Brown Bagger

This section is set up to provide a ready-made Brown Bag Session for you to use with employees and/or managers. Use as is, or adapt this information for a general employee group. You may reproduce as many copies as needed.

Many Millennials Lack Real-World Knowledge

*M*any Millennials – loosely defined as those born since the early 1980s – are considered lacking in real-world skills. EA professionals seeking to entrench themselves in their clients' organizations may wish to consider raising awareness of this issue and promoting the use of older mentors to coach younger employees. Why? Improved communication, teamwork and productivity can be expected to result – a great ROI for any corporate client!

Most hiring managers agree that the most recent college graduates are not being adequately prepared for jobs in their field while in college. Graduates ten or even five years ago were better prepared than those graduating today. The Millennial Generation grew up with actively involved parents. They rarely had to experience failure or struggle at home. Participating in activities was celebrated as an accomplishment. Building creativity and self-esteem was more important than hard work and discipline.

"The education system has greatly changed since the time that the Baby Boomer Generation was attending college. Now universities allow students to design their own majors so a student that dislikes math can avoid taking any math classes," writes Amanda Griffin in the online article, *Millennials Lack Knowledge for the Real World*. "Our society has changed and the demands for certain skills sets are not the same as they were ten years ago. It is unrealistic to expect a university to keep up with the ever-changing skill sets required for today's graduates. Students have to be responsible in determining and seeking out what skills are needed through other sources such as internships and part-time jobs."

Overall, hiring managers list the following skills as the qualities often lacking in the Millennial Generation:

- Organization;
- Communication;
- Leadership;
- "Street smarts"; and
- Personal finance.

❖ **Organization** – Companies expect their employees to be able to manage their time so that they can get all of their work done each day. This requires prioritizing multiple projects and assignments in a cohesive manner.

❖ **Communication** – Written and oral communication is a daily requirement for any job. These skills have changed since the advent of texting, instant messaging, email and other forms of electronic communication. As a result, the conversations of many younger people have become unfocused, casual, and imprecise. It is not unusual for employers to have to give basic writing lessons to new hires as a solution to this problem.

❖ **Leadership** – A leader is a person who takes responsibility to get a job done. But being a leader does *not* require a management position, and is it *not* a skill learned only in classes. Rather, this skill relies on the desire of new employees to excel in their careers.

❖ **"Street smarts"** – What was once common sense is no longer the case. Certain things that are considered inappropriate for the workplace are common among this generation such as corresponding directly to the CEO or wearing earbuds. Everyone is accessible through social media, even the president of the United States so it doesn't seem like such a big deal to Millennials to send an email to the company CEO.

❖ **Personal finance** – Thorough background checks are often carried out on potential hires, even credit score checks. The belief is that personal finance is reflected in an individual's level of responsibility. Many college graduates wish

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they had learned more about the skill of salary negotiation, stock option plans, apartment lease agreements, and employee benefit choices.

(**Editor's note**: "Social skills," a loosely related topic, is addressed on page 4.)

Overall, employers mainly want Millennials to learn more about workplace etiquette, according to Griffin. "Observe the way people dress, communicate, check their phones during meetings, etc. to better understand what is expected of you," she states.

Griffin suggests that employers hold professional etiquette training sessions and/or provide mentors for their new Millennial hires. (*The EA professional is in a perfect position to assist*.)

The Importance of Etiquette

While especially useful for less-experienced, younger associates, etiquette refreshers can certainly be useful for the member of any workplace generation, especially in today's fast-paced, "gotta-have-it-now" society. Accountemps, a leading specialized ad agency, addressed some common questions about office etiquette as part of a recent workplace survey it conducted.

❖ **How much do manners really matter?** A lot. People may not be as formal in the workplace as they used to be, but managers and workers still expect their colleagues to be respectful and courteous. What's more, employees with good manners project an image of professionalism, strengthening their reputation and improving their chances for career growth. In a previous Accountemps survey, 85% of workers said that being courteous has an effect on a person's career path.

❖ **What rules are the most important?** As the survey shows, paying attention in meetings and declining to participate in the office gossip mill are important. But chief financial officers (CFOs) and employees cited other common office etiquette breaches as well, including the failure to respond to emails or calls in a timely manner, running late to or missing meetings, not crediting

others when appropriate, and criticizing others publicly. So make sure to get back to your co-workers as soon as possible, try to arrive at meetings a few minutes early, acknowledge your colleagues when they help you, and keep any discussion of sensitive issues to one-on-one, face-to-face conversations.

❖ **What if I make a faux pas?** Everyone makes mistakes now and then, so don't beat yourself up if you have a minor slip-up at work. Simply acknowledge your faux pas and apologize to anyone you might have offended as quickly as possible. Think about what might have led to the mistake: Were you stressed, overwhelmed or

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handling a problem outside of work? Try to deal with the root of the issue, and consider how you might deal with the situation in the future so that you don't repeat the slip-up.

The Importance of Mentors

Millennials are typically more interested than previous generations in finding a mentor. They have grown up with the notion that one must constantly seek the advice of another, especially since the advent of social media.

There are a few differences with mentorship today that were largely unheard of in the past, according to Karl Moore, a contributor to *Forbes* magazine. First, Millennials tend to have multiple mentors; the traditional older managers, but also peer mentors/coaches.

Secondly, mentorship is a two-way road. When Karl was in his 20s, mentoring was largely one way, from them to him. Today, we see the rise of

reverse mentoring, where Karl's undergraduate research assistants mentor him 20% of the time while he advises them 80%.

Boomers and Generation Xers need to embrace reverse mentoring to be a great mentor for Millennials. It is part of the postmodern worldview that they have been raised with; they believe that their ideas are important and valuable. If you don't listen, they won't respect you.

Consider: You have invaluable knowledge that demand to be shared, but in this technological age, so do Millennials! They understand emerging technologies and social media trends better than the older generations and can teach us more than a thing or two.

"Today, it takes greater commitment and patience to guide Millennials," Moore writes in *The Modern Mentor in a Millennial Workplace*. "One of their characteristics is they really, truly, desire a great deal of feedback. As a manager, I have to make a point of giving more thought to providing more feedback than to previous generations of workers. It used to be more of an afterthought, but today I must more actively spend time thinking about not only a couple of points of feedback, but four or five pieces of feedback."

Millennials do not only rely on one mentor. According to Monica Higgins, a professor at Harvard's Graduate School of Education, "One senior person can no longer be the only place you turn for career support."

Younger workers are independent and seek short-term, informal relationships that avoid interrupting each other's day to day lives. They are used to searching for and choosing their own mentors. In fact, mandatory corporate mentorship programs feel forced and unauthentic. Millennials are more likely to find it difficult to connect with an individual that they do not personally deem relevant.

Mentoring Recommendations

The following are some recommendations:

❖ The principles of mentorship are reasonably simple. The relationship should be mutually beneficial, in that both parties should participate and contribute to one another's goals and expectations. An openness to change and a willingness to learn are essential.

❖ Secondly, corporations should encourage their older employees to reach out to their younger counterparts by highlighting the benefits of this unique partnership. The definition of reverse mentorship should be clearly explained, highlighting the fact that both parties benefit.

❖ The mentor and mentee should think beyond technology. Both individuals have an opportunity to better understand their generational differences. It is possible to discuss other topics aside from skill gaps.

❖ Successful mentors accept the generational needs of Millennials and over communicate. They hold regular meetings, highlight noteworthy actions and provide constructive criticism. Management, of course, still plays a very important role in guiding and teaching Millennials. In fact, young people want open honest managers, more so than ever.

Summary

Millennials want managers to take notice. "Rather than fight them, why not join them? Why not become a mentor? Step up to the plate, embrace the role and accept whoever comes forward. Identify and utilize one another's strengths," writes Sienna Zampino, a research assistant of Moore's and freshman at McGill University. "It is a win-win situation for all parties.

"The future of every company lies in the ability of their Millennials to succeed. They are the inevitable leaders of tomorrow and older workers have the ability to nourish the growth of these young employees," Zampino continues. "You can shape the direction of your workforce. Most importantly, you can work in harmony with Millennials. The offer is on the table and Millennials 'are a knocking'. Will you answer?"

The post by Moore and Zampino is based on a new book co-written with Margaret Snell, coming out early next year, Working More Effectively with Millennials.
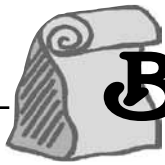
The Importance of Soft Skills

What are so-called "soft skills" and why are they important? Soft skills refers to the cluster of personal traits and habits that mark each employee to varying degrees. Persons with good soft skills are generally the people that most employers want to hire. Soft skills complement "hard" skills, which are the technical requirements of a job.

The ideal, of course, is someone strong in both job-related technical and personal (e.g. "soft") skills. Job skills certainly are not unimportant, but while certain skills can be taught on the job, effective soft skills should be present by the time a given individual is hired. If not, these abilities need to be acquired quickly or employment is likely to be in jeopardy.

Examples of Soft Skills

❖ *Work ethic* – This is the motivating belief that employees owe their employer a full day of diligent work, including following their supervisor's instructions.

❖ *Courtesy* – This skill refers to the habitual use of "please," "thank you," "excuse me," and "May I help you?" in dealing with co-workers, customers, and supervisors.

❖ *Teamwork and commitment* – This is the ability to share responsibilities, confer with others, help others do their jobs, genuinely want to do a good job, and seek help when needed.

❖ *Self-discipline and self-confidence* – This is the soft skill that involves arranging one's tasks for maximum job performance, learning from experience, asking questions and correcting mistakes, and accepting criticism and direction without feeling defeated, resentful, or insulted.

❖ *Conformity to prevailing norms* – This is the ability to govern one's attire, grooming, body language, tone of voice, and vocabulary according to the particular culture of the specific workplace.

Someone with Soft Skills is…

What traits would characterize someone with good soft skills? Put another way, someone with good soft skills is:

- Friendly, but not obnoxious;
- A "doer" and not a talker;
- Positive, not a complainer;
- Not interested in "rocking the boat," but who also isn't afraid to challenge "conventional wisdom" since he/she knows how to do so tactfully and politely;
- A worker who understands that he/she is there to help the business succeed, and not just to pick up a paycheck; and
- Conscientious about having good hygiene, wearing proper clothes for the job, shaving regularly, etc.

Source: "Social Skills in the Workplace," Center for Career Opportunities, Purdue University.