

Generation Y – The Millennial Generation

As our discussions of the different generations goes forth, please keep in mind that every individual is different. That does not mean, however, that it is impossible for people with certain shared cultural experiences to develop similar sets of behaviors and outlooks. As much as we are individuals, we also share much in common with our peers. Thus, if we assert that Baby Boomers are avid learners, it does not mean that every Baby Boomer is an avid learner. We all know individuals who are Baby Boomers and who are not at all interested in pursuing additional learning opportunities. Likewise, if we say that Millennials are more likely to have good manners than Gen Xers, it does not mean that all Millennials are polite or that all Gen Xers are rude. It simply means that certain behaviors are more typical of each group than of others. The point is raised because you should not become frustrated when, for the purposes of discussion, certain broad characteristics are made. This is unavoidable, and you must realize that the broad statements are based on behaviors that have been analyzed and measured for statistically significant presence among population groups.

Millennials born between 1981-2000, depending on the source, are vastly different from previous generations – especially Boomers. Members of the millennial generation cut their teeth on computer keyboards, and to them, computer technology and the Internet are as natural as breathing. This generation's members know more about digital technology than their parents or teachers, and this is a promise of change not only the way families interact and communicate, but also how young people relate to school and learning.

Millennials combine the can-do attitude of Traditionalists, the teamwork ethic of Boomers and the technological savvy of Generation X. For this group, the preferred learning environment combines teamwork and technology. In a classroom with lots of Millennials, give everyone a task. When a few have completed it, encourage them to walk around the room and help others. They're used to working this way in school.

Millennials are the most diverse generation in history. Members are born to the most diverse mix of parents in history as well – from teenagers to middle-aged moms who postponed childbearing to establish a career – from Boomers to Xers. One third of this generation was born to single, unwed mothers. This generation is less white and more culturally diverse than any generation in our history to date.

Many of the parents of Millennials are mid-life Boomers, used to winning and achieving. Millennial members have come to age in a very child-focused world. Many of them had Boomers as parents, and Boomers are as competitive for their children as they are for themselves. Boomers are used to getting their own way, and they have been strong advocates for their children. Because Boomers have worked long hours, because of many single parent families, because of an increasing violent world and because of the desire for their children to "get ahead," Boomers have made sure their children participated in all forms of lessons and activities. Thus, Millennials have grown up in a very structured, busy and over planned world. Also, Millennials are made up of confident, optimistic young people who feel valued and wanted.

Here are some of the characteristics identified for Generation Millennial:

1. Closer relationship with parents.
2. Admiration for their parents (33% names one or both parents as their hero, rather than a pop culture celebrity).

3. A closer sphere of influence – a more dangerous world has created an environment which is more sheltered and structured, and where young people have been protected.
4. The small sphere of influence has contributed to the creation of a generation that is, in general, more polite and considerate than their predecessors. They are less likely to call adults by their first names, but rather use the more formal Mr. or Mrs.
5. Attentive and respectful. This generation has been brought up to show respect for others. In a crowded world where there are larger numbers of people in classroom and activities, civility becomes essential to getting along.
6. Programmed and team oriented. Some college administrators believe that many Millennials have “lost the sense of pure play.” They expect everything to be planned for them and do not expect to have as much freedom – or responsibility for structuring their educational lives.
7. Having spent a large percentage of time in structured activities, they are accustomed to having a lot of adult supervision. Thus, they may have poor conflict resolution skills.
8. Pressured to succeed. The Boomers, parents of the millennial generation feel pressured themselves to succeed and also transferred that pressure to their children. In addition, just as Boomers have lived in a world where there is increasing competition for resources, Millennials have done the same.
9. Involved. This is a generation of activists – young people who believe they can make a difference.
10. Egalitarian. This cohort often prefers to work in teams or groups. They definitely do not prefer hierarchy. Sometimes faculty finds the lack of authoritarian hierarchy in their groups creates ambiguity when it comes to having a point of contact for information.
11. Open and eager. Members of this generation are very open and eager. Students are responsive and “very smart” according to some faculty.
12. Demanding of themselves and others. Members of this cohort set the bar high for themselves and they, like their Boomer parents, expect success. They sometimes “expect” to get good grades and are upset when this does not happen.
13. Stressed. Compared with five years ago, 81% of college mental health service directors reported an increase in students with serious psychological problems. Pressure to succeed is one reason identified by some counselors.
14. Multi-taskers. This generation can easily manage to listen to music, work on the computer and watch television at the same time. This means they need a lot of stimulation in their learning environments and may be more focused than it seems to their teachers.

Here are some shared experiences of Generation Millennial:

1. Child focus (Sylvan Learning Centers)
2. Oklahoma City bombing
3. Busy, over-planned lives (more than 75% of time spent in structured experiences)
4. Stress
5. Malfunction at Three Mile Island nuclear power plant caused a near meltdown

6. Iranian students took 66 people hostage at the US Embassy in Tehran
7. US boycotts the Olympics in Moscow
8. President Regan shot
9. The Equal Rights Amendment passed (though not ratified)
10. The Space Shuttle Challenger explodes shortly after liftoff, killing all seven astronauts on board
11. The Exxon Valdez spills more than ten million gallons of oil into Prince William Sound
12. The Berlin Wall demolished
13. Persian Gulf War
14. Four white police officers accused of beating Rodney King were acquitted; shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado left 13 students and one teacher dead; the Dow Jones Industrial Average closes above 10,000 for the first time
15. It took more than a month to declare a winner of the presidential election because of ballot ("hanging chad") disputes
16. Four US planes were hijacked in attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, killing more than 3000 people leading the US into an ongoing fight against terrorism
17. The Space Shuttle Columbia exploded upon re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere, killing all seven astronauts on board.
18. War is waged against Afghanistan and Iraq

Here are some additional characteristics of Generation Millennial:

1. Bigger than Baby Boomer Generation
2. 3 times the size of Generation X
3. Roughly 26% of the population
4. Diverse
5. Inclusive
6. Powerful
7. Weak on interpersonal skills
8. Cyber
9. Activists
10. Support social causes
11. Impatient
12. Active/hands-on learners
13. Use technology

14. Spending power exceeds \$200 billion

15. Independent

16. Strong views

17. Close to family

And finally, Generation Millennial in the classroom:

While boomers like to be in charge of their own learning and the Generation Xers prefer to work independently with self-directed projects, Millennials prefer learning that provides interaction with their colleagues. They like a lot more structure and direction than Generation X. They want to know everything up front as far as what is expected and what criteria will be used to evaluate their performance. They are the most likely to want to ask questions like, "Will this be on the test?" or specifics such as "how is this going to affect my life in a positive way?" Certainty and security is key for this group. Tying the learning outcomes to economic objectives is important for Millennials. This generation is as comfortable with technology as a fish is with water. In spite of their technology savvy, they are in some ways very traditional. Members of the millennial generation are motivated to learn in order to reduce stress and increase their marketability. They place high value on developing good interpersonal skills and in "getting along." This is a generation that is polite, believes in manners, adheres to strict moral code, and believes in civic action. This is a generation that places a high value on making money – more than any previous generation – and they see education as a means to this goal. Like Generation X, this generation likes learning to be entertaining and fun, and become quickly bored in a learning environment that is not highly active and interactive. They grew up with the Learning Channel and Chuck E. Cheese – edu-tainment and eat-o-tainment. Stand-up talking is deadly for this group who, even as adults, respond to music, art, games, and other creative activities. Learning materials for this group should have the same levels of value interest and multiple focal points as those of Generation X. However, there is an important difference in Millennials in this regard. It is a generation of readers, so written information works well with this group.

Tips for Teaching Generation Millennial:

Some experts have asserted, "there is a growing mismatch between faculty and students in terms of teaching and learning."

1. Develop opportunities for experiential learning. Small group discussions, projects, in-class presentations and debates, peer critiques, team projects, service learning, field experiences, developing simulations and case method approaches have been found to be successful for high school and college Millennial students.

2. Encourage the development of learning and sharing communities – small groups of students that can discuss and analyze readings and assignments. This also addresses the need of many millennial students for hands-on activities in the classroom.

3. Provide lots of structure. Having grown up in a highly structured world, Millennials look for structure in their learning setting. They want to know precisely what is required of them, when work is due and very specific information about expectations.

4. Provide lots of feedback. Providing frequent feedback is essential for Generations Y's. This allows them to know when they are headed in the right direction and when they are getting off-track. Frequent attention from teachers is welcome.

5. Use technology. This is a generation that uses technology for "everything." A classroom that does not incorporate it will not meet students' needs for variety, stimulation, and access to information. Some classrooms still require students to study and learn in ways that, to them, are completely different from the ways they operate in every other aspect of their daily lives.
6. Make it fun. Like their Generation X predecessors, they want to enjoy their learning. If it is not fun, it will be cast into the category of "boring" and may become less effective. Millennials learn best when they are entertained.
7. Incorporate games. For them using computers games as an instructional technique can be very effective. These incorporate many of the strategies that Millennials have already developed for learning: multi-media sensory stimulation, interactive (either with other people or with the computer), individualization (customization) of the learning experience, and control over processing time, highly visual.
8. Be relevant. Like Generation Xers, Millennials will demand relevance in what they are learning. This will also want to "skip" steps in learning if there are areas of the information that have already mastered, and will avoid repetition and rote practice once they feel they have mastered the information.
9. Utilize their talents. This is a generation that likes to be useful and helpful. If you have students who know more about a topic than you do, let them talk about what they know. If they finish an assignment early, let them help other students.
10. Present the big picture. Many in this generation are global or "big picture" learners. They learn better if they have the big picture and then learn more concrete and specific information.
11. Allow for creativity and be creative. This is a generation that thinks in many dimensions at once. Provide opportunities for them to be creative in how they approach and fulfill requirements. Music, art, and games are good teaching tools.
12. Offer multiple options for performance. Try to provide a variety of acceptable, measurable outcomes so that students can optimize their performance.
13. Be visual. This group is the most visual of all learning cohorts. In general, visual learners predominate, but among millennial learners it is even more strongly preferred than in other age groups.
14. Be organized. Because they need a lot of structure, millennial students also learn best when materials are presented in a well-organized and rational way. Millennial students are much more prolific readers than Generation Xers, so reading materials for them are not a stumbling block. However, materials should be clear, use lots of white space, and be visually accessible, just as for Generation X. Summarizing key points is very important for this group. They want to know where they are going with their learning – and why.
15. Be smart. Unlike Generation Xers, Millennials will not look at you with disdain if they feel they know more than you about a specific topic. However, they will expect you to be open to hearing their ideas and to demonstrate competence as a teacher. To this generation being "a good teacher" is more important than knowing everything.
16. Be fair. Like their Boomer parents, fairness is important to this group.
17. Recognize the need for social interaction. This is a key for millennial learners, so learning strategies that incorporate social interaction work well.

18. Remember, talk is essential. Develop activities that encourage students to exchange information verbally. When they say it, it is converted more quickly to long-term memory.

19. Structure a learning environment that demands respect and positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement, from teachers and peers improved learning and increases motivation.

20. Tie learning to actions. For some key information, students can increase their recall if there is a specific action linked to their learning of a key fact. For example, if you want students to remember the date of the Norman invasion, then you give them the information, the year 1066, have them hold up 10 fingers and then 6 fingers. The information will stay with them forever.

21. Think positively. Positive thinking stimulates the brain. It increases the likelihood of success.

22. Be clear and precise. Give students clear goals, targets and purpose. Millennials particularly want to know precisely what they need to do meet the requirements of the class. This is not a lack of intellectual curiosity, but a desire to be efficient. Keep in mind that these students have been exposed to more information in their lives than the two preceding generations combined. They know a lot. For them, school is one of the many ways to get information, and they are used to getting what they need or want in ways that are efficient for them.

23. Allow focus time. The millennial generation's attention span declines after 15-20 minutes. You have your student's brain for only 20 minutes at a time. Break up a training class into 20-30 minute segments with some kind of activity (outbursts, e.g.).

24. Talk is critical. Talking stimulates the brain, in particular, the frontal lobe, the area which controls higher-level thinking and decision-making. Social interaction is important to memory and learning.

25. Enhance procedural memory with movement. Procedural memory is stored in the body – it is muscle memory. Riding a bike is an example of procedural memory. Procedural memory is easy to access. Relating procedural memory to cognitive tasks can improve recall.

26. Make learning relevant. Tie learning tasks to real-world problems. If it is not seen as relevant, there will be resistance to learning.



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