



Millennial Onboarding

ABSTRACT

Onboarding new employees is a secure investment that will assist newly hired employees in developing their skills, knowledge, and value within the company. It will help match the technically skilled Millennial workforce with new and emerging needs of your company, which gives your company an advantage within the market.

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If you're an employer, you want to hire an employee that will do their job, not your bidding.

Jeffery Jones

Preface

More than ever, millennials – those born between 1980 and 1995 – are entering the workforce and becoming a vital part of our organizations. These workers bring a unique outlook on life to their jobs, and may also pose unique challenges. Taking time to customize the onboarding process for millennial employees helps promote employee retention and ensures that millennials are properly socialized into the workplace. Customizing the onboarding process for millennial employees benefits both the employee and the workplace.

Employee loyalty begins with employer loyalty.

Harvey Mackay

Chapter One: Purpose of Onboarding

Onboarding is one of the most important investments organizations make in their employees. A sound onboarding process not only gathers the necessary paperwork from a new hire, but socializes them into the workplace and the job. Onboarding is more than just new hire orientation. It is a continuous process of bringing the new hire into the organization, helping them develop, providing feedback and integrating the new hire into the organization and team. Far from a one-time event, the onboarding process can encompass the first 180 days of a new hire's tenure at your organization.

Start Up Costs

Organizations spend almost \$40 billion every year to onboard new employees. This makes onboarding not only one of the most significant time investments organizations make, but one of the most significant financial investments as well. When employees leave the organization after only a short time, these start-up costs are a lost investment. Taking time to develop a quality onboarding process helps promote employee retention, and thus promotes return on the substantial financial investment made in onboarding them.

Employee Anxiety

A solid onboarding process also helps to alleviate employee anxiety. It is normal to feel some anxiety when starting a new job, with all its uncertainty and new information. An onboarding process that not only fulfills requirements regarding paperwork and policy but which also introduces the new hire to the workplace, coworkers, and expectations goes a long way toward relieving anxiety and helping the employee feel comfortable. This, in turn, helps promote employee retention.

Employee Turnover

Preventing employee turnover is one important purpose of the onboarding process. Many employees decide whether to stay in or leave a job within the first six weeks of employment, and for almost all workplaces the first 90 days of employment is a critical period for employee retention. Employees who are anxious, uncertain about expectations, or otherwise do not feel part of the organization are more likely to leave within the first 90 to 180 days.

Realistic Expectations

The onboarding process is a key opportunity to provide the new hire with realistic expectations. It is also key that the organization and the new hire's manager have realistic expectations of what the onboarding process can do. Even the most efficient and quality onboarding process will not prevent all employee turnover. In addition, not all new hires will respond the same way to onboarding activities. No onboarding process can alleviate all anxiety, or fully socialize the new hire in just a few weeks. Setting realistic expectations for both employee and organization in terms of onboarding outcomes is important.

Practical Illustration

Marisol was hired into an entry-level job at a major firm in her industry. She was very excited to begin the job. On her first day, her manager handed her a large stack of paperwork and a pen, placed her in an otherwise empty conference room, and asked her to fill out the paperwork. Two hours later, her manager showed her to her cubicle and gave her the training manual for her new position. The manager told Marisol to call or email if she had any questions at all during her first day, and then left her to work independently.

Marisol spent the first part of the day reading the training manual, but still found herself anxious about her ability to do the job, and also realized she was unsure what she was expected to do and complete. Her manager did not return voicemail until late in the day, so Marisol found herself uncertain how to proceed. As she ate lunch alone in her cubicle, she wondered if she would ever get the hang of this new job.

Employees who believe that management is concerned about them as a whole person are more productive, more satisfied, more fulfilled.

Yo-Yo Ma

Chapter Two: Introduction

Preparing your employees for success starts long before they arrive for their first day on the job. A sound onboarding process not only helps to integrate new hires into the workplace, it prepares them to succeed in the first days and months on the job and over the long haul. A quality onboarding process goes beyond just new employee orientation -it supports employees as they grow comfortable in the job and the organization.

Why Onboarding?

Why invest in an onboarding process rather than just a one-day orientation? A continuous onboarding process not only ensures that new hires have the necessary paperwork filled out and start the job on the right foot, but helps to socialize the new hire into the organization. Because a new hire's needs and concerns will change as he or she becomes comfortable with different aspects of the job, a continuous onboarding process ensures that employees can ask questions or have different needs addressed as they come up. A quality onboarding process helps to promote employee retention, which is both a cost savings and contributes to greater continuity among the work team.

Importance of Onboarding

The onboarding process sets the tone for an employee's experience at an organization. While many people think of onboarding solely in terms of new hire orientation, in reality onboarding begins with the first welcome from Human Resources, and continues throughout the new hire's first weeks and months at the organization. Attention to every phase of the onboarding process helps to fully integrate new hires into the organization, which contributes to morale, productivity, and retention.

Making Employees Feel Welcome

One of the most important goals of the onboarding process is to make new hires feel welcome in the organization. Onboarding processes which are cold, impersonal, and involve little contact with managers and other employees can be off-putting. In contrast, an onboarding process in which the new hire has contact with new coworkers and managers, is warmly welcomed, and has his or her needs and personality taken into account is likely to create more positive feelings.

Some ideas for making employees feel welcome during onboarding include:

- Introduce the new hire to office neighbors, work team members, and support staff
- If possible, have the employee's workstation set up and stocked with supplies

- Ensure that the new hire has someone to eat lunch with on his or her first day

First Day Checklist

A first day checklist can be helpful for both managers and new hires in the onboarding process. A first day checklist helps ensure that the new hire has the most important information they will need by the end of the first work day, and that they have been adequately welcomed into and oriented to the space. Having a standard first day checklist also ensures that there is consistency across onboarding for all new hires.

Some things to include on the first day checklist might include:

1. Greeting and welcoming the new hire
2. Setting up lunch with the new hire's team or manager
3. Having the new hire's ID badge or other identification ready
4. Introducing the new hire to team members, direct reports, and supervisors
5. Going over the new hire's job description
6. Going over the organizational chart
7. Giving the new hire a tour, including restrooms, break rooms, kitchen facilities, and common areas
8. Showing the new hire his or her mailbox, as well as copiers, fax machines, and other equipment
9. Going over IT and telephone policies and procedures

Practical Illustration

Kenya began a new job at a large firm. She was very nervous her first day about finding her way around and learning her duties. Kenya's manager, Pearl, met her in the lobby when she arrived. Pearl gave Kenya a tour of the office, pointing out her cubicle, the common areas and restrooms, and the workroom with the copier and office supplies. Along the way, she introduced Kenya to the coworkers in the neighboring cubicles. Pearl and Kenya then sat down and went over Kenya's job description and the expectations for her first week. Finally, Pearl gave Kenya her ID badge and walked her to her cubicle, which was stocked with the supplies she would need to begin work. At lunch with her manager and one of her team members that day, Kenya felt like she was settling in nicely.

We're living in a different world now in terms of employee needs.

Anne Mulcahy

Chapter Three: Millennials and Onboarding

As members of the Millennial generation – otherwise known as Gen Y – begin to enter the workforce, workplaces and organizations must change to meet their unique talents and challenges. Employees of the generation have different expectations for their working lives and careers, and the savvy organization takes these into account from the moment of hire and through the onboarding process.

Who are Millennials?

Millennials are members of the generation born between 1980 and 1995. They are a generation that came of age in an era of increasing technology and economic uncertainty, both of which shape the way they approach work and life. While millennial employees are often dismissed as lazy or self-involved, in reality their unique approach to work and life can be an asset to organizations that know how to leverage them.

Common traits of Millennials:

- Preference for multitasking
- Highly connected, via social media and other communication technology
- Tech-savvy – Millennials have grown up using computers and other technology
- Desire to be recognized for their efforts
- Desire for instant gratification and feedback
- Team-oriented and collaborative
- Close to their parents

- Expectation of work-life balance, high value on personal time

How Do Millennials Differ from Other Workers?

Millennials differ from workers in older generations in several important ways. Millennials are generally more tech-savvy than older workers because they have grown up using technology, and with the expectation that technology will continue to evolve. They are thus very comfortable with computers, social media, and other technology. Being comfortable with social media may mean that Millennials need extra coaching on professional communication and what levels of personal transparency are appropriate in the workplace.

They have also come of age as multitasking – which may mean they are more productive, but may also mean they have difficulty focusing on one task for an extended period. They tend to be collaborative and team-oriented and to work well in groups. Millennials have a greater expectation of work-life balance at the earliest stages of their careers than older generations do, and also want to know from the first day on the job what the opportunities for advancement are in an organization. Finally, Millennials expect to be recognized for their work and to receive regular, detailed feedback. They need one-on-one mentoring and individualized attention from supervisors and managers.

Investiture Socialization – Let Them Be Themselves!

One method that works well when onboarding millennial employees is *investiture socialization*. In this process, managers and supervisors draw on Millennials' unique traits and perspectives and allow these employees to be themselves. Allowing millennial employees to be themselves not only helps to alleviate any anxiety they may have about being inauthentic – a particular concern for this generation – but also allows managers and supervisors to see their strengths and weaknesses in action. Finding ways to incorporate millennial traits such as tech-savviness into the onboarding process is another key aspect of investiture socialization, as is spending one-on-one time with the new hires.

Informal Rather than Formal Onboarding Processes

Millennial employees respond better to informal onboarding processes. Day-long orientation sessions, lecture-style orientations, and endless reams of paperwork are at odds with Millennials' preference for multitasking, technology, and (at times) instant gratification. Finding ways to onboard Millennials that draw on their preference for fast-paced, technology-based, and personal interactions is likely to engage these new hires. Putting onboarding material that might otherwise be delivered in lecture format on DVD or in podcast form, for instance, may be more engaging to the millennial new hire. Assigning a manager, supervisor, or team member to deliver the onboarding material to the new millennial one on one rather than in a large group setting is also more effective.

Practical Illustrations

Parker is a manager in charge of recruiting new college graduates to his organization. He notices that the first batch of new hires he brings in seems to be disengaged during their day-long orientation. Many of them frequently check their cell phones or otherwise seem to check out by lunchtime. He also notices he ends up answering many questions via email that should have been covered in the orientation sessions. After talking to his own supervisor about his concerns, and to his college-age son, Parker decided to make some changes to the onboarding process. Instead of a full day of presentations, new hires now watch a short DVD on the organization's mission and vision, then break into small groups where every two new employees meets with a manager one-on-one. After trying this new method, Parker notices that the new hires seem to have far fewer questions about the basic policies and processes.

An employee's motivation is the direct result of the sum of interactions with his or her manager.

Bob Nelson

Chapter Four: Onboarding Checklist

Having a comprehensive onboarding checklist – from pre-arrival through the first day and up through the employee’s first 90 to 180 days – can help when onboarding Millennial employees. Because Millennials thrive on interaction and feedback, having a checklist of what they should be learning and experiencing at various steps in the onboarding process helps the manager provide the type of mentoring and feedback Millennials need. It also helps in the process of investiture socialization we discussed in Chapter Three.

Pre-Arrival

The onboarding process begins long before the employee arrives for his or her first day at the office. Millennial employees especially thrive on a great deal of contact from their manager or supervisor in the days leading up to the first day of employment. Because Millennials also appreciate clear guidelines and expectations, providing a pre-arrival checklist not only helps the manager effectively prepare the employee for his or her first day, but also provides the Millennial employee with the structure he or she needs to feel less anxious about starting a new job.

Items to include on the pre-arrival checklist include:

- Frequent contact with the new employee leading up to the first day. Millennials may prefer email contact over phone contact.

- Determine what the new employee needs to know to start off successfully, including answers to any questions that come up during email or phone contact.
- Prepare a packet with organizational charts, company policies, and other materials to supplement any orientation the employee undergoes.
- Provide a clear outline of the new employee’s job responsibilities, including the job description
- Clearly outline the employee’s career path – this is especially key with Millennials
- Provide clear expectations for the first week, month, quarter, and year on the job
- Set up necessary technology – email, computer workstation, and so forth
- Stock the workstation with supplies
- Email the new employee’s team members to introduce him or her

Arrival

Once the items from the pre-arrival checklist are in place, the new hire’s first day should be able to go smoothly. Having a checklist of items that need to occur or be in place on the first day a new hire arrives at the organization is key to alleviating employee anxiety, making sure that all important matters the employee needs in order to start successfully are covered, and that onboarding is uniform across employees.

Some items to include on the arrival checklist include:

- Assign someone to greet the new employee, or do so yourself
- Give the employee a tour of the work areas, their cube or office, the common areas, the restroom, and supply areas
- Introduce the employee to those who office near them, their supervisor and supervisees (if any), and their team members
- Review procedures for telephone and computer usage, including personal usage rules

First Day

The first day at a new job can be overwhelming. Providing a first day checklist helps make expectations clear from the outset. Millennials value clear guidelines and expectations, so a first day checklist is especially important when onboarding these employees.

Some items to include on the first day checklist include:

- Assign someone to escort the new employee to orientation or meetings, or do so yourself
- Set up lunch with you, or with team members, for the new employee. If lunch is provided as part of orientation, set up this lunch for the first week.
- Take time to explain the work of the unit or department, including reviewing the organizational chart

- Review the employee's job description and expectations for the first week
- Review the employee's career path – especially key with Millennials

First Week

Onboarding should always be continuous, and this is especially important with Millennials. They are used to frequent contact with and feedback from mentors. They also thrive when the guidelines are clear and they are given discrete tasks to complete. Having a first week checklist helps the manager in following up with the Millennial employee, and also provides the employee with structure as he or she settles into the job.

Some items to include on the First Week checklist include:

- Clearly outline training requirements
- Clearly outline job expectations
- Establish milestones the employee should meet
- Work with the employee to set individual goals
- Set 30 days goals with the employee
- Revisit the career path and answer any questions the employee may have
- Ensure that the employee has completed all necessary paperwork
- Ensure that the employee has completed all necessary training

First Month

Because Millennials thrive on structure, a First Month checklist may also be useful. Some studies show that Millennials decide within the first six weeks whether they will stay at a new job. Being sure to lay out a clear path through the first month and beyond can help Millennials decide to stay with your organization.

Some items to include on the First Month checklist include:

- Provide regular feedback on the employee's performance
- Solicit informal feedback from the employee's team mates, supervisors, and supervisees (if any)
- Set aside time to check in informally with the employee to answer any questions that arise

Practical Illustration

Luis was hired to start a new job just a few weeks after graduation from college. After receiving his offer letter, he had 10 days before he started the job. He was pleased to find an email from his new supervisor in his inbox, welcoming him to the team and inviting him to ask any questions that might come up as he reviewed his offer letter. He and his supervisor exchanged some emails, and Luis was relieved to have some of his biggest questions answered. On his first day, he was greeted by one of his team members and shown around the office. In mid-morning, he was able to sit down with his supervisor and go over his job description and the possible career paths he might take in the organization. As his first week on the job came to a close, Luis reflected on how helpful it had been to be able to ask questions, check in with his supervisor, and know exactly what was expected.

Treat employees like partners, and they act like partners.

Fred Allen

Chapter Five: Engaging the Millennial Employee

One of the most important things that a manager can do in the onboarding process is engaging the millennial employee. Millennials are interactive – they thrive when they can explore, do, and experience. Finding ways to engage Millennials throughout the onboarding process not only ensures that the process goes smoothly, but helps get them invested in the organization. An invested employee is an employee more likely to stay with the organization for the long run.

Create an Informal Program

As we learned in Chapter Three, Millennials are more likely to respond to an onboarding process that is informal and personalized than one that is formal and impersonal. Leveraging a Millennial new hires preference for technology, multitasking, collaboration, and for exploration when creating your onboarding program is key to its success. Millennials are likely to become quickly bored with day-long, lecture-style orientation sessions, or onboarding activities where they have little interaction with others. Coupled with their shorter attention spans, these impersonal approaches may leave Millennials feeling disengaged.

Some ideas for creating an informal onboarding program that will engage Millennials include:

- Use technology like videos, podcasts, or webinars in place of lectures or meetings
- Meet with employees one on one or in small groups

- Use a mix of activities and break the onboarding process into chunks
- Allow for some exploratory, unstructured time if possible

Engage Employees One on One

Millennials are accustomed to a high degree of interaction with their mentors, supervisors, and other important people in their lives. They also thrive on collaboration and feedback. Taking time to engage employees one on one throughout the onboarding process, from arrival through the first 90 or 180 days, provides them with the interaction and feedback they need to feel comfortable and competent. One on one interaction with millennial employees need not always be formal; simply taking the time to check in or have a brief chat helps to engage them. During onboarding, engaging Millennials one on one instead of in large group settings is a good strategy, as it provides the sense of investment and the opportunity for meaningful feedback and interaction.

The Role of Human Resources

Human Resources play an important role in onboarding and retaining millennial employees. The role of Human Resources in onboarding Millennials is not just to ensure that paperwork is filled out and policies followed, but to serve as important gatekeepers to the organization. When onboarding Millennials,

Human Resources should take the time to stress all the valuable things the organization can offer the employee – vacation time, benefits, flexible scheduling, and more. Millennials who are new to the workforce may not think to ask about these issues, and those that have been in other jobs have high expectations from the organizations in which they work. Human Resources plays a valuable role as onboarding ambassador when working with Millennials. Taking the time to determine what Millennials care about, and how HR can deliver that, is a key part of bringing this generation of workers onboard.

The Role of Managers

Managers play a vital role in onboarding Millennials, and not just in practical ways such as providing paperwork and office tours. Millennials thrive when they have lots of FaceTime with mentors, managers, and important others in their lives. Because Millennials respond best when engaged one on one, managers can and should take on many of the onboarding tasks that might otherwise be handled by a trainer or HR representative in a large group. Managers provide the structure and feedback that Millennials need in order to feel competent at a new job. Managers can also gauge an employee’s strengths, weaknesses, and concerns and customize the onboarding process to address these.

Practical Illustration

Yuki was nervous about beginning her first office job after graduating from college. She was used to being able to structure her time, and was nervous that now her life would be all about work. She had heard stories from friends about long hours of overtime, never being able to leave work on time, and having to miss out on vacation and leisure activities because of work. On her second day of work, Philip from Human Resources came by her office to go over the benefits package. In addition to her vision and health benefits, Philip pointed out the generous flex-time policy that Yuki would be able to take advantage of after she had been at the job for 6 months. He also told her about the way in which she could earn vacation days, and how these days could be used throughout the year.

Later that day, Yuki's manager Kwame sat down with her to discuss the expectations for working hours during the week. He explained that the organization valued employee's personal time, and they would not expect her to work past 5 PM unless there was a true emergency. In addition, Kwame explained that after Yuki had been in the job for 6 months, they could discuss varying her working hours or even allowing her to work from home sometimes. Yuki found herself feeling much more at ease.

*There are two things people want more than sex and money-
recognition and praise.*

Mary Kay Ash

Chapter Six: Following Up With the Millennial Employee

Even more than most employees, Millennials need follow-up during the onboarding process. Regular check ins allow managers to gauge strengths and weaknesses, address needs and questions, and provide the interaction and feedback Millennials need to thrive. Scheduling regular formal and informal follow-ups throughout the first 90 to 180 days is key to successfully onboarding and ultimately retaining Millennials.

Initial Check-In – One on One

You should schedule time to check in with Millennial employees at the end of the first week of employment. Include this item on your first week checklist. You do not need to schedule a formal meeting, but should take a few minutes to simply check in with the employee and invite him or her to ask questions.

Some things to explore in the initial check-in:

- Would the employee like to go over his or her job description again?
- Does the employee feel comfortable with the goals or benchmarks for the first week of work?
- Has the employee encountered any problems or challenges you can help him or her navigate?
- What new questions does the employee have now that he or she has been doing the job?

- How can you help the employee going into the second week of work?

Following up – Regular, Informal Follow Ups

Millennials are used to frequent feedback and follow up from mentors, teachers, supervisors, and even parents. Taking the time to engage in regular follow ups with Millennial employees helps them feel less anxious and more competent on the job. Follow ups do not need to be formal or extensive, but they should be regular. Setting a time each week or every 10 days to follow up for 10 or 15 minutes is enough. These regular follow ups help to build a rapport and a relationship between you and the Millennial employee, which in turn increases the employee's investment in the job and organization.

Setting Schedules – Millennials and Work-Life

Work-life balance is one of the key concerns Millennials have as they enter the workforce. Unlike older generations of workers, Millennials are less willing to sacrifice personal and family time in favor of work. Stressing that you and the organization honor their lives outside of work is a key aspect of onboarding and retaining Millennials. To the extent that it is possible, you should be flexible on scheduling with Millennial employees. Involve them in setting their work schedules. Make arrangements such as work from home, flextime, or compressed work weeks available. Be clear about expectations

for overtime or work outside of regular work hours. If a Millennial employee expresses concern about scheduling, ask him or her to engage in brainstorming with you about possible solutions.

Mentoring and the Millennial

Millennials want, need, and expect to be mentored. They thrive when they feel as though the organization is personally invested in them, their growth, and their success. Millennials are used to looking to significant others such as teachers and parents for recognition, affirmation, and guidance. Recognizing this and incorporating it into your onboarding process helps Millennials feel both less anxious and more competent. When Millennials feel invested in, they strive to grow and improve. Regular recognition of their efforts and continuous feedback on what they do well and where they could grow also help foster feelings of investment. Millennials are also collaborative by nature; having a mentor they can collaborate with leverages this tendency.

Practical Illustration

Myra had heard many of her colleagues complain about how lazy and disengaged their young new hires were. They never seemed to come to their managers for help, and they always seemed to be in a hurry to leave the office at five. Myra was very nervous when she was told that she would be managing Vikki, who was in her mid-twenties and had just finished graduate school. At first, Myra interacted with Vikki very little, but she noticed that Vikki seemed to need a lot of reinforcement that she was doing well at the job. Myra decided she would check in with Vikki each Thursday to see how she was settling into the job. After their first couple of meetings, Myra noticed that Vikki was more productive and seemed more confident at her tasks. She even started approaching Myra with questions and asking for advice.

*The biggest job we have is to teach a new employee how to fail
intelligently.*

Charles Kettering

Chapter Seven: Setting Expectations with the Millennial Employee

Setting expectations should be a central part of the onboarding process. This allows the employee to know what is expected of him or her, and what he or she can expect from the organization. Millennials in particular benefit when they are given clear expectations, both in terms of what is required of them and in terms of what they can reasonably expect from others. Incorporating clear expectations starting with onboarding is one way to help Millennials feel both that the organization invests in them, and that they can invest in the organization.

Define Requirements – Provide Specific Instructions

A common criticism of Millennials is that they have trouble self-starting. Looked at another way, however, Millennials are not unmotivated – they just perform best when given specific instructions and guidance. Along with their being accustomed to mentoring and feedback, Millennials are used to a high degree of guidance from teachers and parents. They bring this expectation into their working lives. When provided with specific requirement and instructions, especially when coupled with frequent feedback, Millennials can be very productive and even innovative workers. Taking the time to provide specific, detailed instructions and expectations can help Millennials thrive.

Identify Opportunities for Improvement and Growth

Millennials value the opportunity to improve, grow, and be recognized for their efforts. If they do not see a way to grow and advance in a job or organization, they are unlikely to invest time or energy in it. Leverage Millennials' preference for frequent feedback by identifying opportunities for improvement and growth. Clearly outline the ways in which an employee can improve performance, grow in skill or responsibility, or advance in the organization. Recognize what they do well and frame any weaknesses as opportunities for development. Stress the resources the organization has to offer in helping employees grow and develop, including mentoring and training.

Set Verbal Expectations

One effective way to set expectations with millennial employees is to do so verbally. Take advantage of Millennials' desire for FaceTime by using that time to set expectations. Be clear, be specific, and be systematic. When setting verbal expectations, walk the employee through each step of the process or task. Take time to ask if they have questions, or ask him or her to explain to you in his or her own words what is expected.

Put It in Writing

Along with setting verbal expectations, putting expectations in writing is key to onboarding and retaining millennial employees. Putting expectations in writing gives employees something to refer back to, and also provides the manager or mentor with a record of what has been agreed to. Millennials appreciate clear, detailed, systematic instructions, especially when they are learning something new. They feel more competent when they have a written set of instructions to refer back to. You might draw up informal contracts, or simply provide detailed sets of written expectations and instructions. Such sets of written instructions also benefit the millennial employee because they make clear not only what is expected of him or her, but what he or she can reasonably expect.

Practical Illustration

Markus was very frustrated with his new direct report, Shonda. She had graduated from a prestigious college with honors, but she seemed unable to undertake any work independently. She continuously asked him for guidance or wanted to double check every step of a project. Markus found himself answering many emails from Shonda every day, as her projects fell further and further behind. Markus scheduled time with Shonda to discuss this issue. They sat down together and made a chart of each step of the project, what Shonda needed to do, and when it was due. They talked over the expectations and Shonda asked a few questions. From then on, Shonda was able to complete each stage of the project without turning to Markus for guidance. The project turned out perfectly. Shonda asked if they could have a meeting and create an expectations chart for all future projects.

Mentoring is about sharing experiences, advice and knowledge.

Anonymous

Chapter Eight: Mentoring the Millennial

Millennials thrive when they are mentored. They are used to a high level of interaction with the significant more knowledgeable others in their lives – teachers, parents, bosses. Establishing mentoring relationships with millennial employees during the onboarding process helps not only to make them more comfortable in the job, but conveys that the organization is invested in them as people. Millennials value recognition and having time and energy invested in them. Make mentoring part of the onboarding process as you bring Millennials into your organization.

Be Hands-On and Involved

While older generations of employees may prefer to work independently and to seek out mentoring when it is needed, millennial employees value mentors who are hands-on, involved, and who seek them out. Don't wait for a problem to arise or for the employee to approach you. Seek out opportunities to provide feedback – not just affirmation – about what the employee is doing well and what he or she might improve. Make frequent contact via email, phone, or in person, above and beyond your regular check-ins. Millennials tend to prefer “high touch” relationships – relationships in which contact is frequent and mutually rewarding. Encourage the employee to let you know if there is something he or she wants to learn or talk about, and continuously offer opportunities for mentoring and growth.

Serial Mentoring

Because Millennials value mentoring and the opportunity to grow and develop, serial mentoring should be a part of the onboarding process for them. Serial mentoring is a process by which one employee is mentored by several more experienced employees, ideally with expertise in different areas of the organization. This allows the Millennial to experience a variety of perspectives and a high level of hands-on mentoring, while also not placing the entire burden for mentoring new hires on one or two managers or supervisors. With serial mentoring, employees benefit from various team members' expertise, and managers and supervisors get to work with a variety of new hires. Incorporating serial mentoring into the onboarding process fosters a climate of continuous mentoring.

Be a Mentor, Not an Authority Figure

While Millennials thrive on mentoring, they are more skeptical of authoritarian relationships. When mentoring Millennials you should strive to be collaborative rather than dictatorial or authoritarian. Millennials tend to disengage when confronted with what they perceive as authoritarian leadership. The mentoring process for Millennials should be reciprocal and open. Spend as much time listening to the employee as you do issuing expectations or directions. Invite conversation rather than giving orders. If a Millennial employee gets the sense that he or she will be disciplined by a mentor, the relationship

suffers. While it may at times be necessary to discuss areas of improvement or even issue a reprimand, ideally the mentor will not be the person to do this. Millennials seek out partners in their growth and success, and mentors who instead become dictatorial or authoritarian undermine that relationship. Serial mentoring can be helpful in balancing this issue.

Focus Millennial's Exploratory Drive on Work

Another common criticism of Millennials is that they have short attention spans and cannot focus on the task at hand. Looked at from another perspective, however, we see that Millennials are skilled multi-taskers. They also have a high level of curiosity, and growing up alongside technology such as the Internet has allowed them to indulge this exploratory drive. Harness this exploratory drive toward work. Encourage millennial employees to explore areas of the organization's work, or of their own professional development. Give them projects and tasks that allow them to use this intellectual curiosity. Provide them with opportunities to learn new skills, to multitask, and to research and explore. Rather than seeing Millennials' ability to multitask as evidence of a lack of focus, instead leverage it to help them grow professionally. If the value of this exploratory curiosity is made clear from the beginning of onboarding, millennial employees can work with their mentors to find ways to channel this drive into success in the workplace.

Practical Illustration

Whitney had her first full time office job, and access to incredibly high speed internet. While she always went online with the intention of accessing information for her projects, she invariably found herself researching unrelated topics, sometimes for hours at a time. She knew that this was not helping her productivity. Whitney's manager also noticed that she seemed to always have browser windows open when she strolled past her cubicle. One day Whitney's manager suggested that Whitney use her online time to explore ways in which she could be more productive. Whitney found herself reading several helpful blogs about procrastination and multitasking. She told her manager about this in their weekly follow up. Together they agreed that Whitney should spend two hours per week searching out professional development blogs and articles so that she could learn more about working efficiently.

We're living in a different world now in terms of employee needs.

Anne Mulcahy

Chapter Nine: Assigning Work to the Millennial Employee

One of the most important things that employees learn in the onboarding process is how they will be assigned work, what expectations for work are, and how they will be rewarded or compensated. When assigning work to the millennial employee, managers and supervisors should keep in mind these employees' need for structure, specific guidelines and clear expectations, and feedback.

Provide Clear Structure and Guidelines

As we discussed in Module 8, Millennials feel most capable when they have clear guidelines and structure around work. Making clear what they can expect in terms of structure and guidance around tasks and projects, and to whom they can turn to if they find these lacking, is a key component of onboarding. When providing structure for a Millennial employee, make clear who and what is involved in a project or task, who they can go to with questions or concerns, the order in which tasks should be completed, and any relevant deadlines or benchmarks. Make guidelines and instructions as clear, comprehensive, and systematic as possible.

Provide Specific Benchmarks

Along with their desire for structure and guidelines, Millennials seek out benchmarks or specific points at which they can have their project evaluated. When assigning work, provide specific benchmarks. These can be points at which the employee has to have his or her work signed off, or simply points at which he or she can reflect on or evaluate the progress made. Benchmarks or mini-deadlines are also useful in helping the Millennial employee plan his or her time. Especially in light of Millennials' preference for multitasking, having a set of benchmarks to achieve can keep the employee on task, help prevent procrastination, and head off any problems or issues before they become unmanageable.

Set Boundaries and Provide Reality Checks

Millennials may over or underestimate what they can accomplish in a given period of time and with the available resources. When setting guidelines and benchmarks, it is also key to set boundaries. Make clear what is expected of the employee, at what point he or she may seek help and from whom, and what the consequences of not meeting benchmarks or deadlines will be. Also provide reality checks. Discuss with the employee his or her plan for accomplishing the work. Offer your own experiences about the time and resources similar tasks or projects have taken. Encourage the employee to consider issues that he or she has not thought of, such as the need to coordinate with team members or allow for administrative tasks such as copying of documents.

Guide, Don't Dictate

While providing clear guidelines, setting boundaries, and providing reality checks are all important when assigning work to millennial employees, it is also key not to dictate. Millennials want guidance, but also want to feel as though they are collaborating. Taking a dictatorial approach to assigning work to Millennials is likely to backfire, as they may disengage or become skeptical of the value of what they are doing. The exploratory drive that characterizes Millennials can be leveraged here as well, as they are guided in their work but allowed to find their own methods and solutions. Providing a clear structure while allowing Millennials to navigate tasks and projects on their own time and choosing, is likely to generate the most buy in and productive work.

Practical Illustration

Sylvia is a very traditional manager. She is used to providing her direct reports with a list of tasks to be done, along with deadlines, and having the work done to her specifications. When she began working with Tyler, a new employee in his late 20s, she didn't understand why he often had many questions about how to complete work. As far as she was concerned, he should have been able to meet the deadlines as directed. She was consistently frustrated that he seemed to need so much handholding, and even then he often was late with work or needed to do it over. In talking with Margot, another manager, Sylvia voiced her frustrations. Margot suggested that Sylvia outline each of Tyler's tasks in detail, including providing small mini-deadlines and scheduling time to talk through Tyler's plan for completing each project.

Sylvia was skeptical, but decided to try it. When Tyler was provided with step by step guidelines, he seemed to be able to complete projects in a more timely fashion, with better results. Sylvia also learned that Tyler wasn't always able to think ahead about potential obstacles and often underestimated the time projects might take. After they began having weekly meetings about his progress, she noticed that Tyler seemed more confident and more able to plan out his projects to account for obstacles and delays.

Feedback is the breakfast of champions.

Ken Blanchard

Chapter Ten: Providing Feedback

Feedback is a vital part of onboarding and nurturing any employee, but it is especially important for Millennials. Taking the time to provide frequent quality feedback helps Millennials feel that the organization is invested in them and their success. Because Millennials are used to receiving feedback often from many people in their lives, they tend to do their best work in a feedback-rich environment.

Millennials Thrive on Feedback!

Millennials have grown up in a feedback-rich environment. They are used to being recognized for their contributions. They are also used to looking to teachers, parents, and other more knowledgeable others for evaluation of their performance. When they are not receiving frequent quality feedback, Millennials may question whether they are succeeding or performing up to standards. This may make them anxious or even disengaged. Leverage Millennials desire for frequent feedback by taking the opportunity to offer both informal and formal feedback often.

Characteristics of Quality Feedback

Learning to give quality feedback is a skill. Feedback is more than just affirmation of quality performance or criticism of poor performance. Quality feedback recognizes strengths and opportunities for growth. Millennials especially need more than

just affirmation of a job well done or corrective feedback on work not up to standards. Part of their exploratory mindset is wanting feedback that outlines specifically what they are doing well and where they can improve.

Some key characteristics of quality feedback:

- It is specific
- It is descriptive rather than evaluative
- It is timely
- It is actionable
- It focuses on behavior rather than personality traits
- It is concrete
- It is continuous

Informal Feedback

Because Millennials desire continuous feedback, it is not necessary or practical to deliver all feedback in the context of formal meetings or check ins. Millennials value informal feedback, in the form of emails or just in the course of casual interactions throughout the work week. Do not feel that every feedback session has to take the form of a meeting, follow-up, or a check-in. Taking the time to offer informal feedback frequently will build rapport with millennial employees and create the kind of feedback rich environment in which these employees thrive. Informal feedback can still incorporate all the elements of quality feedback.

Formal Feedback

Frequent informal feedback is important when working with Millennials. They also value more formal feedback on a regular basis. Establishing regular times to give your employees formal feedback, including developing goals for improvement and recognizing growth that has occurred, will keep millennial employees engaged and growing in their work. Do not wait for an extraordinary success to occur or a problem to arise to give formal feedback to a millennial employee. Likewise, do not limit formal feedback to the yearly performance review. Millennials appreciate being able to check in about how they are doing, and may respond especially well to specific examples or quantifiable results.

Practical Illustration

Louis typically gives his employees formal feedback once a year, at their performance reviews. Otherwise, he only gives feedback when a problem arises or when an employee accomplishes something major. When Camilla started working in his department, he was struck by how often she needed to be told she was doing well, and how she continuously asked how she was doing. She was performing well, and Louis didn't understand her anxiety. Another manager suggested that Louis take the time to give Camilla feedback once a week on how she was coming along in her new job, what she was doing well, and where she could improve. After just a few weeks, Louis noticed Camilla seemed less anxious and more confident in her job.

*If you did not look after today's business, you might as well
forget about tomorrow.*

Isaac Mophatlane

Closing Thoughts

- **Ella Wheeler Wilcox:** A pat on the back is only a few vertebrae removed from a kick in the pants, but is miles ahead in results.
- **John C. Wilcox:** Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.
- **Bob Nelson:** Take time to appreciate employees and they will reciprocate in a thousand ways.