BOOMERS MAKE WAY...
THE MILLENNIALS ARE HERE

SARITA BHAKUNI, Ph.D., Senior Organizational Development Consultant, CPP Inc. reveals why today's Millennials require a completely different approach than yesterday's baby boomers

There is much talk about the new generation of workers entering the workforce and the effects this has on the workplace, training and employee development. How should today's training and learning programs or methods be adapted to better suit the needs of these new workers?

The Millennials, who comprise today's talent pool, are "right now" learners. They have grown up in the high tech, super connected, immediate gratification age and expect learning to be delivered quickly and in a less didactic, more interactive format. It is no longer enough to have off-the-shelf training programs; it is now necessary to provide customization to the end learners. To do so, we must be accomplished in truly knowing our audience – to go beyond motivations, skill levels and interests to reach a deeper understanding of their experiences and what is relevant in their lives. When we lose their attention, we fail to achieve our goal of engagement for potential learning and development. What it comes down to is credibility – how can we say we understand the needs of this generation if we have not made an attempt to understand who they really are?

I was recently coaching a manager who spoke at length about generational differences. We discussed differences in language, approach and pacing. Managers sometimes feel left out of the current pop culture zeitgeist because their experiences are vastly different. This particular manager asked me, "Just because I don't know who Kanye West is, does that mean I can't do my job?" For some people, mastery and knowledge management happen both inside and outside of the office, and we must be cognizant of this fact when translating learning to younger generations. The challenge is that outdated approaches are now disposable. Millennials wait six months for the update of the new iPhone, then buy the new and improved version despite the fact that the old one still works. Why? Because it is available and they can. Our training and learning programs, therefore, need to be current, relevant and informative in interactive formats and must also be somewhat fun. Otherwise, we are guaranteed to be thrown out with last month's cell phone or mp3 player.

The Millennials expect much more from their employers than the Baby Boomers. Can you talk about these differences and describe how this affects training and learning, from on-boarding to performing?

If you speak to workers from the generations that preceded Generation X and the Millennials, such as Baby Boomers or Traditionalists, it is likely they will tell you stories with pride and a sense of accomplishment about how they paved their own ways. Some of these people believe that the younger generations need hand holding and that we are creating an overly dependent workforce. The main shift I have observed is that these new young professionals ask for help when they need it, and do so unabashedly. Though this may feel bothersome to senior managers, the millennial talent pool is actually gathering the information they need first so they can implement on their own without micromanagement by superiors.

Another difference I see is that social interaction and community within the workplace and learning environment are of paramount importance to Millennials. For example, the top five consulting firms are ushering in large numbers of trainees who work together in small groups. These trainee groups are sent out on consulting assignments accompanied by more senior client managers and with the goal of satisfying clients as quickly as possible. During these assignments, the formation of virtual classrooms and an artificial continuation of the academic environment are created. The "graduating classes" of these firms eat, drink, sleep, travel and analyze together on their 14- to 16-hour day assignments. What enables them to manage this experience is the camaraderie and sense of community created within their learning cohorts. Competing and performing are still drivers, but they learn to manage these drivers within the context of collaboration and mutual learning.

Such on-boarding processes have become integral parts of new training programs – from the small business to the big box company. Rather than a step-by-step laundry list of what to do and when to do it, new employees are learning from the experiences of their mentors. In his book, A Whole New Mind, Daniel Pink discusses the value of using stories as teaching tools. These experience stories are what young professionals remember when faced with situations similar to their mentors. When given an opportunity, people remember the relationships with their mentors early in their careers, and these mentoring relationships help build loyalty to the organizations. Additionally, when new high potentials are given the tools to connect virtually – such as e-learning tools being integrated into the on-boarding program – they remain engaged, regardless of their client assignment.

Can you discuss some of the ways in which organizations should approach talent management and some key aspects that many overlook?

Developing talent and a leadership pipeline has changed dramatically over the last 10 to 12 years. Age and seniority no longer define what it takes to be an enduring leader, and the people who populate high potential programs are looking younger and younger worldwide, as are the C-level executives of so many start-ups. But what is often overlooked is that effective talent management and succession planning starts with assessing EQ, or emotional intelligence. High potentials often possess an abundance of technical skill, which does not often translate into leadership skill. Consequently, using such antiquated models to elevate "next in line" managers does not promote bench strength or leadership strength within the organization. What does is a talent management strategy that incorporates the development of emotional intelligence of high potential employees and future leaders. Technical skill and job competencies are a given – the time is right for adding self-awareness, which is the keystone to effective leadership and emotional intelligence.

Research suggests that IQ peaks at 18 while EQ peaks at 50. Thus, reaching people as they are developing is imperative in creating new, more robust leaders. IQ is losing relevance, but EQ has been building momentum as the way to manage talent. Identifying where these young leaders need to enhance their EQ skills can direct their development more specifically. Taking a look "under the hood," so to speak, and using metrics early on to examine assets and vulnerabilities can help define effective development plans for high potential leaders. Across industries, an early investment in talent management has been linked to ROI in terms of the financial bottom line, but the propensity to wait for "just in time" interventions has created the existing and growing leadership gap in organizations. What organizational development and HR professionals are now finding is a means to reduce this gap by engaging individuals and enhancing their development through the use of assessments.

What are some of the tools those in the HR, training and learning professions can employ for effective talent management?

Assessment in talent management continues to focus on leveraging a person's strengths to build upon an existing foundation. While we do want awareness of potential areas for development, it is more imperative to give individuals immediate direction. Early success with talent management initiatives is more consistently sustained when it begins with positive feedback. This is because people do not feel too helpless to embark on overwhelming projects. An excellent way to introduce people to their styles while providing opportunities for self-awareness and growth is by applying the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) personality assessment to the training and development process.

So much of our culture in the corporate world focuses on what we are doing wrong and must correct. The MBTI assessment, however, says that there is no perfect type. Instead, the goal is to use your talents appropriately and be flexible in accommodating the situation. Whether in an on-boarding program or in the C-suite, this instrument helps provide insight and instruction around communication styles, change, conflict management and decision-making in a way that people can connect. One specific MBTI report compares two individuals' MBTI types and offers recommendations for enhancing the relationship and fostering more effective communication. This is a practical tool that can be used in mentoring programs and between managers and their direct reports to streamline communication and get to the undercurrent of relationship dynamics. But more importantly, using the MBTI assessment as a foundational tool provides a shared language for people and serves as a catalyst in discussions – promoting growth and development in a safe and benign way.

To use the tool ethically and most effectively, HR professionals are required to obtain MBTI Qualification. In my observation, the most admired and successful companies have provided a venue or opportunity for talent management professionals to obtain this essential credential by attending an MBTI Qualifications program. These programs offer a "deep dive" into type dynamics and applications of the instrument that are supported with years of research and collaboration with the Myers & Briggs Foundation. Furthermore, when participants leave, they are equipped with the tools they need to immediately implement programs and begin doing interpretations. With MBTI Qualification, participants are prepared to answer those difficult questions we receive when people are resistant to development or unsure about feeling vulnerable and sharing aspects of themselves with others.

Certainly practice makes perfect, but HR professionals who have the essential tools for implementing effective talent management programs contribute to more successful corporate initiatives and achieve higher levels of buy-in and investment companywide. MBTI Qualification is a must-have credential for every HR professional. **FP**

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