



## Stop Blaming the Millennials

*Leaders today are too quick to blame the millennials—their work ethic, sense of entitlement and need to be coddled—for performance gaps and behavioural issues.*

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Are you one of those leaders who rolls their eyes at the behavior of millennials? Are you convinced that this generation of young adults is difficult to understand, lead or motivate? When we hear leaders speak about millennials, it's almost always with a combination of frustration, irritation and hopelessness. They use sweeping generalizations about a generation of people such as "They're so entitled." "They expect too much attention," or "They believe they should get promoted without having earned it." Leaders tend to react most when the millennial employees' behavior is different from how they behaved or felt they were entitled to behave.

If you are a Baby Boomer, perhaps you recall some of the things that were said about your generation. For example, females were told to not worry about a career and encouraged to get a job to last until they found a husband. Hippies of our generation were told they would never amount to anything because they didn't take anything seriously enough. Despite having parents who worked long and hard to make ends meet, Boomers rebelled against the way their parents lived and their values.

Many of our generation dropped out, hitchhiked around the globe, explored eastern religions while rejecting our parents' and business



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expectations, caring more about our experiences than our future. We were indeed puzzling, confusing and infuriating to the previous generation, who didn't understand why we didn't respect their authority. Our parents' generation of leaders were authoritarian and patriarchal and didn't seek to understand what we needed; they simply judged us. Now we Boomers are the one's scratching our heads and saying the same thing about millennials that our parents said about us, especially in the workplace.

## Entitlement is Created, Not Unique to Millennials

Unfortunately, what is believed about millennials is the result of gossip and hearsay about them. We repeat what we hear about them as though what we are told is an absolute truth. While certain characteristics are true of many young people, we have to take responsibility for this generation as it is a function of parenting that leads to entitlement, poor impulse control and an inability to receive feedback.

Boomer parents reacted to their authoritarian parents by parenting in a liberal permissive fashion, being overly inclusive and treating kids like friends. These parents tried to be everything their own parents weren't – empathetic, inclusive, supportive. They worked hard to shield their children from any negative experience by overprotecting them, being cheerleaders and caretakers. They were afraid to let them fail, experience disappointment and accept the reality of their talents and abilities. Millennials are simply acting the way parents and teachers have trained them to behave and be led, not babysat, in order to be successful.

## Surveys Done in a Vacuum

Many surveys say that Millennials have a different set of values than the older generation. But isn't this just a function of being in your 20's and early 30's? They call it the idealism of youth for a reason. We want to change the world and make it be the way we want it to be, how it makes us feel the way we want to feel. My values as a hippie in my 20's was much different than my values when I became a card-carrying yuppie in my 30's. I went from wanting world peace to wanting to be at the head of a company, dress for success, own a Mercedes in a matter of years. I went from global consciousness to personal fulfillment of my potential as do most people. This is not a millennial thing!

The following is a sampling of surveys of millennials conducted by different universities that demonstrate something very different than

the rumors about them as well as what it means to use these surveys without a baseline from other generations for comparison. For example:

1. A survey of UPenn business students finding that 1992 graduates expected to work 58 hours a week; 2012 graduates expected to work 72 hours. This is what they expected; not what they actually did. It also doesn't reflect on changing standards at work including the flexibility allowed by technology.<sup>1</sup>
2. A survey from Bentley University found that half of millennials are willing to work long hours and weekends to achieve career success. But how does that compare to previous generations? Perhaps an even higher percentage of Boomers and Gen X'ers were willing to work long hours. You can't conclude that generational differences exist with data from just one generation—it's impossible.<sup>1</sup>
3. A survey by Ernst & Young found that 47% of millennials in management positions have begun working more hours in the last five years compared to 38% of Gen X and 28% of Boomers. Of course, they have—they are young and just got the management jobs, while Boomers have one foot out the door to retirement.<sup>1</sup>

Because we survey millennials about their wants and needs, we say their hopes, dreams and values are different. That they want and need

different things. How do we know this? No one did a survey about what Boomer values were or what was most important to us in life and work when we were young adults because we emerged from the “Mad Men” era where expectations for both men and women were clear and inflexible. Like millennials, Boomers didn't want to work all the time (work life balance), wanted to be self-determined (career path), wanted our elders to be ethical (same),



## 8 TIPS FOR LEADING MILLENNIALS

1. **Give them a vision and objectives for what needs to be done**
2. **Define tasks, expectations and job description**
3. **Correct them if they don't understand**
4. **Say “no” if it isn't aligned with objectives**
5. **Define what success looks like**
6. **Support them when needed**
7. **Provide training when needed**
8. **Provide corrective criticism in a way they can hear it**

[1] Twenge, Jean M. (2016, February 24). Do Millennials Have a Lesser Work Ethic?. [Web Article] Retrieved on December 4, 2018, from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/>



and didn't want to be bound by convention (flexibility). So, are millennials really that different?

## Complaining and Comparing

We think millennials have the negative reputation they do because each generation likes to blame the next when they don't have the skills to manage them. Many of our Boomer clients complain that millennials don't work as hard as they did at their age. These leaders are repeating what our parents used to say to us which was, "You have it so easy! I had to walk to school through three feet of snow. Uphill! Both ways! Without boots!"

There is no value to comparing what others are doing relative to ourselves. It's subjective and doesn't help you lead others. As the expression "Comparisons are odious" indicates, comparison

(especially of people) is not productive and has negative consequences. When you compare them to what you are like, you might as well be saying "I think everyone should be just like me because I am a model for intelligence, work ethic, learning quickly, leading, etc." Labelling anyone gets in the way of our effectiveness as leaders and the success of our employees.

Each generation finds the next generation different from them and take it as a personal affront when they don't share the same values. Of course, all of us think things would be so much easier if everyone was just like us, but they're not. Let's get over this one, please as taking the behavior personally helps no one, especially leaders.

## Give Millennials a Chance to Develop

We now know that when parents don't act as their child's executive function while they are growing up, it remains undeveloped. This leads to dependency issues as adults, without the ability to take initiative, fear of experimenting, inability to struggle, and the expectation that leaders should take care of them.

Most of the Emotional Intelligence competencies come from our executive function – emotional self-management, accurate self-assessment, social awareness, stress management, impulse control, etc. Many of the complaints you hear about millennials are directly related to low EI as a result of them never having to develop it. Parents that rescued



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their children from negative experiences didn't do their children any favors. Leaders who are permissive and let employees define how they are going to work, and what they will and won't do, are perpetuating the problem.

## It's About Leadership

Boomer leaders are judging millennials the same way their parents and leaders did. Employees should be judged on their own merits, not seen through the lens of "They are a millennial, so they won't like being told what to do." Everyone is different and to lump all millennials into a category suggests they are all the same. It's time to stop lumping millennials together and instead treating them as individual human beings with distinct needs based on their personality type, brain organization, ambitions, etc. As leaders, we must stop blaming Millennials and start developing leadership skills to manage their performance and ensure their success.

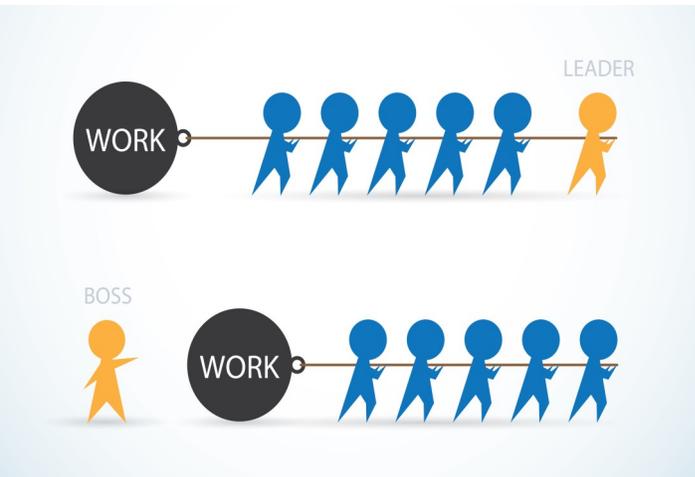
Blaming millennials can also be an attempt to be absolved of the responsibility to lead younger people who aren't like us and don't make us feel the way we want to feel. Leaders must learn to deal with entitlement, poor performance, and other challenging behaviors. We need to stop believing that we are at the mercy of their behavior and if it weren't for those damn millennials, we would be a great leader!

Young humans need guidance, effective leadership, opportunities to grow and develop. They need to be respected, listened to and appreciated for what they can contribute. Our goal is not to make them be like us or have the same experiences we had. They have challenges of their own without having to fear hurting our feelings if they don't act right.

## Leading Millennials

Leaders must stop blaming the millennials and look at what they need to do to lead them, then develop skills to do so. They need their leaders to define expectations, give feedback, recognize success and be honest about their capabilities. Too many leaders are permissive, acting like colleagues and cheerleaders, creating a





mediocre workforce unprepared for the rigours of the career path they have chosen.

If you want to be effective in leading millennials or any other employee group, our Leadership Foundations Coaching Program shows leaders how to develop the skills that answer the following 4 questions for employees:



What am I supposed to do?

- ✓ Give them a vision and objectives for what needs to be done
- ✓ Define tasks, expectations, job description
- ✓ Correct them if they don't understand
- ✓ Say "no" if it isn't aligned with objectives
- ✓ Define what success looks like



Will you let me do it?

- ✓ Share responsibility
- ✓ Delegate task and authority
- ✓ Trust they will do what is required
- ✓ Let go of control
- ✓ Give them resources to do it



Will you help me when I need it?

- ✓ Don't let them veer off course
- ✓ Support them when they need it
- ✓ Resolve issues with them
- ✓ Hold them accountable when they fail to meet expectations
- ✓ Encourage progress and outcomes
- ✓ Provide training when needed



Will you let me know how I am doing?

- ✓ Give them SMART feedback
- ✓ Give realistic assessment of their capabilities
- ✓ Provide corrective criticism in a way they can hear it

## Caliber's Leadership Toolbox

Leaders are developed, not born. While some have more intrinsic talent for leading, most need to develop the skills required to define, direct, coach, assess and give critical and encouraging feedback. Leaders need to focus on



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themselves, develop awareness of the fears they have of being authoritarian (like their parents). They must stop taking responsibility for the feelings they imagine millennials and other employees might have and have difficult conversations, for the sake of the business, employees and themselves.

### Think about your Leadership Toolbox.

What skills do you have and which are missing? Dealing with the challenging aspects of leadership can be learned and developed over time and is not something that is done through osmosis.

Stop blaming the millennials, assess what skills you need to develop and contact us for more information about our programs for leaders.



## FREE WEBINAR

**Interested in learning morning? Visit our website to access a FREE recording of our Webinar “Stop Blaming the Millennials”.**

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### ABOUT CALIBER

Caliber Leadership Systems is a Toronto-based consulting firm working with global clients striving to achieve their full potential. We specialize in helping clients build the infrastructure—systems, processes, structures, behaviour and leadership practices—necessary to prepare for and master the next level of organizational growth and development.

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