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## Get the Best Out of Millennials by Tweaking Habits

### Managers Have to Adjust Expectations and Approaches

By Carol Phillips

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The Millennial Generation is being closely watched as it begins to fill the entry-level ranks at advertising agencies, law firms, investment banks and corporate offices. Many believe it will be unlike other generations both in its work expectations and in its impact on the workplace.

Early indications, however, are not entirely glowing. A recent "60 Minutes" segment portrayed a generation unwilling to make even the most routine sacrifices, such as staying late after work. Perhaps the failure to impress reflects a failure on the part of managers to adapt their expectations and approaches.

Here, then, are six lessons I've learned about what it takes to get the best performance from a sophomore.

#### **1. ELIMINATE AMBIGUITY.**

Millennials are experts at calculating what it takes to meet expectations. Once locked in, they have a GPS-like approach to navigating toward the goal. I have learned that the flip side of this laser-like focus is a lack of patience for any hint that the rules are being changed midstream.

**LESSON:** Set clear goals and timelines -- and resist modifying them. Once the syllabus is printed, I never change it.

#### **2. THINK OF TIME AS A 24/7 RESOURCE.**

College students don't look busy or frantic; they look tired. Millennials regard time as a 24-hour

resource. Thanks to time stamping, I know students complete their work closer to 5:00 a.m. than 5:00 p.m. I have come to admire this as an exquisite sense of time management rather than a lack of forward planning.

**LESSON:** Focus on results, not process. Tell them when it's due, not when to do it.

### **3. COMBINE WORK WITH PLAY.**

I suspect Millennials will think of a job less as a place you go from 9 to 5 than as a place where you get to hang out with a great team of friends prior to meeting them later to hang out and continue the conversation somewhere else.

**LESSON:** Allow Millennials to form their own work teams when possible.

### **4. MAKE IT WORTHWHILE.**

Students are sick of busy work and exercises; they long to do something "real" and meaningful. What's more, they are convinced they are ready for it. Whenever possible, I incorporate real-world consulting problems and clients into class assignments. Many students have told me years later that those were among the most meaningful experiences they had in their college careers.

**LESSON:** Assign the tough problems, not just the ones you think they can handle.

### **5. HANDLE WITH CARE.**

They look like adults, talk like adults and (usually) think like adults. So it's easy to forget that emotionally they have more in common with high-schoolers than young professionals. They take everything very seriously. Many Millennials lack the resilience to shrug off setbacks; a misdirected frown or a curt e-mail can send them into a tailspin.

**LESSON:** Use criticism sparingly, frame feedback positively -- and keep the Kleenex handy.

### **6. PLAY TO THEIR STRENGTHS.**

Millennials find technology effortless, the result of growing up in a world where computers, cellphones, iPods, navigation systems and digital recorders are ubiquitous and essential. They exhibit an unusual breadth of experiences and a deep sense of social responsibility. Their perspective is entirely global. In the classroom, I try to leverage these strengths by giving them choices and encouraging them to follow their interests. Student work often astonishes me with its professionalism and creativity.

**LESSON:** Let their creativity, technology skills and brainpower loose. There's no telling where it will lead.

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