is important to consider as more and more Millennials move up the corporate ladder or continue to pursue their own entrepreneurial endeavors.

The first step is for Millennials to reevaluate how they see themselves.

Common Stereotypes

Millennials continue to have an image problem. Much has been said about this generation's work ethic, common personality traits, and general ability to contribute to the workforce. Common stereotypes such as Millennials being spoiled, entitled, narcissistic, and lazy continue to be perpetuated in a variety of places, including various corners of the Internet. From focused content platforms such as a neo-masculine website, to more mainstream sources like Time Magazine, these stereotypes continue to be a source of much disagreement and debate.

While many Millennials and other generations have resisted these stereotypes, either through verbal and written disagreement or by simply letting their actions speak, new research from the Pew Research Center suggests that a majority of Millennials actually agree with many of these common assumptions.

The survey found that individuals born between the years 1982 and 2000 are less likely to see their generation in a positive light, and more likely to embrace negative descriptions about Millennials, compared to other generations such as Generation X, Baby Boomers, and the Silent Generation.

Among positive qualities such as being patriotic, responsible, hard-working, and willing to sacrifice, the percentage of Millennials that agreed with these descriptions only ranged from 15 to 36%. In contrast, those Millennials who agreed with negative descriptions such as being self-absorbed, wasteful, greedy, and cynical ranged from 31 to 59%.

For the first time we have information about how Millennials perceive themselves. Only 40% of Millennials even associate with the term "millennial", while a vast majority disagree that the term is even a good fit in describing them.

With Millennials beginning to buy into these negative descriptions, how can they best prepare for the times when they are required to lead others?

Millennial Leadership

As the Millennial generation solidifies its place within the modern workforce, more and more Millennials are going to be raised into positions of leadership. While there are many individuals that naturally possess leadership qualities and skills, the majority of these future leaders will have to develop management skills.

Research continues to suggest that not only do Millennials have different values and perceptions, they also have different ways of learning and processing information. Because of this, new approaches to leadership and management training are going to be necessary in order to educate the future leaders of this generation.

Furthermore, research has also begun to suggest that typical Millennials are going to more and more favor participatory type of leadership styles that move away from traditional leader/follower relationships. Businesses and companies that want to utilize effective management training will need to continue to focus on greater team oriented, group consensus, and shared responsibility approaches.

Training future Millennials will also benefit from a more active approach. Long gone are the days of “chalk and talk” styles of classroom learning where teachers merely lecture and students simply assimilate information. 21st-century leadership education will have to engage Millennials in an active way. To achieve this, certain strategies can be used:

- Millennial-led discussions within the classroom and the workplace.
- Hands-on learning opportunities including simulations, role-playing, and practical work projects.
- The extended use of technology in workplace production.
- Extended training that focuses on extended community engagement and that emphasizes greater business ethics, values and goals beyond the bottom line.

Most importantly, leadership training is best done early. Waiting to teach Millennials how to become great leaders for a particular position, or when they have earned their place within the corporate ladder will not be as effective as starting as soon as possible.

This early education will also be necessary to begin to combat negative generational stereotypes that many Millennials are beginning to place even onto themselves. As a leader, self-image and confidence in one's own abilities is perhaps the core trait of effective leadership. Since negative stereotypes and self-perceptions can often be difficult to reverse, leadership education leadership training will need to emphasize positive traits and qualities that Millennials naturally possess or can develop from an early stage. Millennials can learn to be great leaders if their education starts early.

Early, active education will give more Millennials the knowledge, tools, and experience to become the next generation of great leaders.