

What Millennials Can Do

I BELIEVE THAT leaders of companies bear some responsibility to move their corporate cultures away from the dog-eat-dog philosophies of yesteryear to more trusting, Circle of Safety–style environments. And that must happen if we want to help Millennials in the workforce work at their natural best. However, as a Millennial, you too have some work to do if you want to reap all the benefits of a good culture. As great as handholding feels in the moment, if your desire is truly to find fulfillment in work and make an impact in the world, there’s going to be some heavy lifting, hard truths to face and much patience required. So . . . if you’re game, read on.

Solve Your Own Problem

If you’re assigned to do something, big or small, and you don’t know how to do it or even how to start, ask for help. If your boss doesn’t give you an answer or the guidance you need, find the answer somewhere else. Some bosses won’t help because they’re assholes, but others won’t help because they want you to figure it out yourself and trust that you’re smart enough to do so. Either way, you need to figure it out because it’s good for you. Google probably won’t help either. The opportunity for growth here is to reach out to other people you know. Friends, old bosses, other

people at the company, the bosses of your friends are all viable choices. This is an opportunity to develop interpersonal skills. In other words, this has to be more than an e-mail request. The most valuable advice will not come from an e-mail response with a list of suggestions or instructions; the real goal of leaving you to figure it out is to push you to cultivate a relationship. Go to someone in the company you may not know, knock on their door and ask for their help. If you're in a small company, look outside the company. Again, the goal isn't to simply have a person other than your boss give you step-by-step instructions, but to learn to develop a relationship with someone who knows more to guide you or act as a sounding board as you figure it out yourself.

Push to Completion

Responsibility or accountability isn't about starting a task or a project. It happens when we carry it to completion. For example, every now and then I ask someone to help me find something or get a hold of someone. A few days go by and I don't hear back, so I follow up on my request. "I looked it up but couldn't find anything" is the answer I get, or "I e-mailed him but haven't gotten a reply back yet." Those who are brilliant at pushing to completion do all the things the rest of us do to start a task and when they run into a roadblock, figure out all the other ways they can continue to make progress. They don't simply repeat what they've done. When asked about their progress they don't reply, "I'll try to e-mail him again." The really gifted Completers start thinking about what workarounds they can use if whatever they tried before isn't working well enough or quickly enough. Even if they never end up having to use that next step, it's already been considered. The gift of this practice is that the next time a similar challenge comes up, ideas are already generated, and new relationships already exist thanks to the way they handled things the previous time. This is what makes them so resourceful. It's not how they solved one problem, it's how prepared they are to solve the next problem.

Beg for Criticism

There is no question positive reinforcement is extremely valuable in any organization. Being recognized for our strengths and contributions does wonders for our self-confidence and our feelings of belonging. However, being told only what we are good at reduces our opportunity to grow. We don't learn much when everything goes well and we get all the answers right. Real learning happens when things go wrong or when we screw up. What we should all want is a balance of feedback. At the end of every project, I ask my team what I could have done better. At the end of most meetings, we tell each other what little mistakes we should watch out for next time. Find the people whom you respect and admire, the ones you want to be more like or know how they are good at something you could be better at, regardless of their rank or responsibility, and ask them what you can do better next time. In time, you will find yourself much more receptive to negative feedback and much better at giving feedback, positive and negative, to others.

Unless your company offers a class on how to give and receive feedback, don't assume those around you, including your boss, know how to give negative feedback. They may be too aggressive. Too blunt. Maybe even a little mean. Perhaps they are bad at giving feedback because no one ever taught them how. Or perhaps they've had bosses who were bad at giving them feedback. Try to brush aside the stuff that offends or upsets you to really try to hear what they are saying you can do better next time. And if they only tell you things like, "don't let that happen again," then work to figure out what you can do better next time, so that it doesn't actually happen again. Preparing to solve a problem for next time feels better than getting upset about our failure to solve it this time.

Sacrifice Credit

Like feedback, giving credit where credit is due goes a long way to building a Circle of Safety and creating an environment of mutual

respect between boss and employee. Of course leaders should publicly acknowledge the hard work that specific people contributed to a project. However, there is more to work than getting the credit for it. Like almost every tip in this section, it's about balance. There is something quite magical about learning to be a shadow player who helps make others look good, whose silent impact makes projects turn out better. There is a humble magic in feeling an immense sense of joy and pride in seeing someone we supported, worked with and helped get the public praise.

Much in the same way parents find real joy in the success of their kids and great leaders feel pride when their people achieve things others didn't think they could, so too can we all learn to feel joy in the contributions we make to see those around us thrive. I know what some of you are thinking: if I did the work, I want the credit. I agree. But the short-term burst of goodness you feel for the extrinsic reward won't last. More important, it won't help you develop the muscle responsible for long-term feelings of fulfillment. What's more, the more others see you experience real joy in being the shadow player, the more they will seek you out for help. The more they will rely on you and trust you. When that happens, take intense pride and joy in the success of the project and start working hard to celebrate each other.

This book, for example, has an acknowledgments section. I didn't have to write it, and most people won't read it. But it's not for you—it's for the people who helped me. It's my little tip of the hat to say thank you. And here's the best part—because of the relationship we've built, almost all of them take immense personal pride when they hear someone say how much they enjoyed this book, without knowing their contribution to its creation. They are the real reason things like this can happen.

Cold Turkey Your Phone

Many of you won't like this one and will think of all kinds of excuses to ignore or avoid doing it. For example, here's a

suggestion: stop keeping your phone by your bed when you sleep, charge your phone in another room. You already have your excuse, don't you: but it's my alarm clock!

I don't need to offer an alternative option for you—you've already read *Solve Your Own Problem and Push to Completion* and know what to do.

Just as an alcoholic removes the alcohol from their house because they can't rely on their willpower not to drink, you need to find ways to keep yourself away from the addictive power of your devices. You are simply not strong enough to deny yourself that hit of dopamine goodness. You have to cut yourself off. I'm not suggesting we abandon our phones or social media altogether, I'm suggesting we regain balance. What I've learned is that if we start with some more dramatic strategies, we can actually beat the habit and overcome our urge to jump every time our phones buzz, ping, flash or beep. Beat the addiction, lose the craving. That's how it works. So . . . what can we do in the short and medium term to help us overcome the urge to constantly check and check in?

1. From this moment on, no cell phones at any meal table. If you're out for lunch or dinner with a friend, family, colleague or client, turn your ringer off and put your phone away and out of sight. Upside down on the table doesn't count. A bottle of vodka with the cap on it won't help the alcoholic beat the craving. It has to be out of sight altogether! If the person you're with takes their phone out—you can say politely, "Hey, let's have a meal together, without our phones." You can make exceptions: if you happen to be waiting for an important message, just inform the people you're with why you need your phone out. Once that message comes in, put the phone away. You get the idea.

You'll probably hate it the first or even dozen times you do it. Too many of us are addicts, remember. Taking away the thing that makes us feel good doesn't feel good. Give it some time and you'll start to feel the effect. We actually enjoy the company of

our friends more. We have an even better time when we go out with them. We have livelier conversations. We learn more about them and they learn more about us. We learn to trust and rely on them more just as they learn to trust and rely on us more. This is one simple step you can take to build deep, meaningful relationships with the people in your lives.

2. On the same note, if you have a spouse or significant other, the next time you go out on a date with them, agree to leave both your phones at home. Or, if you need a phone for kids, to call a car—or take a picture of your food—take just one phone and let the other person carry it. If you are carrying your date’s phone, you won’t feel the craving to check it and vice versa. The quality of the time you spend together will, in short order, significantly improve. And when you come home to texts from people asking you why you took so long to respond, some of you may start to enjoy replying, “I was out with the person I love and we left our phones at home.”

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