

# MANAGING MILLENNIALS

How to provide guidance to these individuals as they adjust and adapt to today's workforce.

BY BEATRIZ BAILEY

**T**he millennial generation (born 1982–2004) today comprises roughly 100 million people, mostly in their teens and 20s.<sup>1</sup>

There is a good chance you have several millennials working in your practice. Many likely are receptionists and medical assistants; some may even be providers. Growing up totally in the technology era, these young individuals possess a set of social and work characteristics that is unique and frequently misunderstood. Gaining an awareness of common millennial characteristics will help you provide guidance to these individuals as they adjust and adapt to today's workforce.

Before you commit to learning about and helping millennials in your practice, it is important to recognize that even if you aren't a millennial, you still can draw upon your personal experience to better understand these employees. After all, you experienced the stage of life that your millennials are facing right now—that is, the time in early adulthood when you were discovering who you are, who you were going to be, and defining how you were going to leave your mark. This stage typically occurs between the ages of 20–35. During this time, individuals tend to be focused on friendships, romance, careers, and starting a family. This phase has nothing to do with generation per se; rather, it is more reflective of where these individuals are in their lives.

By recognizing the difference between the aforementioned “stage of life” and being a member of the millennial generation, you will be better prepared to identify millennial-specific traits and tap into your own experience to help these individuals become functioning and impactful members of your multigenerational work team.

## CHARACTERISTICS AND TIPS

Fine-tuning your understanding of the millennial generation will help you provide better leadership to these individuals, resulting in more cohesive teams and—as a result—better returns. Following are several tips on successfully managing millennials, each preceded by a description of common characteristics shared by members of this generation.

**They are social.** Millennials want to work in an environment that has a social culture. Most are “plugged in” via social networks at all hours of the day. **Tip:** Your practice should channel this energy by utilizing millennial staff members in social roles whenever possible, e.g., social media marketing, event planning, team building, task forces.

**They have a unique, technology-based communication style.** Smartphones have changed the way many professionals communicate; but for millennials, this is the only approach they have ever known. They grew up texting. Just look at a phone bill and you will see that they spend most of their time texting as opposed to speaking with one another. Yet, if we look at who we have managing the phones in our practices, it is often this group of individuals whose inclination is to text rather than converse on the phone. **Tip:** Train them, and train them well. Start with the basics of phone etiquette. Show them what good phone etiquette looks like. Explain it to them, and make sure they know it is imperative that they practice it. This group is eager to please; you just have to teach them what they don't know.

**They are tech savvy and want to be developed.** Millennials are the most tech-savvy generation ever. This is great news! The industry is changing, and the use of technology in our practices continues to grow. Just think back to all of the technological advances in your practice over the past few years: Imaging, electronic medical records (EMR), social media, websites, etc. These individuals are comfortable navigating through evolving technological waters. **Tip:** Have them use their skill sets by encouraging them to make full use of the technical platforms in your practice. For example, if you are using only the top-level functions of your EMR system, ask them to learn how to use the advanced functions and teach their peers. This not only leverages their skill set, but it allows them to develop leadership skills.

**They are drawn to structure.** Surveys show that millennials are more likely than prior generations to opt for secure, structured jobs. They want—and need—to know what you expect of them. **Tip:** A detailed job description ensures that both the employee and employer have defined expectations. This removes any ambiguity for employees and assists employers in defining roles and determining if the practice's expectations are realistic for each given role. Additionally, it provides a basis for measuring performance and providing feedback.

**They want feedback.** This generation was raised by parents, coaches, and teachers who offered continuous feedback, e.g., helicopter parents, sports/activity coaches. Hence, the absence of feedback leads to ambiguity in how well they are performing. **Tip:** Take advantage of their desire to excel in their roles and their appreciation for concrete feedback; this is an open invitation for managers to coach these indi-

viduals. In fact, millennials generally prefer informal, frequent feedback. However, don't discount the need for a formal performance review.

**They are the ultimate team players.** Millennials grew up working in teams, both in school and in extracurricular activities. They understand how to work with others and yearn for team environments which feed their social personas.

**Tip:** Leverage their aptitude for teamwork by making them "team leads" of your projects, e.g., event planning, EMR integration, training, problem-solving task forces.

**They have a desire to learn.** The millennial generation is achievement-oriented. They took advanced placement (AP) courses and tests in school, were involved in multiple extracurricular activities, and, when asked, can describe their long-term plans. This is because they grew up believing that they could do and be anything they wanted. Why should this matter in a practice? In order to keep these individuals engaged, you must invest in their development. **Tip:** Create a formalized training program for both new and tenured staff, and encourage them to invest in their own development.

**They want to succeed, but often lack work-related "soft skills."** The reality is that most millennials have not been taught "soft skills" in the workplace. I still remember my first business-related job out of college. Part of my training included a meeting with a personal shopper at the high-end Nordstrom department store. They taught us how to dress professionally and explained why it was important. Most millennials have never been taught how to dress professionally for the workplace nor the impact of poor office etiquette. The most telling sign is their egregious use of personal cell-phones and Facebook in the office. They are so used to being plugged in that they fail to realize that this is not always appropriate. **Tip:** Spell out the office dress code and etiquette expectations early on in orientation discussions and provide a formalized employee handbook in which the requirements are clearly outlined. Offer professional development opportunities that reinforce these tenets, and make sure coworkers consistently model all desired behavior and attitudes.

**They unintentionally blur the lines between personal and professional image.** They don't understand that there is no filter between "personal image" and "professional image" when it comes to social media. They need to be taught that a posting on Facebook (for example) has the potential of spilling over into their professional world. **Tip:** Implement—and enforce—a social media policy that cautions against inappropriate behavior or messaging away from work. Provide examples to illustrate how such behavior, when captured on social media, can harm the reputations of both the employee and the practice.

**They may need to adjust to altered career paths.** Although millennials were raised to believe they could accomplish anything, they had a rude awakening when they completed their education and found themselves in an

extremely competitive job market with record-high unemployment rates. Therefore, some still may be reeling from the realization they may need to spend more time than expected working in fields other than their own and/or working longer in entry-level positions. This may result in millennials appearing frustrated or uninterested—or conversely overly ambitious—for their role. **Tip:** Be patient if you notice any of these attitudes/behaviors. Your millennials may simply need some time to rewrite their five-year plans. Maybe you can play a role in helping them define what that looks like.

## AN ALL-AGES TEAM

Millennials have unique skills and are eager to please. By understanding their strengths, you have the opportunity to leverage these assets in areas where you may find resistance from other employees. Additionally, you can better appreciate millennials once you differentiate between stage-of-life and generational traits; then you can reference your own experience for increased understanding. With this combined knowledge, you can create a practice environment and culture that is productive and fun for your emerging young workforce while building an all-ages team of motivated and productive employees capable of providing the highest level of care and customer service. ■

1. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/pb/millennials-or-gen-x-the-ultimate-guide-to-generational-confusion/08c09c37-bb60-4a7d-862c-fa4a39d004e1\\_quiz.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/pb/millennials-or-gen-x-the-ultimate-guide-to-generational-confusion/08c09c37-bb60-4a7d-862c-fa4a39d004e1_quiz.html)



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