

DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION:

6 Ways to Start Preparing Millennials for Leadership in Higher Education

- ▶ **While many Baby Boomers delayed their retirement due to the economy, the leadership exodus is right around the corner.**

For higher education institutions that have been planning for succession, GenXers will easily move into key positions. *Yet who will fill those mid-level leadership positions—the associate director, the student retention manager, the alumni engagement officer—suddenly vacated by GenXers?*

The obvious answer? **Millennials.**

- ▶ **Yet even Millennials know they're not ready to lead.** In a recent study, 30% of Millennials felt they weren't prepared for the responsibilities of leadership, citing a lack of confidence managing challenging employees and dealing with conflicts.¹ And by 2020, 46% of workers in the US will be Millennials² — a succession disaster for higher education if this generation isn't developed for leadership now.

Providing leadership training today is crucial to ensuring Millennials are ready to take charge tomorrow.



Here are 6 ways to prepare Millennials for leadership:



1. PROVIDE REAL MENTORSHIP.

Millennials don't respect leaders for the breadth of their content knowledge. Accessing content is easy, and Millennials, who grew up with the Internet, know how to find information faster than any other generation.

Instead, **Millennials are inspired by real mentorship—especially when it comes to soft skills**, like how to communicate effectively on campus, in the office, and in the community.³ Because Millennials thrive on networking and connection, mentorship is a natural way to provide engagement and inspiration, as well.



2. THINK Laterally, NOT VERTICALLY.

Millennials' leadership skills aren't just gained through upward mobility and the traditional career path. **Lateral moves** — within the same or even a tangential department — **can just as effectively cultivate experience and engagement, as well as create more well-rounded leaders later.**

These lateral moves satisfy Millennials' desire for new challenges and lessen the likelihood of losing them to another institution when they're ready for a change.

3. MAKE LEADERSHIP MEANINGFUL.

Millennials value meaning in their work; in fact, **30% of Millennials surveyed stated that finding meaning on the job was the most important success factor.**⁴

Higher education institutions have an advantage in that employees have an innate passion for learning. **Keep this passion alive by helping Millennials remember why they chose higher education as a career.** Help them cultivate meaning by emphasizing their career goals in the context of a larger purpose, i.e., aligning employee goals with the institutional goals and mission. Networking opportunities—being part of a like-minded community—and opportunities to mentor younger employees can also foster meaning and improve engagement.





4. ENSURE FEEDBACK IS ON-DEMAND AND FREQUENT.

Millennials simply can't thrive on the annual review.

This generation needs regular feedback — think weekly reviews and performance updates.

Ongoing feedback also nurtures Millennials' desire for connection, a profound driver for a generation raised on social media. (Providing on-demand feedback can be tricky if you're still relying on spreadsheets or paper processes; **consider a performance management system designed to offer real-time feedback.**)



5. CREATE PROJECT-BASED ROLES.

Foster leadership skills in the context of project-based roles, rather than traditional hierarchical roles. **Millennials care less about hierarchy and upward mobility than they do about being challenged and finding meaning;** provide the opportunity to develop leadership skills through on-the-job experiences.

6. ACTIVELY DEVELOP SOFT SKILLS.

Part of the reason Millennials get such a bad rap is many of them don't have the soft skills critical to great leadership—how to motivate others, build relationships, and manage conflicts.

The UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School suggests actively helping Millennials with their soft skills.⁵ **Provide mentorship and formal learning opportunities** to help them learn how to adapt to workplace culture; **be diplomatic and assertive** with employees, students, and the community; and **set short- and long-term goals** aligned with both their desired career path and the institution's succession planning strategy.

1. Josh Bersin, "Millennials Will Soon Rule the World: But How Will They Lead?", Forbes, accessed on March 19, 2014, at <http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshbersin/2013/09/12/millennials-will-soon-rule-the-world-but-how-will-they-lead/>.
2. Jessica Brack, "Maximizing Millennials in the Workplace," University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Kenan-Flagler Business School, p. 2, accessed on March 19, 2014, at <http://www.kenan-flagler.unc.edu/executive-development/custom-programs/~media/DF1C11C056874DDA8097271A1ED48662.ashx>.
3. Brack, p. 4.
4. "Creating Tomorrow's Leaders: the Expanding Roles of Millennials in the Workplace," Boston College Center for Work & Family, p. 5, accessed on March 19, 2014, at <https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/centers/cwf/pdf/BCCWF%20EBS-Millennials%20FINAL.pdf>.
5. Brack, p. 11.

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