

What Companies Can Do

LEADERS EAT LAST outlines a philosophy and strategy to lead, build trust and inspire our people to take care of and support each other. The specific ideas and tactics I offer here pick up from where chapter 24 left off and address the specific challenges Millennials face. In practice, most are good, general leadership concepts that will help everyone in an organization grow.

Keep Conference Rooms Free of Cell Phones

It seems like something small and insignificant. The same can be said for brushing our teeth for two minutes. It is useless unless we do it consistently. Every time we interact with each other at work it is an opportunity to connect as human beings and slowly build trusting relationships. When we are on our phones before meetings, we take away opportunities to simply chat. Whether we talk about work, ask about each other's weekends . . . or even sit in silence together . . . we are doing little things that go a long way over time. If companies simply ban cellphones in all conference rooms, in time they will start to feel improvements in the quality of relationships their people enjoy.

Encourage Notetaking on Paper Instead of Computers

According to a study published in *Psychological Science*, those who take notes on paper are better at processing and retaining information. Though computer note takers may capture more data, those who use paper are forced to discern which information is more important. This learnable, practicable skill significantly impacts critical thinking and decision making. And for those who *have to have* notes captured digitally, then assign one person to take digital notes or simply transcribe the handwritten notes after the meeting.

Teach Leadership

I visited a large bank and asked if they had a leadership training program. “We do,” the executive answered excitedly. When I probed for specific courses they teach, I was told they teach compliance. “That’s not leadership training,” I said, “that’s how to follow the law.” He continued to share more of the courses on offer, but there wasn’t a single class on actual leadership. How can we expect people to lead if we don’t teach them how to do it? The best companies I know have a robust curriculum to include human skills like effective confrontation, active listening and communication skills.

Teach How to Give and Receive Feedback

Many Millennials in the workforce say they want more feedback. In practice, I’ve learned that what they seem to want is more positive feedback, more affirmation when they do well. Stories abound that too many of them aren’t actually that good at receiving negative feedback. Giving and receiving feedback are learnable, practicable skills. Getting better at giving feedback is not simply about giving more feedback, it’s learning how to give it, positive and negative. Similarly, receiving feedback is not simply about demanding feedback, it’s learning how to receive it, positive and negative, then knowing how to act on that feedback when it’s offered.

There are many ways to do this. For example, our company has developed its own 360 review system. Once a year, each person on a team is asked to write down their top three strengths or areas they believe they’ve most improved and their three biggest weaknesses or areas they feel they need the most growth. Everyone’s answers are consolidated into one document and shared with every member of their team. We then take whatever time it takes—half a day or a full day, depending on the size of the team—to go through it all.

Each person must first read their weaknesses. Then anyone who wants to can add to or comment on that list. At this time, the person sharing their list may not speak. They are prohibited from defending themselves or offering excuses. Their job is to listen. Immediately after, the person reads their strengths. And again, anyone else can add to or comment on the list. Again, the person being reviewed may only listen. At most, we allow clarifying questions. Someone takes responsibility to run the meeting to ensure that anything outside these parameters is quickly shut down.

It is an amazing experience. The most junior person on my team had the opportunity to tell me how I let her down and how I make her feel when I say or do certain things. It was completely eye-opening for me and it was empowering for her to feel heard. We don't use this process as part of our formal evaluations but rather as a growth tool. We are all also members of smaller coaching pods that meet for an hour once a week or once every other week throughout the year to help each other build on what we learned in the review session.

Take Advantage of Your Millennials

More companies would benefit directly by taking advantage of the unique skills and perspectives Millennials bring to the table thanks to their upbringing. For example, Millennials grew up on social media. They have literally spent their entire lives curating their personal brands. They intuitively understand how branding works. Take advantage of it!

Instead of complaining that Millennials aren't showing up or aren't engaged, use them as a barometer of how you are doing as a leader or to gauge the kind of culture the company is building. Consider that older generations may not, in fact, be more engaged in their work (the data supports this), but rather that they are just better at faking it. Use the fact that Millennials are more willing to speak out when they are feeling uninspired, disengaged or dissatisfied as an accurate accounting of how everyone

in the company feels. If given something that inspires them to engage or stick around, Millennials will fully engage for a long, long time.

Growing up in a world of instant gratification has its liabilities. It also offers a huge advantage. Millennials are comfortable with change and quicker to pivot than older generations. I am amazed by how many of them are so comfortable with the thought of quitting their jobs to freelance, join a start-up, or start a company themselves. I've met so many Millennials who quit a job they didn't like without another job lined up. I've never met someone of an older generation who's ever done that. Older generations seem to prefer stability over uncertainty. If there is a project or opportunity that requires lots of quick turns, snap decisions, even risks—throw Millennials at it. Let your older employees support them with experience and know-how. Building on that, although Millennials admit that they struggle to form deep meaningful relationships, they excel at first impressions. They are very impressive at a first engagement. Though they may struggle with issues of self-confidence, they give off an air of confidence that is valuable for networking or sales. Put them on the front line to sell and let the more experienced employees support them to help build deeper relationships with prospects. It will make for a more balanced team dynamic and both generations will learn from each other.

Here are a few more general thoughts to keep in mind if you want to take full advantage of all the gifts Millennial employees offer:

- **Mentor and support them** (acknowledging that sometimes they may not have the courage to ask for it). A true mentor is never too busy to mentor.
- **Lead by example.** Leaders in companies can be better role models than the athletes and movie stars Millennials look up

to now. Show them heroism and leadership in their daily lives, so they don't just associate those qualities with billionaires and celebrities.

- **Talk about your failures.** It's easy to talk about our achievements, but being frank about our failures helps Millennials understand the realities of the journey that is their life and career. Doing so also contributes directly to building a Circle of Safety, helping create a culture in which everyone feels more comfortable to admit mistakes, fears and misgivings.
- **Give them the opportunity to fall.** There is a lot of talk about "embracing failure" in the business press. But the problem with the word "failure" is that it can be an invaluable lesson or it could mean total destruction of a company. We should continue to remind people that failure is bad and should be avoided when possible. What we can embrace is falling. Millennials should be given more opportunities to fall. Opportunities to have a lot of responsibility on smaller projects. And if they screw up we say, "good fall, now try it again."
- **Offer more opportunities to develop "human" skills.** Because an excess of technology can negatively affect how some Millennials connect, it's up to us to bridge the gap. Lead by example by connecting in more human ways. Reduce e-mail use, make more calls instead. Roam the halls more to talk to your people and ask more questions. If we want them to engage better, let us better engage with them.
- **Help them love themselves.** Help Millennials build their self-confidence. Think about how you would want another leader to treat your children. As Bob Chapman from Barry-Wehmiller says, let's work to treat all our people, each of them someone else's son or daughter, the same way.
- **Take a chance on them.** They may surprise you.

- **They are the leaders of the future, but we are the leaders right now.** We are the ones with the authority and an ability to exert far more influence on their lives than they can on ours. We must preach our own causes. We must reconnect with our own Why. We must become the kind of idealist we were when we were younger . . . then build our companies and lead our people to join us.

“Excerpted from *Leaders Eat Last* paperback edition by Simon Sinek, May, 2017 (Penguin/Portfolio). Full edition is available at Amazon or any bookstore near you.”