



6 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW TO LEAD THE PLAYSTATION GENERATION

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR LEADING MILLENNIALS

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I didn't know what I was getting into before spending five years on the front lines finding out what makes millennials tick.

The research I read before I became director of [IMD's MBA](#) class in 2009 didn't prepare me to lead members of the digital cowboy generation, those born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s.

We've all read plenty about millennials before: they are used to being told they are good all the time from a young age. They are not ready for real world setbacks. All they want is instant gratification. They lack loyalty. The list goes on.

While some of these characteristics have some truth to them, they can be said about previous generations as well. The stereotype of a millennial is a digital version of what 20-year-olds have been like since the industrial revolution.

Here are the 6 things I learned that today's leaders need to know to really harness the power of millennials.

1] They learn through experience

We don't call them the PlayStation generation for nothing. They grew up playing a lot of video games without using instructions. They learned to make it to the next levels of these games by dying over and over again. They can be like that in their professional careers too. They throw themselves into new experiences without a lot of planning and learn by failing.

They expect a leader to play the role that the walls and cliffs do in a game. Leaders should be aware of this and help point out the potential pitfalls of certain courses of action, both before and after.

2] Their lives are non-linear

The world has always been complex and volatile for this generation. They have witnessed the Asian financial crisis, climate change, 9-11 and the war on terror, the 2008 financial crisis, all before they were established professionals. This generation has never seen the world as a safe and coherent place.

They will have non-linear career trajectories and they know it. A lot of them will go back and forth between traditional employment and entrepreneurship.

For a large part of their lives they have been reading on the internet focusing on one subject one minute, and something completely different the next. Previous generations learned in a more linear way by reading books from start to finish.

For leaders this means that Gen Y is prepared for complexity. They don't know anything else. Older managers may have a hard time adapting to the new normal.

3] They ARE loyal. But to principles and not to people

This is where some of the accepted wisdom about millennials comes to play. They appreciate personal development. They love new opportunities. But they will not follow your lead just because you are the boss.

Instead of trying too hard on developing loyalty to your leadership or your organization among your team of millennials, you should focus more on developing and communicating the principles and purpose behind your organization's work, no matter whether it is a company, an NGO or a government agency. Millennials need to know that they are working to make the world a better place. They believe that there is no success without sustainability for individuals, organizations, society, and the environment. If you can convince them in an authentic way that what you are doing is principled, they will get behind you.

4] Assumptions about privacy, boundaries and roles are fluid and permeable

This can be good and bad. We have all heard horror stories of young adults suffering consequences for what they post on social media, like that friend of a friend who got fired for calling their boss a jerk on Facebook.

But it can work in a positive way. Not submitting to antiquated hierarchical structures allows millennials to think creatively and find business opportunities where others might not imagine there were any.

While leaders should watch out for unintended consequences, they should also encourage younger employees' creativity to think beyond of the established way of doing things.

5] Power is distributed and control requires permission

In other words, millennials don't put up with bad bosses. They don't listen to authority if they don't agree.

This might seem like a challenge, but in the long run the sooner people stop accepting poor leadership, leaders will have to improve. Everyone will benefit.

The lesson here is: don't be a lazy leader. Make sure your millennial employees understand why your organization and team are doing what they are doing. Don't just say "do it because I said so".

Also, don't neglect leadership development. Keep investing in your leadership capabilities so you can motivate your millennial employees.

6] They are not good at boring but necessary work

Millennials don't like to concentrate on boring tasks that lead to mastery and build character if those tasks don't have clear benefit. In order to develop expertise and wisdom in any industry, people have to invest in non-glamorous grunt work to get to know their sector by heart. These types of experiences also help build patience to work through a problem until it's solved.

Today's senior managers should put in extra effort to show the digital cowboys why the hard work is important. Leaders need to make sure that entry level talent know that having a deep understanding the different aspects of an industry will help them in more senior roles later on.

Companies and organizations by and large have been good at getting millennials in the door for a while now, but they have been more challenged about getting them to transition to higher levels of responsibility.

If senior managers follow these 6 pieces of advice, they can tap into millennials' strengths and help them become the next generation of leaders.

[Martha Maznevski](#) is Professor of Organizational Behavior and International Management at IMD. She will be leading a daily interactive discussion on millennials at [Orchestrating Winning Performance \(OWP\)](#), the unique global business program at IMD which takes place from June 21-26 2015.

She also teaches in [Strategies for Leadership for female executives](#) and the [IMD-CKGSB Dual Executive MBA](#), which builds knowledge and networks to do business with China and the world.

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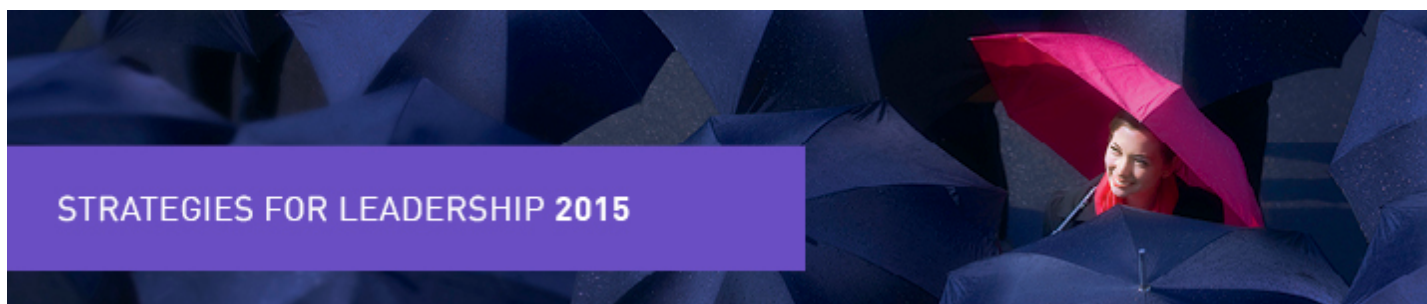


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