

Maximizing the Human Capital of Millennials Through Supervisors Using Performance Management

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Abstract

Millennial staff members bring a wealth of human capital to the work setting. Most Millennial staff members are supervised by Baby Boomer or Generation X individuals. Different perspectives to the work environment are reviewed for the three generations. Taking into consideration the needs and wants of Millennial staff members, these Baby Boomer and Generation X supervisors need to consider the perspectives of the Millennial staff members to maximize job performance and satisfaction for them. The performance management model is explained in the context of the Baby Boomer and Generation X supervisors creating an environment for the Millennial staff members in which they can “be their best.”

Key Words: Millennials, Generation Xers, and Baby Boomers; generational differences, expectation setting, feedback, performance coaching, performance management model, job performance, and job satisfaction

Table 1 presents definitions for generations, including years born, name, and 2017 ages. While some experts on generational differences may have slightly different dates for years born, the information presented here should not change any assumptions based on generational definitions.

Table 1

Generations Defined

| Years Born | Name | 2017 ages |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1925-45 | Silent Generation or Traditionalists | 72-92 |
| 1946-64 | Baby Boomers | 53-71 |
| 1965-80 | Generation X | 37-52 |
| 1981-99 | Millennials or Generation Y | 18-36 |
| 2000-present | Generation Z or Digital Natives | <18 |

Millennials are quickly representing the majority of staff in many organizations as Baby Boomers decrease in numbers by way of retirement. Maximizing the human capital attributes of Millennials through supervisors creating an effective work environment is crucial. Effectively working through generational differences in values, beliefs, and preferences between supervisors and staff members is important. Individuals from different eras working in harmony will benefit each other's performance.

Supervisors are often Baby Boomers or Generation Xers, while many staff members, at an increasing rate, are Millennials. Supervisors need to focus on working effectively with Millennial staff members to maximize job performance and satisfaction. Millennials are not hesitant to change employers; therefore, it is important to help effective Millennial staff to be happy and satisfied at work. Understanding the needs, wants, and general characteristics of Millennials is crucial to supervisors working effectively with them.

Table 2 presents examples of differences on similar factors for Millennials and Baby Boomers. Additional descriptors of Baby Boomers are: (a) motivated by competition; (b) goal-driven; (c) resourceful on a tight budget; and (d) sustained engagement when working on a task (Pappas, 2016).

Characteristics of Millennials, in addition to information in Table 2, are: (a) driven by information technology; (b) likely to speak up and assume their opinions will be heard and valued; (c) expect work to be assessed on merit; (d) do not respond well to "because that is the way things have always been done;" (e) want frequent feedback on performance; (f) like to work in teams; (g) follow a "work to live" mentality; (h) positive and confident about their work; (i) like challenges and have a disdain for boring experiences (Gallup, 2016; Heathfield, 2016).

General characteristics of Generation X individuals are: (a) highly independent and goal-oriented regarding achieving a position of power; (b) thrive in structured hierarchical environments; (c) view people in positions of power as experts; (d) value flexibility and adaptability within a hierarchy; (e) follow a "live to work" mentality; (f) concerned that they will not be able to retire comfortably; (g) structured, punctual, and "linear" in thinking; (h) action-oriented; and (i) move through work quickly (Asghar, 2014; Cummins, 2014; Giang, 2013; Goudreau, 2013; Krueger, 2014; Pfau, 2016; Sollors, 2017).

Table 2

Examples of Perceptual Differences between Baby Boomers and Millennials

| Baby Boomers | Millennials |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loyalty to the organization where they work • Value recognition for hard work • Understand change is necessary, but are cautious to adapt (e.g., technology) • Value face-to-face and written communication • View of work-life balance tends to be more focused on work • Sometimes apprehensive to diversity and tend to defend status quo • Value workplace rules, policies, and procedures designated for efficiency and getting quality work done • Believe in continual professional development for advancements in career, being productive, and effectively meeting job requirements • Value money and lucrative retirement plans | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loyalty to the organization is dependent upon if there is enjoyment on the job, and people in the organization being loyal to them • Enjoy frequent feedback on quality of work • Change is positive and they are quick to adapt • Prefer fast-paced communications that are technologically-based (e.g., emails, texts, social media) • Work-life balance is centered; will sometimes work extra hours when necessary, but equally value social time away from work • Quick to accept diversity, inclusion, and accompanying changes, because it has been a part of their environment • View some workplace rules as trivial and unnecessary; desire flexibility • Do not always want to spend time on professional development unless there is a payoff in job satisfaction • Value being appreciated as much as money (Harvey & Clark, 2016) |

In summary, there are differences among Millennials, Baby Boomers, and Generation Xers regarding how they view the world of work. These differences need not prevent Millennial staff members and their supervisors from working collaboratively if the supervisors effectively manage the work environment by using the performance management model.

Performance Management

The performance management model presented in Figure 1 (overview) can be used in private, public, non-profit, and not-for-profit organizations. By modifying the wording in the model's five steps to align with the terminology used in a particular organization, the performance management model is applicable. Further, with minor changes the performance management model will work effectively for those organizations that are eliminating the annual performance appraisal review.

In the present climate of ever increasing accountability of staff members' performance, it is essential that supervisors have a comprehensive and systematic approach to supervising and evaluating Millennial staff members. Supervisors need to take actions that create environments in which Millennial staff members can reach their full potential for job performance and satisfaction. Use of the performance management model advocates that effective supervision and appraisal of Millennials takes the mystery out of what is expected of their performance so there are "no surprises" to them when summative appraisal occurs.

Figure 1 shows the role of the expectation-setting process (Step 2) in a model intended to reward and improve performance. As depicted, the expectation-setting process is preceded by the supervisor reviewing the job description, work assignment, previously established development plans, and any other criteria used for performance appraisal (Step 1) with the Millennial staff member. The Millennial staff member is encouraged to give opinions, offer suggestions, and ask questions for clarity in the give-and-take discussions in Step 1. The supervisor and Millennial staff member should clearly articulate the specific expectations that will guide the staff member in terms of performance. This process must be accomplished collaboratively with the Millennial staff member freely asking questions, voicing opinions, and truly feeling that they are an important part of the process. Clarity of performance expectations is vital to the overall effectiveness of the performance management process (Bartz, DeMont, Hillman, & Miller, 1992-1993).

Step 1**Identification of Evaluation Criteria**

- Information from previous summative evaluation (from Step 5, if information is available from previous year)
- Job description and teacher evaluation criteria
- Involve millennial

Step 2**Expectations**

- Human element components and technical element components (flow from Step 1)
- Involve millennial through multiple mini discussion sessions

Step 3**Feedback and Coaching (Formative)**

- Review expectations from Step 2
- Formal observations and informal observations
- Have meaningful information and data
- Mini feedback sessions that involve millennial
- Coach if an expectation is not met (performance coaching)

Step 4**Summative Evaluation Conference (Feedback and Coaching Also Used Here)**

- Summative rating completed
- May identify professional development goals
- Career coaching, if applicable
- Based on information from Steps 1, 2, and 3
- Involve millennial

Step 5**Management Decisions**

- Summative rating and any other relevant information from Step 4
- Tenure status, if applicable
- Future building assignment, if applicable
- Individual professional development goals, if applicable
- Involve millennial

Figure 1. Performance Management Model.

After expectations are set, the supervisor frequently provides the Millennial staff member with performance feedback (Step 3) relative to those expectations. This feedback is based on having collected sufficient on-the-job information to be of use in assessing the Millennial staff member's performance. Much of the feedback likely will be positive reinforcement for a job well done.

The supervisor seeks out the perceptions of the Millennial staff member and encourages questions and suggestions for clarity during feedback sessions. When the aggregated data indicate that performance is not meeting the original expectations, the supervisor and Millennial staff member discuss the situation. In a collaborative format they consider alternatives, with the ultimate goal being improved performance. This process of identifying ways for improving performance is referred to as "performance coaching" and is a part of Step 3 in the performance management model. This phase is formative and should be used for helping the Millennial staff member meet the agreed-upon expectations (Bartz & Bartz, 1995).

At a predetermined point in time (e.g., annually) a formal performance appraisal conference is held (Step 4). This represents summative evaluation. The performance appraisal conference should also address any training and professional development growth activities needed for improvement. The results of this performance appraisal are data used as the basis of management decisions in Step 5 (e.g., salary increase, future job assignments, and developmental needs). The performance appraisal process should also include positive reinforcement in those areas in which the Millennial met or exceeded expectations.

Specifics of Expectation Setting

Two crucial elements of the expectation setting are *technical* and *human*. The technical element addresses specifically what is expected of the Millennial staff member flowing from Step 1 in the performance management model that includes the job description and all criteria of the staff member's appraisal system on which her/his performance is evaluated. Supervisors must be clear on the factors and criteria of the technical element components. There must be an environment in which Millennial staff members can express their opinions and ask questions for clarification of these components.

Equally important in the expectation setting process for Millennial staff members are the human element components of *involvement*, *understanding*, *acceptance*, and *commitment*. *Involvement* is exemplified by the supervisor sharing information with the Millennial staff member about how she/he views the technical element components to be addressed in the Millennial staff member's specific job assignment and general job duties. Also important is the Millennial staff member having input by sharing general perspectives, opinions, suggestions, and questions about the information discussed with the supervisor. The Millennial staff member may identify areas of desired growth and needed staff development to address this growth. Involvement is a "give-and-take" process.

Understanding means the Millennial staff member has internalized the technical element components and translated what effective performance looks like. The supervisor should establish a truly two-way communication dialogue. The Millennial staff member should be encouraged to ask questions for clarity and give suggestions. *Acceptance* represents the Millennial staff member believing that the technical element components are legitimate, worth his/her effort, and important to improving job success and self-development. It is essential for

the discussion to include a “contextual understanding” of the technical element components by the staff member and supervisor.

Commitment addresses attitudes and beliefs that are likely to drive behaviors needed for the Millennial staff member to effectively meet the technical element components. Again, this is a two-way communication process with the Millennial staff member feeling free to offer opinions, give suggestions, and ask questions (Bartz et al., 1992-1993).

Details of Feedback and Coaching

Feedback and coaching are highly interrelated. The difference is that feedback represents the information that *describes performance* while coaching is the assistance given to *improve performance* when feedback indicates expectations are not met. The definition for coaching used here is “performance coaching.” This contrasts with developmental coaching that focuses on assisting Millennial staff members in gaining knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform effectively for future positions and job responsibilities representing competencies not yet mastered. Performance coaching deals with the “here and now” in relationship to meeting expectations.

Coaching is frequently more difficult for supervisors to perform effectively than giving feedback. It is often easier to indicate what is “right or wrong” with performance through feedback than to specifically identify ways in which the Millennial staff member can improve performance so it aligns with expectations.

Feedback. Behavioral science research clearly indicates the crucial role feedback plays in behavioral change for the formative and summative evaluation of Millennial staff members. Feedback is defined as the activity of providing information to the Millennial staff member in relationship to how her/his performance meets expectations. Thus, it assumes that expectations have been clearly established.

Effective feedback requires the supervisor to spend sufficient time collecting information and data on the performance of a Millennial staff member in order to give specific feedback related to expectations. From the perspective of the Millennial staff member, feedback answers the question “How am I doing?” Supervisors should view effectively giving feedback as being “received” as opposed to merely given. This means that unless feedback is received by the Millennial staff member and internalized, it is unlikely to have much impact on performance.

When providing feedback to a Millennial staff member, the supervisor should initially be descriptive and nonjudgmental. An example of a judgmental statement is “You do a poor job of getting others actively engaged in the collaborative process.” According to Bartz and Bartz (1995), the same issue addressed descriptively is “I do not see much collaborative interaction between you and other staff members. What is your observation?” Feedback needs to be timely in that the sooner it is given to when the performance occurred, the greater its impact (Kaplan, 2010). Additional perspectives for supervisors to consider regarding feedback are:

- challenge and motivate the Millennial staff member to invest effort and ownership in the situation,
- not be given when the Millennial staff member or supervisor are upset or frustrated,
- be specific,
- focus on behaviors and not personality,

- demonstrate interest in the Millennial staff member,
- demonstrate effective preparation by the supervisor,
- ensure that both the supervisor and Millennial staff member understand what was discussed,
- encourage self-reflection by the Millennial staff member,
- respect the dignity and opinions of the Millennial staff member, and
- exhibit a trusting climate.

Coaching. Performance coaching is based on the belief that the supervisor needs to work collaboratively with the Millennial staff member to enhance performance when an expectation is not met. Supervisors must make sure to seek out the opinions, questions, and suggestions of the Millennial staff member throughout the coaching process so that it is truly a joint venture. The supervisor makes sure that the Millennial staff member has previously received proper training and development activities in relation to the expectation for which performance is not met. Performance may be an issue of unmet training and development needs. The supervisor may need to prescribe additional resources in order to assist the Millennial staff member in improving performance. The supervisor should clearly determine if the Millennial staff member has any perceptions regarding obstacles preventing her/him from performing up to expectations (Bartz & Bartz, 1995). Following are additional factors to consider when performance coaching Millennials.

- Specifically and accurately identify which behavior change(s) are needed.
- Indicate the positive consequences for making the necessary change(s).
- Check for understanding to make sure he/she knows why the change(s) are needed.
- Discuss the Millennial staff member's responsibility for making the change(s).
- Work with the Millennial staff member so that buy-in and ownership are likely.
- Establish credibility in the context of the supervisor's knowledge and skills to recommend change(s) to address the performance issue.
- Show appreciation for the Millennial staff member's efforts and commitment.
- Respect the integrity and capability of the Millennial staff member.
- Encourage self-discovery and self-development through discussions with the Millennial staff member.
- Provide follow-up after the coaching session to determine the extent in which the desired change(s) are actually taking place.

Concluding Thoughts

All of us are products of the times in which our values and beliefs were formed (e.g., perspective on technology and its attributes and limitations). If properly addressed, the varying perspectives of generational differences are an asset to diversity and problem solving in an organization (Bartz & Rice, 2017). Millennial staff members want input about their job expectations, asking questions, and making suggestions. These are reasonable and honorable perspectives.

Baby Boomer and Generation X supervisors need to consciously strive to understand the needs and wants of their Millennials staff members and utilize the staff members' human capital

assets for maximizing their job performance and satisfaction. Millennials now compose the majority of workers in many organizations. From the perspective of human capital, maximizing their performance is critical to the overall effectiveness of the organization. The wise supervisor knows how to use the attributes of Millennial staff members through the expectation-setting process, performance feedback sessions, and the coaching process via the performance management model to create an environment in which Millennials can “be their best.”

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