

Some Thoughts about How Millennials Communicate ... and Some Advice

Just about any discussion of the millennial generation (generally considered those born between 1982 and 1994) is likely to include something about their communication style. For example:

- **Millennials don't like talking on the phone.** They grew up as email and texting were coming into vogue, and they readily embraced those technologies. Interestingly, one telecommunications company conducted a study that showed that smartphone apps that enable you to make phone calls rank fifth among apps used by the public.
- **They prefer text messages.** Millennials like the instantaneous nature of texting, plus the fact that they can send or receive messages anywhere and at any time. Also, unlike phone calls or face-to-face conversations, text messages give the sender a bit more "thought time" to figure out what to say.
- **They still like emails ... for less urgent communications.** Emails give users more time to respond (i.e., a few hours). Plus, they can say more when there are fewer space or other formatting limitations.
- **Millennials value open and honest communication.** They like "straight shooters" – people who tell the truth, are direct, and avoid "corporate speak," as well as words and phrases that sound like they were written by someone in the PR department.
- **They value brevity.** Long-winded communications are seen as time and money wasters – something that should be avoided. So, 140-character tweets, abbreviations such as LOL ("laughing out loud") and TL;DR ("too long; didn't read") and similar shortcuts are likely to find their way into business communications.

This style of communication is likely to become more common in the business world as millennials assume leadership roles formerly held by the baby boomers. In fact, in three years, millennials will comprise half of the workforce. So, it's not surprising that there's no shortage of articles, books, or workshops offering advice on how to better communicate with millennials. A quick Google search alone unearthed hundreds of articles, such as, *How to Communicate with Millennials at Work – 23 Surefire Tips to Retire the Stereotypes*, and *How to Bridge the Millennial/Baby Boomer Communications Gap*.

Without a doubt, baby boomers and Generation Xers will need to adapt. But it's also important for millennials to understand and master more traditional styles of communication – the kind used by those "still in charge." So, this article will now tackle a topic rarely, if ever, addressed in those "how to" articles on the internet and in business publications and other sources – namely, what can be done to expand and enhance the communication skills of millennials.

Look for mentoring opportunities

For instance, if you spot a younger employee whose writing skills are sub-par (e.g., he or she cannot write a clear, compelling, or even grammatically correct proposal or report), pair that individual with a colleague who has mastered that skill. Make sure the mentor knows that his or her primary role is to help cultivate a specific communication skill. Millennials want feedback – in part because of their desire to move up through the organization. They are incredibly receptive to assessments and advice given by supervisors and others who have achieved success.

Cultivate face-to-face communication opportunities

It takes practice to master the art of in-person conversation. Some millennials don't get much practice. Because of their extensive reliance on online communication, many of them have missed out on the face-to-face interactions previous generations have benefited from – benefits such as learning how to speak in a professional manner, listening attentively, and reading body language. It's been said that younger workers would rather send an instant message than walk down the hall to speak directly to a colleague. If that's true, they are missing out on more than physical exercise.

When appropriate, invite them to certain meetings or presentations – as observers rather than as participants – so they can see the many aspects of face-to-face communication. Also, walk down that hall; seek them out in person – even if you're tempted to send an email or text about something. Most learning is observational, and observing your approach may make them less awkward in face-to-face conversations.

Invest in training

All generations of employees value it. Millennials are no different. But keep some things in mind:

- **Be sure it's meaningful.** In other words, make it clear not only what skill is important, but also why it's important. Telling a millennial that he or she needs to change his or her "too casual" style of communication (e.g., too terse, informal, slang, etc.) is not enough. You need to tell him or her why it needs to change (e.g., that it's inappropriate to use with a particular colleague, client, or customer he or she is communicating with).
- **Provide training in smaller chunks.** Decades ago (four decades to be specific), [The Ammerman Experience's](#) flagship workshop was two days in length! We've long since abandoned that approach. Today, some of our workshops are a half-day in length and some of our executive coaching sessions are two hours. When you think of providing training opportunities for millennials, think in terms of multiple, but shorter, sessions.
- **Beware of "lectures."** The best training is interactive or includes such things as on-camera practice or other learning-by-doing activities. (Millennials are especially into gaming – perhaps an outgrowth of their fascination with video games.) Our firm uses video extensively. We have an impressive library of public-domain video clips which we incorporate into our workshops. Millennials are among those in the "television generation;" they are quite comfortable with seeing themselves practice on video.
- **Address blind spots.** Most companies assume their employees know how to communicate effectively – that they learned these skills in school or at a previous company. Wrong! Consider the following: Have you ever been taught how to craft a powerful, effective presentation? What about

PowerPoint? Most people misuse it, so it's unlikely they have ever had a tutorial on it. Handling Q&A? Managing presentation stress? Unless someone seeks out accurate information on these topics (few people do), he or she must rely on what they see inside the company. (The Ammerman Experience frequently addresses those topics in our workshops for the very reason that these topics have traditionally been ignored.)

- **Consider coaching with Ammerman.** Our Strategic Communications Coaching is a new approach designed to train employees in the art of communication using many of the suggestions above. Whether you are a millennial yourself or the one responsible for managing the millennials on your staff, our coaching program takes the guesswork out of executing a training plan. We focus on the most critical skills needed by millennials to communicate in the workplace while giving them liberty to direct their coaching toward specific areas of desired growth. Working through video conferencing in pre-scheduled blocks of time, our format encourages shorter, more impactful training sessions that don't require time out of the office or travel. Best of all, we bring our proven experience and 43 year background of excellence in business communications to every interaction, meaning you or your team learn highly impactful, incredibly effective skills in a very short amount of time. It's a true, one-on-one format that helps bridge the communication gap between millennials and their more senior co-workers and leaders.

Help your millennials expand their horizons by offering them new and different approaches to communication. And, be open to their approaches to communicating as well. If you do, you'll find that your baby boomers, Gen Xers, and millennials will make a great team.