



Tips from the Bridge: Communicating with the Millennial Generation

In the Manager's Communications Training session in Colorado Springs, several participants asked for tips and techniques to better lead and manage the young people that are increasingly making up today's workforce. Companies will be hiring plenty of these folks in the next decade. Lockheed Martin Chairman, President and CEO, Robert Stevens spoke at the United States Naval Academy this past summer and pointed out that his company needs to hire 14,000 new people each year for the next ten years. Here are the five traits he believes the company needs in its leaders:

1. To see beyond what is today to shape the future
2. To build enduring, inclusive relationships
3. To energize the team
4. To deliver results
5. To demonstrate personal excellence, integrity and accountability

So, how can today's leader instill those five traits in the people who will take the helm in the future? Communication is key. One organization that has a lot of individuals from the Millennial Generation working for them is the United States Navy. More than 100,000 sailors aged 18-25 are serving in the U.S. Navy today. That's a pretty big communication and leadership challenge. The tips below are what the Navy is passing on to its leaders regarding communicating to this new generation.

- Use more face-to-face communication and fewer emails. The research shows that face-to-face communication is the preferred source of information for Millennial Generation. So even though this generation is much more adept at using new communications technologies (more than half of them have sent a text message in the last 24 hours), they still prefer the value of face-to-face interaction.
- Take time to first explain issues, than repeat the message. Studies indicate that people can hear something over and over yet not recognize its existence if they have little prior knowledge or awareness of it. Their minds fail to recognize it amidst the noise of the hundreds of other messages that bombard them every day.
- Repeat messages in a variety of media (face-to-face, email, intranet, etc.) and forums (staff meetings, presentations, one-on-one meetings).

Scholars have spent a lot of time studying this generation and what makes them tick. One of them is Diane Gayeski, Ph.D., from Gayeski Analytics in Ithaca, NY. In a great presentation she posted online

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(<http://www.dgayeski.com/leading-gen-next.pdf>), there are two factors that jumped out at me regarding what the new generation of workers is seeking in the workplace:

- Clear direction on GOAL but not method
- Need to know the VALUES of those for whom they work

So you know what the boss wants. You know what one world-class organization is telling its leaders about leading young people today. And you have a sense of what the Millennial Generation of workers are looking for from you. Here are the three bottom-line communications tips to leading the Millennial Generation:

- Good face-to-face communications on your part will help develop the leaders who will solve tomorrow's problems. You know, the problems we have not yet encountered.
- Provide clear messages. Young people today can recognize a clear message and filter out the spin pretty easily. They want to know their mission and understand their role on the team. You have to work at good communications with your team.
- There are so many mediums available to you to reach your team. Use all of them, or as many as you possibly can, to reach your people and bring them along.

If you'd like more information on the Millennial Generation, you can go to *The Pew Center for People and the Press*. That organization did a great study on nearly every aspect of the attitudes of this very influential group. You can get the study at: <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/300.pdf>. You can also read the text of Robert Stevens' speech "Forging Full Spectrum Leaders" at: <http://www.lockheedmartin.com/wms/findPage.do?dsp=fec&ci=18492&rsbci=0&fti=120&ti=0&sc=400>

If you have any feedback or comments about Tips from the Bridge, or have a topic you'd like us to address, drop us a line at bridgetips@signalbridge.com. We'd love to hear from you.

Good Luck!

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