

BOSTON COLLEGE

CENTER FOR WORK & FAMILY

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Creating Tomorrow's Leaders: the Expanding Roles of Millennials in the Workplace

For nearly a decade, the leading edge of the Millennial generation – also referred to as Gen Y - has been entering the workplace in growing numbers. Their arrival has spawned books and articles which describe their generational characteristics, offer advice on how to retain and manage these younger workers, and provide guidance on ways to foster collaborative intergenerational teamwork.

Even as employers focus on ways to attract and retain today's younger workers, they must also begin to prepare for the next imminent challenge: guiding Millennials into leadership roles. To successfully accomplish this will require capitalizing on the Millennials' generational strengths and helping them overcome perceived weaknesses.

Introduction to Millennials

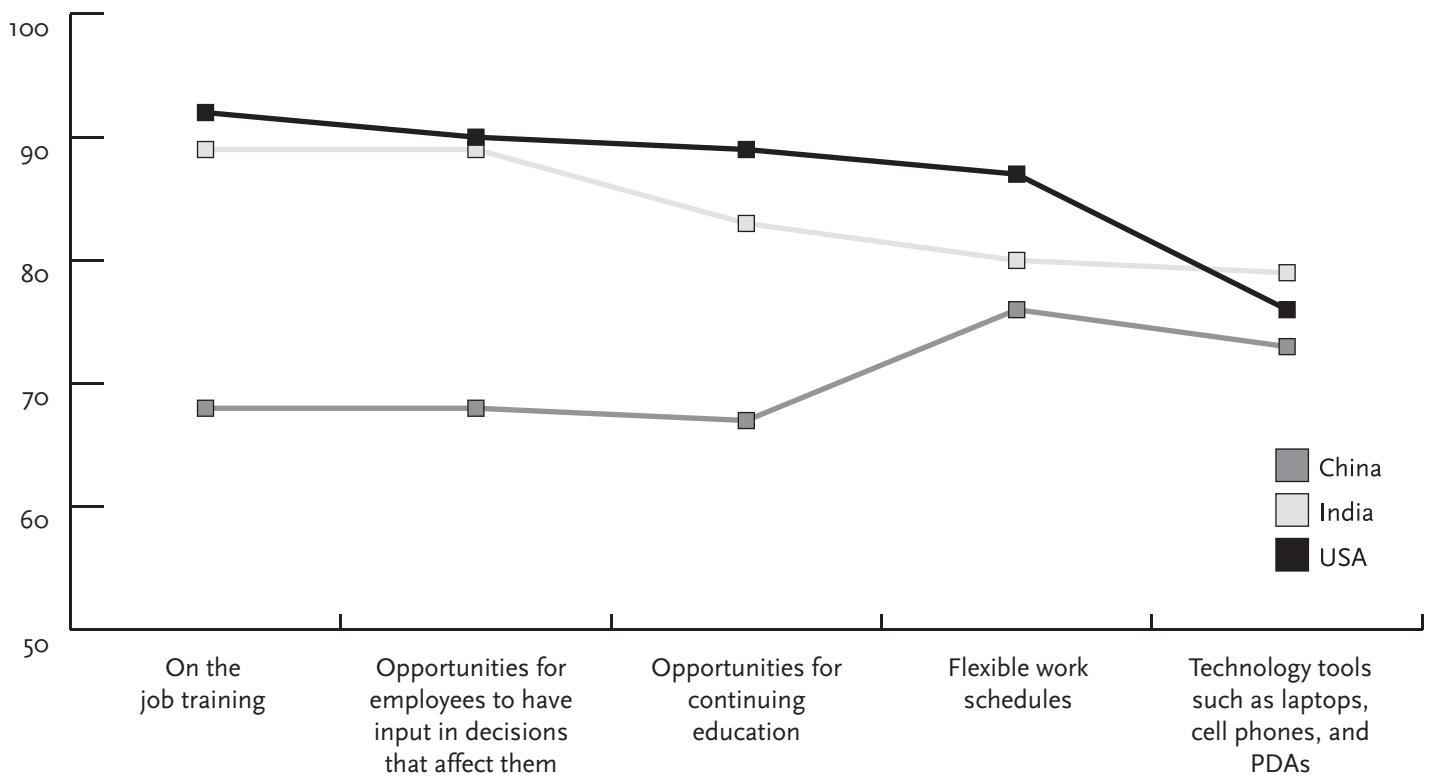
It is important to begin any analysis of generational distinctions by noting that there can be variations among members of the same generation just as there are differences between the generations. This briefing analyzes some generalized characteristics of Millennials that can be helpful as we develop this generation into successful leaders.

Millennials are described as an ethnically diverse generation who are team players, optimistic, confident, trusting of authority, rule-followers, achievers in school, and generally achievement-oriented in everything they undertake. They are also the most affluent and well-educated generation in history, and are estimated to be as numerous as – if not larger than – their parents' generation, the Baby-Boomers (Howe and Strauss, 2000). Though this description from researchers Howe and Strauss was developed in 2000, it remains accurate today.

The Millennial generation offers diversity in a variety of ways. Their racial and ethnic profile is far more diverse than in previous generations. In addition, there are more students today from single-parent homes, blended families, and families with same sex parents than ever before. This generation is also seen as having far more egalitarian views about the roles of women than did their predecessor generations (Broido, 2004).

Most significantly, Millennials are the first generation in history to have been immersed in technology throughout their lives, which will have a significant impact on the way they will communicate as leaders. Raised as "digital natives", Millennials are constantly connected. However, a challenge related to the opportunities that technology provides is the need for everyone to be "digitally literate" and to keep abreast of constantly changing technologies (Palfrey and Gasser, 2008).

Figure 1: Percent of Millennials who strongly/somewhat agree that an employer should provide:



Source: Smith, 2010

This early and constant exposure to technology has resulted in certain behavioral characteristics. For example, technology has enabled increased availability and accessibility to consumer goods, leading to a greater abundance in choices. As a result, Millennials expect customized selections in products and services, and bring these expectations into the workplace as employees and as leaders.

Technology also leads to a preference for flexibility. Millennials seek institutions that provide flexible careers and schedules in an effort to maximize opportunities. More-

over, Millennials expect flexibility from other people and from institutions, and have a strong desire for speed and efficiency. Figure 1 above describes some of the benefits that Millennials in the United States, India, and China believe that employers should provide.

Finally, Millennials have been described as taking longer to reach full adulthood than previous generations. Both the median age of marriage and entering parenthood has risen significantly in the United States, as has the number of years devoted to pursuing higher education (Arnett, 2004).

Best Practice: Brown Brothers Harriman & Co.

Millennials make up 42% of the population of Brown Brothers Harriman (BBH), and BBH has implemented a variety of programs in order to help engage this population in their workplace:

- An upcoming speaker series will examine the opportunities, challenges and expectations of employees in today’s multi-generational workforce. BBH will bring in a speaker to discuss intergenerational relations and how the different stages of life impact employees more than their generation itself.
- In 2009, employees founded a networking forum targeting BBHers in early stages of their careers

(i.e. Millennials & Gen Xers). Through a variety of social, business, education and philanthropic events, this group contributes to meeting the value proposition of these younger professionals.

- Regarding Millennials’ use of technology, BBH’s Innovation Group is leveraging ‘viral’ communications through an on-line collaboration tool to facilitate innovative ideas.
- Realignment and emphasis on BBH’s employee volunteer program (i.e. BBH Cares) takes into consideration Millennials’ value for volunteering through work and provides development opportunities by assigning employee team captains to all events.

Cautionary Notes in Viewing through the Generational Prism

Even as an entire industry has developed around the identification of – and providing advice in response to – generational characteristics, some cautionary thinking is advised. First, the notion of being able to define an entire generation is open to significant debate. The factors that are involved in such an analysis incorporate “age, period of time, historical context, and social interpretations of historical events, usually understood as experiences shared by a particular birth cohort” (Green, Eigel, James, Hartmann, and Malter, forthcoming).

The Sloan Center on Aging & Work at Boston College recognizes this complexity in their “Prism of Age” which encompasses a variety of factors which influence behaviors that go beyond chronological and generational age, for example: Life Events Age; Organizational Age, Occupational Age; Relative Age; Social Age; and Physical Age.

Commentators have questioned whether many of the characteristics ascribed to the Millennials are only selectively applicable to those who are from a more economically advantaged segment of the population. A recent New York Times writer was pointed in his criticism of the generational labels: “Over the last decade, commentators have tended to slap the Millennial label on white, affluent teenagers who accomplish great things as they grow up in the suburbs, who confront anxiety when applying to super-selective colleges, and who multi-task with ease as their helicopter parents hover reassuringly above them. The label tends not to appear in renderings of teenagers who happen to be minorities or poor, or who

never won a spelling bee” (Hoover, 2009).

It is, therefore, important to understand the nuanced complexities of trying to develop management solutions to what are perceived as generational challenges. In effect, these research gaps should be viewed as cautionary notes for managers to understand that there is neither any single solution nor management tool that can adequately address an entire cohort of workers. But there are valuable and interesting lessons that can be learned from the prodigious amounts of research and analysis done to date.

The Millennials in the Workplace – The Rise of the Multi-Generational Workforce

In 2008, the Center for Work & Family, as part of its Executive Briefing Series (EBS), published *The Multi-Generational Workforce: Management Implications and Strategies for Collaboration*. The EBS reported that, globally, such shifting demographics as fertility rates and life expectancy, coupled with the impact of technology and access to information, present workforce challenges for businesses. Moreover, the successor generation to the Baby Boomers – Gen X – provides too small a pool of available workers to fill positions left vacant by retirement. The EBS recommended that organizations adapt to the multi-generational workforce by assessing the characteristics of their workers in order to develop strategies for recruitment, engagement and retention. The EBS also highlighted corporate best practices which emphasize the importance of promoting a supportive culture that respects workers and acknowledges and appreciates their differences.

Best Practice: Deloitte

Deloitte LLP understands that engaging Generation Y professionals and building a pipeline of these future leaders is critical to its success. In 2009, Deloitte established regional Gen Y Councils to serve as a sounding board to senior leadership on major organization initiatives, and create dialogue about and across the generations. Members are manager level and below and represent each of the organization’s four business units and enabling services. These Councils are supported by advisors from the Talent organization as well as business unit partners, principals, and directors.

A key outgrowth of the Councils is the National Gen Y

Summit: a first of its kind two-day meeting that brought together all the Councils and senior leaders to share ideas about empowering Gen Y professionals and accelerating the launch of an online Gen Y Community. The agenda included: a senior leader panel to develop rapport between the two groups; a workshop about fostering internal mobility, mitigating turnover, performance management, and professional development; and a deep dive into the Gen Y online Community focused on prototype and content development, driving traffic to the site and other online opportunities, and connecting with campus recruiting.

Best Practice: Johnson & Johnson

Johnson & Johnson's first generational affinity group, *Millennials*, goes above and beyond race, gender and cultural diversity; it stands to foster a sense of understanding and inclusion across all generations. Its vision includes:

- **Serving as an educational resource and awareness advocate** regarding the Millennials' culture and defining characteristics
- **Empowering and supporting the Millennials' professional growth** and success
- Establishing relationships between Millennial employees and all other associates to **foster a deeper understanding of the Millennials' population.**

Although its namesake references those of Generation Y, *Millennials* is open to everyone, cultivating knowledge sharing among all generations. The group adds value for the Johnson & Johnson enterprise as well by providing insight into this generation of consumers. In addition, like its other Affinity Groups, Johnson & Johnson believes that *Millennials* provides leadership development opportunities and exposure that contribute strongly to retention and development of all employees.

Best Practice: Sodexo

Sodexo's *i-Gen* employee network group offers social media training, networking with colleagues about intergenerational workforce challenges and successes, an online *Generations in the Workplace* training, and intergenerational mentoring roundtables. Network group members can also participate in the four-part Career Management training, in which they learn about career competencies, development opportunities, career management and navigation, and how to prepare for a promotion within Sodexo.

The *Emerging Leaders* program helps employees develop strategic leadership skills. Program participants work in partnership with senior leaders on high-visibility business situations, working as a group to encourage collaboration and develop critical thinking skills within the context of the company's business model.

To help employees manage work and life, formal and informal flexible work arrangements are available to allow for modifications to schedules or where one works.

Reshaping Boundaries and Leading the Response to Work-Family Integration

Millennials have grown up during a time of "revolutionary shifts" in the workplace arising from the dramatic increase in dual-earner families: "Coming of age in an era of more fluid marriages, less stable work careers, and profound shifts in mothers' ties to the workplace shaped the experiences of a new generation" (Gerson, 2009). These shifts, as Professor Kathleen Gerson notes, create both new options and new insecurities, and increase the conflicts between "work and parenting, autonomy and commitment, time and money."

Gerson's research revealed that gender flexibility in breadwinning and caretaking was critical to the stability of family pathways. "Gender flexibility involves more equal sharing and more fluid boundaries for organizing and apportioning emotional, social, and economic care" (Gerson, 2009).

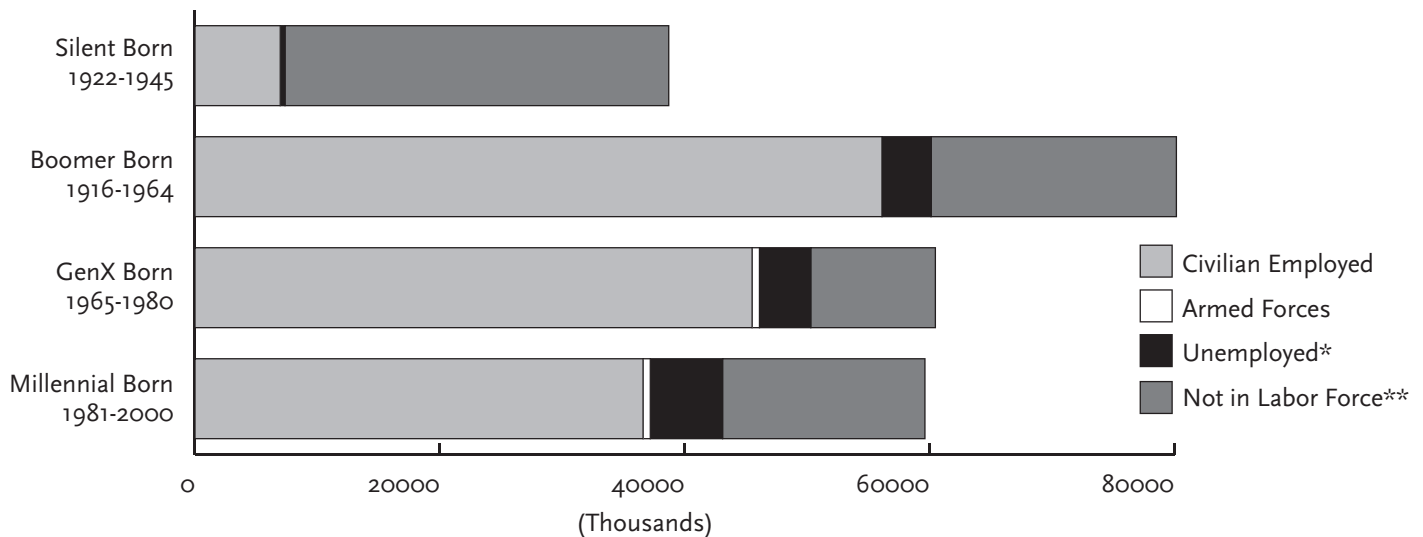
The importance of gender flexibility in carrying out work and family obligations was also demonstrated in the Boston College Center for Work & Family study *The New Dad* of nearly 1000 fathers in large corporations. The data revealed that even as fathers aspire to be equal caregivers at home, there is a gap in the actual achievement of that aspiration, exacerbating the level of work-family conflict which men experience (Harrington, Van Deusen & Humberd, 2011).

These two studies have profound implications for the workforce as it develops its cadre of future leaders from the Millennial talent pool. More than ever before, understanding a young employee's belief that he or she can sufficiently meet the needs and responsibilities of parenting as well as meet the expectations and obligations of the workplace will be paramount to retaining and advancing high quality workers. For Millennials to lead successfully, they will need to achieve the "gender flexibility" in parenting that Gerson describes. Millennial men and women seek a supportive work culture that allows fathers as well as mothers to thrive in both their parenting and their careers.

How Managers and Millennials View Each Other

Managers seeking to invest in the younger generation as future leaders may be concerned by the perception that Millennials lack a long-term commitment to the workplace. But what a manager sees as lack of loyalty may be explained by other factors. For example, a study released by the Career Advisory Board, presented by DeVry University, observed that many Millennials saw that their parents' long-term loyalty to their employer could not save them from being downsized. Furthermore, Millennials who

Figure 2: Labor force status by generation, 2009-2010



*Percent of the population that is unemployed

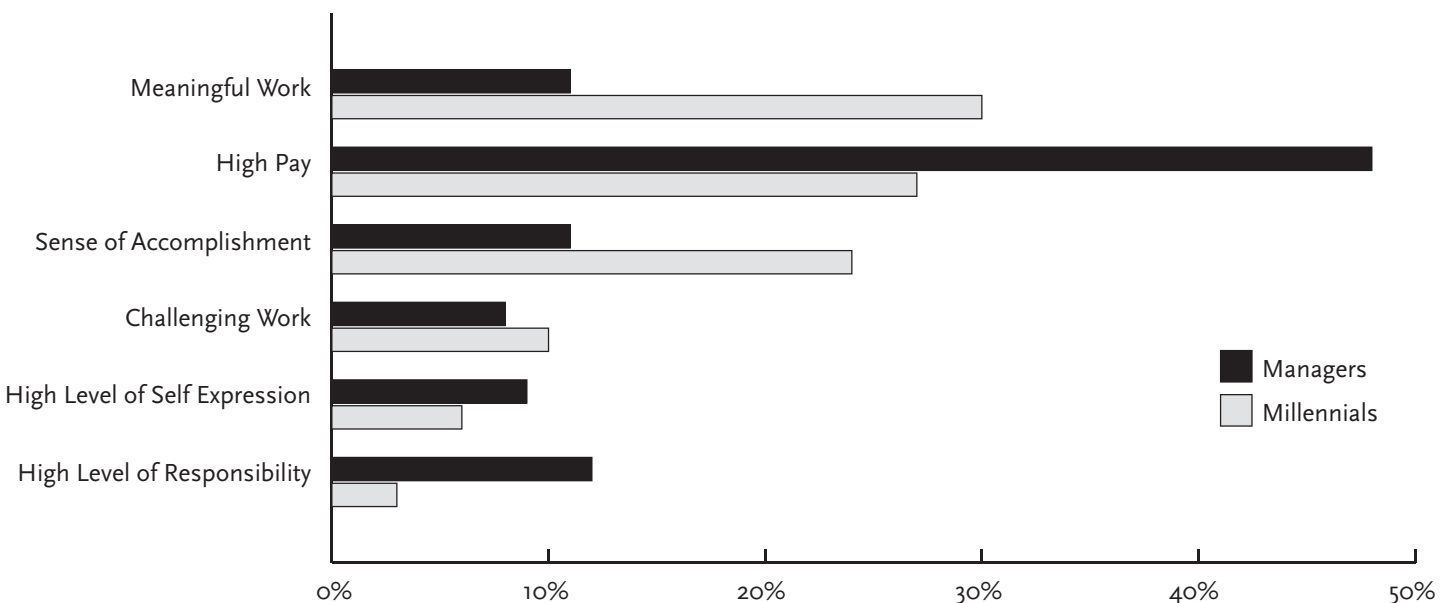
**Percent of the population that does not work and is not looking for work

Sources: Pew Research Center, 2009; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010

began their careers earlier in the 21st century have seen greater unemployment due to the global economic crisis (see figure 2 above). Of necessity, therefore, they have become more adaptable to uncertainty than the generations before them. Finally, the theory that Millennials are experiencing an extended adolescence also implies that they may be past their 20's before they are in a more stable pattern. But managers may be surprised to learn that, notwithstanding these challenges, Millennials believe they will be promoted to a leadership role at a younger age than their parents were (Levit & Licina, 2011).

This research also identified a significant disconnect between how Millennials define success and how managers perceive that Millennials define it. Specifically, many managers believe that Millennials are primarily focused on money, whereas Millennials report themselves as more focused on meaning. Meaningful work was identified by 30% of Millennials as the most important factor defining career success (See Figure 3 below). Yet when managers were asked to identify the Millennials' most critical success factor, 48% replied high pay, and only 11% reported that meaningful work was the Millennials' most important factor (Levit & Licina, 2011).

Figure 3: Managers' and Millennials' view of the most important factor that indicates career success to Millennials



Source: Levit & Licina, 2011

Best Practice: Raytheon

Raytheon's *Leadership Development Program* is a strategic early career component of an integrated talent system to attract, develop, and retain leaders. Its mission is to build a foundation of leadership competencies, functional disciplinary expertise, and to provide development and networking opportunities to accelerate front line, middle and executive career success.

Through 6 month rotational assignments in targeted business areas, participants develop and expand their skills and professional networks. The program is designed to provide participants, typically in their late twenties, with the opportunity to experience many aspects of Raytheon businesses. For the exceptional young people selected to participate, it also begins to groom them as leaders.

Another program for younger workers is *YESnet: Young Employee's Success Network*. *YESnet* provides "under-thirty" employees a "place" to be with people their own age and who share mutual interests. Participants engage in outside activities, participate in volunteer activities, and partner with other Raytheon organizations on projects. *YESnet* is a particularly helpful retention tool for young talent in smaller locations that do not offer the easy opportunities to network with people in their own age groups.

Best Practice: Marriott

In 2009, in response to feedback from associates seeking new opportunities to connect with senior leadership, the Area Vice Presidents in **Marriott International's** Central Region held five in-market "Evening of Engagement" dialogues hosted by senior leaders in that geographical area. They invited high-potential millennial managers to join them for these unique networking opportunities. Response to the initial sessions was so overwhelmingly positive that the initiative was implemented across the country. In 2010, attendance at these sessions grew to include nearly 900 early-career managers, and they will continue to take place in 2011 and beyond. The objective of these events is for senior leaders to have meaningful interactions with managers to discuss their aspirations and share insight on methods to achieve career goals. Millennials appreciated the opportunity to network and interact with senior leaders and share their perspectives.

The significance of this data is that it reveals a potentially critical communication gap in the workplace. If managers interpret the behaviors of Millennials through a prism that fails to see their employees' primary goals and objectives, important opportunities to train and nurture desired behaviors in the workplace – both as current workers and future leaders – can be lost.

The Profile of the Millennial Leader

A report analyzing a series of interviews with Millennials identified 8 characteristics of how Millennials will tend to serve as future leaders (Smith, 2010). Specifically, the study stated that Millennials will likely bring the following strengths to their roles as leaders:

1. **Active attention** – Just as Millennials value attention from their employers, they see the need to provide active attention as a central metric for leadership.
2. **Transparency** – Millennials are more engaged when they are able to learn and understand as much as possible about their employer and their assignments, and Millennial leaders will strive for transparency to keep their team aware and engaged in business decisions.
3. **Relevancy for others** – Because they seek meaning in their work, as leaders, Millennials can be expected to impart the relevance of their goals to their employees.
4. **Relevancy for oneself** – Millennials are likely, as leaders, to be sensitive to those they lead who are also analyzing their own path.
5. **Passion** – Millennials look to be passionate about their work, and can be expected to infuse that passion into the workplace and their communities.
6. **Accountable leadership** – Millennials are more likely to reject hierarchical leadership, and will lead by team motivation, collegiality, and accountability.
7. **Autonomy through flexibility** – Millennials view flexibility in when and where one works as a sign that they are respected in the workplace. As leaders, Millennials are expected to be open to non-traditional behaviors and to provide opportunities for autonomy and flexibility.
8. **Self-care as a reflection of organizational health** – Millennials see the connection between their own health and the health of their workplace. As leaders, they are likely to be more sensitive to ways to develop healthier work-life integration.

Tips for Developing Millennials into Leadership Roles

Current managers in the workplace have an important role to play in the development of the next generation

of leaders – both as role models and trainers. Millennials pay close attention to whether their workplace offers opportunities to advance and grow in their careers. Accordingly, those workplaces that want to retain and advance their talent will develop and implement a variety of programs that demonstrate a commitment to their younger employees. The recommendations which follow are examples of useful ideas from a sampling of researchers and employers, and are offered to help employers get started.

Initiatives to foster mutual support and understanding between Millennials and their managers can be advanced through the implementation of *two types of training* (Levit & Licina, 2011):

1. Provide training on intergenerational dynamics which offers concrete strategies to build a better sense of community within teams.
2. Provide “soft-skill training for Millennial hires” that addresses such issues as:
 - a. Assimilating into a new workplace culture;
 - b. Working with team members assertively and diplomatically;
 - c. Learning how to receive and process feedback;
 - d. Learning how to approach a supervisor to seek mentorship and set long-term career goals; and
 - e. Developing strategies to combat misperceptions about Millennials, such as reverse mentoring to more effectively leverage their strengths.

Collaborative discussions that foster innovative thinking can provide valuable insights to help bridge generational divides and develop the next generation of leaders. For example, a Massachusetts non-profit organization, Leadership MetroWest, sponsored a Leadership Roundtable entitled, “*Boomers & Millennials: Collisions & Collaborations*,” at Framingham State University, where business leaders offered their tips for creating a thriving workplace where Millennials can learn to lead. The recommendations centered on:

1. Communication and Transparency

Open and honest communication is essential, as is two-way feedback. Striving for *greater transparency* can help keep Millennials invested in a company’s business goals and objectives. And by *leveraging the technological skills of Millennials*, greater workplace efficiencies can be achieved.

2. Management Style

By being *intentional about leadership development*, current workplace managers can incorporate teachable mo-

Best Practice: Northrop Grumman

Connect1NG is a Northrop Grumman program that provides non-traditional avenues to help develop and engage new employees. The program is operated “by employees, for employees,” and aimed at retaining recently hired and highly skilled engineers. Volunteer teams organize social networking, community outreach, and professional development activities across 26 geographic regions. Within the past 3 years, more than 15% of Northrop Grumman employees have participated in over 1,000 events and volunteered more than 7,000 hours per year.

Background

Northrop Grumman faced an identity challenge after almost a decade of corporate merger and acquisition activity. While using identical on-boarding concepts, business units had adopted different brands, resulting in varied employee engagement participation rates and retention. A single new-hire acclimation program was deemed critical to an integrated campaign.

The Connect1NG Solution

First, early education on the business portfolio and environment, and industry trends, provided relevant career planning knowledge. Second, frequent interaction with executives provided context on career paths a new hire could choose to achieve personal success and business results. Third, constant access to peers through social events, community service, and professional development opportunities allowed new hires to establish networks outside their work area.

As a result, voluntary participation in Connect1NG increased over 300% from the legacy teams, and long-term objectives for return on investment were met in less than 3 years.

Executive Perspective

Executive sponsorship is required to launch and sustain a Connect1NG chapter. Employee leaders gain access to leadership training, stretch assignments and coaching through interactions with local executives. These networks also help executives reach a targeted community for new projects, obtain feedback on initiatives, and establish long-term relationships that sustain the business.

ments into their day-to-day activities. The development of *two-way mentorship programs* can encourage people to connect at both the professional and the personal level. Another part of effective management is to *delegate more efficiently which provides stretch opportunities to Millennials*. And it is also important to keep in mind that Millennials expect to bring fun into the workplace - something that can benefit all generations..

3. Appreciation of Diversity

It is important that generational stereotyping not get in the way of the ability to understand the expectations and skill sets of each employee. This means not only embracing generational differences, but *embracing differences* in how tasks get done. Efforts to *foster intergenerational collaboration and learning* will improve outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The Millennial generation is continuing to impact the workplace through its size and diverse range of talents. Moreover, as Baby Boomers retire or scale back, the leadership roles they have occupied for so long will need to be filled. Because Generation X is too small to completely fill the void, Millennials will quickly need to undertake many of these leadership roles. Accordingly, there is a clear workplace imperative for business organizations to support the Millennials in their growth and development as future leaders. By identifying and cultivating leadership talent early, employers can best position their workplaces for smooth leadership transitions and a stronger future.

Best Practices from CWF member organizations are provided throughout this EBS. The breadth and scope of these programs highlight the strengths and holistic approach that Millennials bring to the workplace and the contributions they make toward organizational success. Career development, social interactions, volunteerism, and technology are hallmarks of many of these Best Practices.

The Best Practices provided demonstrate an understanding of the Millennials and an investment in their future. These practices showcase a variety of ways to engage Millennials, for example: by using social networks to connect them both locally and globally; by providing opportunities for Millennials to meet and work with company leaders; and by helping Millennials develop and implement philanthropic and other projects that showcase their talents, engage their passion for meaningful work, and expand their networks. Their ideas – and the other suggestions offered here – are meant to encourage your own internal look at ways to support the Millennials on their path to future leadership.

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About this Series

Written for an executive level audience, the Boston College Center for Work & Family Executive Briefing Series addresses topical and strategic issues of particular relevance to the current business climate. The series highlights research findings, data trends and best practices in a concise format, aiming to foster action-oriented dialogue within organizations. Each issue features an accompanying PowerPoint presentation that captures key points and includes a section for practitioners to customize and add organization-specific data

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Since its founding in 1990, The Boston College Center for Work & Family has been a national leader in helping organizations create effective workplaces that support and develop healthy and productive employees. The Center provides a bridge linking the academic community to the applied world of the work/life practitioner and has three main focus areas: research, membership, and education. The Center is committed to enhancing the quality of life of today's workforce by providing leadership for the integration of work and life, an essential for business and community success.

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