5 SECRETS FOR EFFECTIVELY ENGAGING, LEADING, AND RETAINING MILLENNIALS

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When I give a keynote to organizations on effectively leading and engaging Millennials, I usually start with this question:

"Be honest, who in this room has recently wanted to grab the shoulders of a Millennial in your office, shake them and ask, *'What in the world are you thinking?'*

Typically the audience starts laughing and many hands go up around the room.

And I get it.

Millennials have their weaknesses and do things differently than generations past (sometimes to the great frustration of those trying to lead them). Millennials have high (sometimes unbelievably unrealistic) expectations of what they will receive from their job; and having patience to see some of those expectations come to fruition isn't always Millennials' greatest strength.

However, I typically follow up my first question about shaking the shoulders of Millennials with this question: "Now who in this room has recently wanted to grab the shoulders of someone your own age or older in your office, shake them and ask, *'What are you thinking?'* Be honest, even if that person is sitting next to you!"

Too few are actually talking *with* Millennials

Even more laughs and hands go up.

You see, even though generations do and see things through different approaches and lenses, we are all people. And we're all going to frustrate each other, no matter what age.

Yet, in today's national headlines so many people are talking about Millennials. Talking to Millennials. Too few are actually talking *with* Millennials. (*Bonus tip*)

Millennial bashing and stereotyping is all the rage, and it's those negative stereotypes which become a self-fulfilling prophecy. We need to move beyond finger pointing and labeling if we're going to create multi-generational, cross-collaborative relationships.

This article is for managers, leaders, politicians, pastors, parents, teachers, and marketers who are looking to engage, motivate, and lead this generation in impactful ways.

The 90 million+ people in the Millennial Generation are dramatically impacting and affecting every facet of American culture. In 2020, Millennials will make up 50% of the workforce, and in 2025 they will make up 75% of the workforce.

Strategically attracting Millennials to your organization, and then successfully engaging and retaining them, is not an option, it is a necessity.

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First, why am I the person to write this?

For years after college, I felt like I didn't fit in the "real world". Like many Millennials, I lived the intense and overwhelming "*what now*?" as I struggled to find my career path. I was searching for success, but I wasn't sure what success meant or looked like.

Like many in the MIllennial generation, I wanted something more than just a paycheck. Yet, I wasn't sure what was missing. As I opened up this conversation to other Millennials and over the years have become one of the leading voices to, and for, the Millennial generation, I realized I wasn't alone.

I've written about the unique issues facing Millennials now for over 10+ years. I created and still run the internationally popular website AllGroanUp.com, writing hundreds of blogs defining the unique struggles and problems specific to twentysomethings that have been read by millions of people in 190 countries.

I have also extensively researched generational complexities in organizational settings while completing my Masters in Organizational Leadership. I speak at universities, non-profits, and businesses about issues relating to helping organizations and Millennials work better together. I've done hundreds of radio, TV, and podcast interviews relating to the topics facing Millennials and how to engage this generation.

I also work individually with businesses, churches, and non-profits on how to engage, retain, motivate, and develop this next generation through a process I created, called "Millennial Mapping". Then finally, I've written one best-selling book titled *101 Secrets For Your Twenties* (Moody Publishers) and then my newest book *All Groan Up: Searching For Self, Faith, and a Freaking Job!* (Harper Collins Imprint).

But more importantly than all of that — I've listened. I consider it one my greatest honors to receive emails every day from Millennials who are calling for help, advice, and are searching for insight. And I've heard what they have to say.

Like many in the Millennial generation, I wanted something more than just a paycheck.

Literally, in the last week here's the names and locations of just a few of the emails and survey responses I've received: Karishma in India, Samantha in Missouri, Proverb from the Philippines, Natalia from Costa Rica, Libbie in Seattle, Charles in Atlanta, Qi in

Australia, Tanesha in New Jersey, Hei-Yue in Washington D.C, Fernando in Spain, Jacob in Chicago, and Darylle in South Africa.

I've heard from thousands and thousands of Millennials all over the world, and many of them share the exact same fear–that if not met by their company or leaders, will lead to a growing disconnect and ultimately a Millennial disengaging and beginning their countdown for when they are going to leave.

You must understand the changes taking place that are molding the Millennial mindset and motivators, or as a recent Brookings Institute report on Millennials and Corporations warned, "losing touch with the changes taking place in a society pose a clear danger to the future of organizations." This does not "bode well for the survival of America's current corporate governance practices."

Let's get to it. How do leaders and organizations effectively engage and develop this next generation?

5 TIPS FOR EFFECTIVELY ENGAGING, LEADING, AND RETAINING MILLENNIALS

1. Understand what Millennials Fear Most

I recently spoke at the Intel Security Global Partner Summit on this topic of engaging and leading MIllennials, and I prefaced much of my talk on what I call Millennials' greatest fear.

Understanding and alleviating this one fear is at the heart of the struggle in connecting, motivating, and retaining Millennials.

That one fear?

Insignificance.

Millennials aren't just looking for a paycheck, they are looking for purpose.

They are not just looking for more money, Millennials are looking for more meaning.

Millennials think it should matter that they want their work to matter.

"A recent Intelligence Group study found that 64% of millennials said they would rather make $40,000 a year at a job they love than $100,000 a year at a job they think is boring."

We're talking about a $60,000 pay cut that a Millennial is willing to take for a job they love, which I would define as a job they are good at, find interesting, have important relationships within, and most importantly, feel like they are playing a significant role in something significant.

Understanding and strategically speaking to this fear of insignificance could be the difference between a Millennial passionately and productively working at your company. Or counting down the days before they pack up their stuff and leave.

Millennials think it should matter that they want their work to matter.

Even better, alleviating this fear doesn't have to cost your company an extra penny. The impact could also possibly save you millions of wasted dollars in re-hiring, re-training, and re-marketing by just honing and growing the Millennials who are right under your nose.

Why are Millennials truly flocking to the Silicon Valley or business startups, rather than the tried and true industries? Is it because they can be a part of something that is cool that they can *casually* brag about on Instagram? Well, yes that's part of it.

But more profound and impactful than that, they can be *part of something significant* while playing a significant role in the company's future.

In a massive global survey of Millennials by Deloitte, *"77% of Millennials said part of the reason they chose to work where they do is because of the company's sense of purpose."*

Companies spend loads of extra money on the cool extra frills and features that the Google's of the world offer, yet they are missing what's more important to Millennials - **significance**.

Are you addressing Millennials' greatest fear of insignificance?

Companies don't have to be a cool and sexy startup to create a culture or structure that meets Millennials at the heart of what motivates them.

Plus, meeting this fear of insignificance will have much deeper and more lasting effects than installing a new, cool coffee bar in the lobby or replacing desks and office chairs with standing desks and treadmills.

With this fear of insignificance in mind, here are more concrete ideas on how to engage and lead Millennials.

2. Relationship First. Everything Else Second.

As a person leading these young professionals, before you spell out office protocol, before you ask for a volunteer, a sign up, or a purchase, before you come downstairs with an agenda, before you lay out the "this is how we do things here…"

Build a Relationship.

Top-down hierarchical leadership does not create significant relationships. Hence, another reason Millennials flock to startups is that they can be right there in the trenches next to the CEO and founder.

Millennials find significance in the relationships, mentorship, and apprenticeship with the influential leaders around them.

Millennials want to know and be known.

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Now this does not mean you have to take on any and every idea a young professional throws out there. Because we both know there will probably be quite a few!

However, try to take a few minutes and listen.

Giving a thoughtful response to an idea shows respect and appreciation for their intellectual contributions, whether these contributions make sense at the moment or not. It is foundational to building a great working relationship.

For example, read this response from an assessment I received from a Millennial who works at a major corporation that on paper says it prides itself on engaging with Millennials. Here is what this Millennial had to say:

> *"After my first year, I felt as if my voice was not being heard and my concerns were simply ignored. Fast forward to today, I still feel that way...*

There is a stereotype that millennials will pursue the next big opportunity. In my opinion, this is accurate. However, the cause is not just a millennial thing, it's also a result of our voices being ignored."

Here is another written statement from a different Millennial who works at the same company:

"I don't really feel like I have anyone in my corner, especially growing up in a culture where your teachers were more your advocates. I don't feel the same with our team culture. It's almost like we are constantly being judged, NOT supported."

Now even if the Millennial's responses above made you ever so slightly scoff, this is the reality of what Millennials value. They want to know you, and be known.

If your leadership is untouchable or dismissive, young professionals will greatly lose their effectiveness in championing your company. This generation is not just inspired by titles, they are inspired by relationships.

3. Share Your Story (flaws and mistakes definitely included)

Whether you're a pastor, manager, president, or a parent, I think you'd be surprised how interested the twentysomethings in your life are about hearing your story. And not just about the successful parts.

No, they want to hear how you screwed up. How you don't have it all figured out. How you've questioned, feared, and failed. They want to know what you're currently wrestling with and the strategies you are using to overcome.

The age of the super-hero leader with no flaws is dead. Millennials don't want to follow super-humans. Millennials want leaders who are actually human.

Millennials distrust of institutions, politicians, and corporations is at an all time high as we have come out of what I call the "Steroid Era" with the American Dream exploding right in our face.

Millennials yearn for authenticity. They have been barraged with marketing messages, advertisements, and hearing leaders say one thing, then watching them do the exact opposite. Consequently, Millennials' "BS-radar" is fine-tuned.

MIllennials want authentic leaders.

The age of the super-hero leader with no flaws is dead.

If your leadership, company's vision statement, and values feels like it's all talk, but no day-to-day substance to back it up, then Millennials will lose heart and trust.

If Millennials don't trust you and your organization, then they will leave.

Millennials want leaders who can admit their mistakes, ask for forgiveness, confess weaknesses, can you look you in the eyes and talk to you beyond the latest status reports and deadlines.

Millennials want to follow real people with real chinks in their armor who are still really moving forward.

They want someone they can trust and it's your mistakes openly shared that become that great connecting point. Or that human factor that creates buy-in and inspires them to go "all-in" flaws and all.

If you can't honestly talk about your own struggle, Millennials, honestly, won't listen to your solution.

Don't rule Millennials with a top-down, authoritative approach. Come alongside Millennials and build an authentic relationship with them built on trust and mutual support.

4. Give Millennials a Place at the Adult Table (and don't surround it with a bunch of barriers and flaming hoops of fire to jump through)

Too many twentysomethings feel like they're still sitting at the bright orange kid's table using plastic sporks, while the real adults decide the important matters.

Since Millennials' biggest fear is insignificance, they want to have a role in something bigger than themselves.

Leaders, managers, parents and pastors – let Millennials be a part of the bigger discussion.

Be confident enough in who you are as a leader to stop minimizing who twentysomethings are as followers and future leaders.

Do the Millennials in your office feel like they are given the authority to really own their role, position, and work in the company? Or have you created a culture and systems that make Millennials feel like they have no real say, authority, or role in the important issues, decisions, and conversations.

If Millennials don't trust you and your organization, then they will leave.

If you make a Millennial feel like they are a cog in the machine, they will stop turning.

Sure twentysomethings don't have the experience others do, but that doesn't mean that they can't give valuable input based on their strengths and experiences. They see problems from a different perspective, with a different lens.

Let them be heard and they will want to stay. Don't put a two-year-long obstacle course in front of a twentysomething for them to prove their worth before they can open their mouths. Or they will just start running a different race.

But I can hear you now – "*the Millennials in my office think they know everything and won't shut up about it!"*

Give Millennials a place at the adult table.

Yes, the Millennials in your office most likely need to learn more tact, humility and how to be better listeners. However, wouldn't you rather have employees who care enough to voice their opinions and fight for them? Or do you want employees who really stopped working for you five years ago and causes no ripples whatsoever because they stopped jumping in the water a long time ago?

As I spoke about in an interview on Dave Ramsey's [EntreLeadership Podcast on *The Keys to Leading Millennials*](#), just inviting Millennials to the table, even if you preface it by saying you just want them to sit there and listen without speaking, will show Millennials that they are important enough to you and the organization to at least be a part of the larger picture and conversation.

5. Create Community and Clarity (and yes, don't skimp on the positive reinforcement in the process)

I hear from countless twentysomethings all over the world who feel lost, confused, directionless, and most of all ALONE. The most common phrase I hear is "*I feel all alone.*"

For parents: If your twentysomething (possibly living back under your roof) seems unmotivated, I'd argue it's not stemming from laziness; it's coming from a lack of purpose and place. They don't know where they're going or how they're going to get there, and the fear, failure, and overwhelming anxiety is suffocating them at best, or at worse, paralyzing them.

Can you help them create a vision for their life? Can you help them ask important questions?

Can you create a place where they really feel understood?

For employers: Can you create an environment that is fluid and flexible, that is more dedicated to the "why" of your organization than it is to policies, procedures, and "*this is how we've always done things.*"

If you make a Millennial feel like they are a cog in the machine, they will stop turning.

Can you create a culture that is not about work/life balance, but is about work/life integration -- where Millennials are given structure, yet are also trusted enough with freedom and flexibility to get their job done in possibly some atypical ways?

If you make a twentysomething feel like they're in a foreign country, they will continue to travel.

If you make a twentysomething feel more isolated, they will be looking for the quickest way to escape.

And yes, they don't want you to hold back the affirmation in the process, if it's authentic. Twentysomethings are struggling to figure out who they are and where they fit, and they could really use some positive affirmation from you. They will respond better to positive affirmation than they will to the negative or demeaning authoritarian leader.

They will also respond much better to constructive criticism and feedback from you, if you're coming from a place of a relationship together than one where you come by their office and spend time with them only when they've done something wrong.

Millennial Mapping Your Organization

The topic of retaining and leading Millennials is a much deeper and complex discussion than a written report or what a research study can fully encapsulate.

Engaging, developing and retaining this generation is not formulaic, it's personal and specific to the culture, industry, people in leadership positions, products, and purpose of your organization. This is why I love engaging with organizations and the people in them

> If you make a twentysomething feel like they're in a foreign country, they will continue to travel.

through [engaging keynotes and workshops](#). Then as well, why I've created a proprietary process called ["Millennial Mapping"](#) to help organizations uncover where and why they are losing Millennials.

There is no one size fits all answer, yet there are small, incremental and strategic changes you can start implementing right away to not only do a better job retaining young professionals in your organization, but also get the most creativity and productivity out of them that will increase your bottom line.

We are entering into a strategic intersection and collision of generations in the workplace unlike anything seen in generations past. To reiterate the recent Brookings Institute report on Millennials and Corporations, "losing touch with the changes taking place in a society pose a clear danger to the future of organizations."

Do you understand the changes taking place and are you willing to shift and adapt to meet the needs to lead this next generation?

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Paul Angone is one of the leading experts in the nation on helping companies and Millennials work better together. He is a [national keynote speaker and trainer](#), best-selling author of *101 Secrets For Your Twenties* and *All Groan Up: Searching for Self, Faith, and a Freaking Job!*, and the creator of [AllGroanUp.com](#), which has been read by millions of people in 190 countries.

Paul also contributes and has been featured by publications such as Bloomberg, Business Insider, Chicago Tribune, Huffington Post, Entreleadership, and is a business consultant with a master's degree in Organizational Leadership. He has worked with companies such as Intel Security, Wells Fargo, etc., and he specializes in helping organizations attract, develop, and retain the Millennial generation through [engaging keynotes](#), workshops, and his proprietary consulting process called – ["Millennial Mapping."](#)

Whether it's at a company wide event or conference, career development event directly for Millennials, or a training for executives and managers on strategies to more effectively retain and engage Millennials, Paul is an invaluable resource in helping your company navigate the largest generational transition and transfer in the workforce that we've ever seen.