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5 Effective Ways To Prepare Millennials For Leadership Roles

By: Kimberly Fries, *Forbes.com*

Based on a number of views on millennials and memes shared online, one might envision this generation as demanding and pretentious. In terms of age, they are often portrayed as spoiled college students or recent graduates. In truth, there are millennials who are well-entrenched in



their thirties. Point being that when we talk about millennials and leadership, the focus cannot be on the future. It has to be right now. Millennials are already taking over leadership roles and the younger members of this generation are clearly on deck.

We know that 91% of millennials aspire to leadership. They also have very strong opinions on what leaders should do. On the other hand, many also recognize where they are lacking in competencies as well.

Millennials seek leadership positions to empower others and to create change. Only a very small minority do so for compensatory reasons or to establish a legacy.

So, how do we prepare millennials for future leadership and help millennials already in positions of leadership to succeed? That was the question I asked Alberto Riehl, leadership consultant and CEO of DreamSource Consulting. He identified five strategies that he has found to be effective – hacks that he has recommended and implemented for several Fortune 500 companies over the years.

1. Challenge millennials so they can improve their technical skills and experience

Millennials are often confident about their softer skills. However, it's obvious that their confidence may need challenging. In addition to this, learning hard skills and gaining technical expertise is also important to them.

To lead effectively, millennials must face situations that challenge their skills and perceptions. Riehl says this can be done by placing them in positions of leadership in smaller projects, allowing them to attend events geared at upper management and empowering them to take decisions without seeking constant approval.

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2. Prioritize communication and transparency

Millennials lead best in an environment where communication is a priority and transparency is key. Encourage open communication throughout all layers of management. Then, familiarize the millennial with policies and procedures while also providing them with explanations of these policies.

Once this happens, millennials will have a better understanding of how and why leadership decisions are made. Not only will this make them more likely to embrace such decisions, they will have a better understanding of how and why those decisions are made.

3. Offer regular feedback

“Millennials value feedback that is given frequently and honestly,” Riehl said. “However, giving it to them shouldn’t be seen as simply indulging their wishes. Employees as a whole are better off receiving feedback on a regular basis so that they can improve and adjust their performance over time.”

The more frequently millennials receive feedback, the better they are able to change and grow. Specifically, 41% of millennials want to be recognized for their work at least monthly, if not more frequently. This makes it easier for them to develop the skills and habits they will need as leaders. It also helps to model great personal leadership.

4. Give them leeway, but make them justify it

Millennials crave work life balance. They also want to be able to work in ways that enable them to be the most productive. On top of that, they expect company policies to make sense. They aren’t likely to accept them simply because that’s just the way it is. In fact, according to a recent study by Fidelity Investments, most millennials will accept an average pay-cut of \$7,600, if it stood for better work/life balance, more purposeful work and superior company culture.



According to Riehl, one of the better ways to manage and help millennials to grow into leadership positions is to give them leeway when it comes to how and when they work. This encourages creativity and helps them to create the work life balance they crave. He warns, however, that they should also be held to a high standard at the same time. Standards for performance and productivity should never be lowered. Further, they should be expected to justify their decisions and choices. This will help them learn to do so when they are in leadership roles.

5. Match them with a mentor

Millennials who are interested in leadership roles have indicated that they largely believe that they can develop the skills they need through mentorship programs. As a result, many companies are creating or adopting mentorship programs. The most successful ones are those that are supported by senior level executives as a study of several Fortune 500 companies indicates.

“By giving them access to this kind of one on one feedback and advice, millennials can learn to make better career decisions for themselves,” Riehl added. “It can also help to tune them into the policies and procedures of the organization.”

In the end, the best ways to prepare millennials for leadership roles are simply modeling the leadership behaviors that they aspire to. Doing so will lead to two positive outcomes. The first is that it will result in policies and expectations that millennials emerging into leadership positions can embrace. The second is that it simply models fair, effective, and sensible leadership. This is something that millennials can then model when they are given leadership positions.