

## Help! My Manager Is a Millennial & I'm Not

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In *Skyfall*, an aging, battered James Bond meets the new Q—the high-tech wizard for M16, in a museum. Q is young, not long out of graduate school. Bond and Q are staring at a painting.

In their first exchange, they set each other straight.

*007, I'm your new quartermaster.*

You must be joking.

*Why, because I'm not wearing a lab coat?*

Because you still have spots.

*My complexion is hardly relevant.*

Your competence is.

*Age is no guarantee of efficiency.*

And youth is no guarantee of innovation.

This scenario is not found only in adventure flicks. Although the dialog may be different, the younger manager—older worker gap has entered the workplace. In a 2014 survey by CareerBuilder, 38% of workers reported that they currently work for a younger boss.

Two years ago, The Learning Café embarked on a primary research project detailing the observations and experiences of more than 400 Millennial managers, their bosses, team members and colleagues across federal government, not for profit and corporate organizations. At the time, our goal was to discover the strengths and vulnerabilities of Millennial leaders through their own eyes, as well as reveal the views of their direct reports, managers and peers.

In the process, we learned about the teams that report to Millennial managers. Guess what? Many if not most of the Millennial managers led teams of older Millennials, Generation Xers and Baby Boomers. And while this generational mix offers huge opportunities for creativity, productivity and knowledge sharing, there was also ample opportunity for discomfort and even clashes.

First, the good news: our research revealed that Millennial managers bring huge strengths to leadership

including collaborative work tools, enthusiasm for learning and technology abilities. In order to reap these workplace rewards, we must first address what Millennial managers and their team members cite as a younger manager's number one challenge: "managing older people" and "getting credibility and respect with mature team members." (As well older team members were most likely to cite "a younger boss" as their top challenge.)

Instead of a gap, we at The Learning Café see a bridge to opportunity. Mature team members can help bridge that gap; they have an opportunity to create robust, productive partnerships with their newer-to-the-workforce managers. Based on our research, here are four productive partnerships between mature team members and younger managers. For each partnership, we present targeted actions that older workers can use to leverage the differing work experience. The results? Knowledge sharing, harmony and superb business outcomes. The combination of veteran savvy and the fresh passion and updated skills of newer managers can create outstanding business results.

Here's how a more mature worker can make the most of a younger boss opportunity:

### **Partnership #1: Have the Boss's Back**

**What you need to know:** Younger managers are widely seen as quick studies, team oriented and rarely micromanaging...and are seen as lacking the ability to deal with conflict and poor performers, and require what is perceived as "handholding"—a lot of feedback, input and coaching about specific situations, clients and key projects.

#### **Actions**

##### **1 It's Not about You**

Just like any boss, your Millennial manager is worthy of respect. Create a strong partnership by acknowledging the talents they bring to the role. Don't indulge in sarcastic commentary to other colleagues that diminishes your boss.

##### **2 Share the Back Story**

Disclose the historical details and relationship information that your manager may not know. The information you share can help them keep a watchful eye and put the team in the best light. Let them know that you're there to help.

##### **3 Proactively Ask for Input & Feedback**

Don't let your performance be the elephant in the room. Let your manager know you value their point of view, and would like to talk about how you both see things. Then give them some time to think it through before your conversation.

### **Partnership #2: Speed Up Communication**

**What you need to know:** Millennial managers are seen as adept at adopting new approaches, able to improve team productivity through technology, and speedy at communicating ... but, they tend to over-use technology for communications, and have less patience for face-to-face meetings than their more experienced team members.

#### **Actions**

##### **1 Embrace the Mini-Meet**

A meeting doesn't have to be an hour or even 30 minutes. Rally your manager and project team for a crisp 10 minutes.

##### **2 Leverage F2F Meeting Time**

It's not old-school to have a clear, short agenda and use good meeting process to keep the meeting on track.

##### **3 Use More Visuals**

Let's face it. Lack of time is not only a Millennial manager issue. Consider a one-pager or illustration to make the point. Is your dashboard or project plan overwhelming? If it really needs to be weighty, lead with a pithy summary and use color, graphics and bullet points to get the message across.

### Partnership #3: Stay at the Top of Your Game

**What you need to know:** Millennial managers often bring the latest-and-greatest in new functional skills or technology. However, they occasionally have a rep for being less patient with team members who struggle with technology or lean on legacy knowledge.

#### Actions

##### 1 *Remain a Wizard*

Think of the change you've already seen in your career discipline or functional area. Amazing, right? Keep your reputation as a constant learner intact—talk to colleagues at the forefront, and ensure your skills are top notch. Actively explore what's new in your functional area, and share what you learn with your boss. A simple action like having coffee with a colleague who's working on a new initiative keeps you in touch.

##### 2 *Park Your Assumptions*

Think that your younger boss doesn't have much to contribute, knowledge-wise? You might be surprised. And less experience certainly doesn't mean less passion. Get curious and have a conversation with the boss about their background, experience and vision for your team and work. Ask yourself what you can learn from the boss and their approach.

##### 3 *Keep Contributing*

Share your expert perspective in the very best way with the new boss—by helping your team and organization reach important goals. Tempted to withhold your expertise because you're piqued? Rally your spirits and keep showing 'em your winning style.

### Partnership #4: Unglue Yourself from the Past

**What you need to know:** Millennial managers are seen as forward thinking, open to change and willing to break rules to improve things; however, they are also regarded as intolerant of the status quo and sometimes not effective at making big things happen because they're poorly networked or they show impatience.

#### Actions

##### 1 *Be Part of the Solution*

Help your manager figure out how to make change and create innovation. Be openly supportive and don't get stuck in "it's always been this way." Make it clear that you're excited about new ways of working and accomplishing project goals; share the context and "why" behind current processes so your boss gets fast insight and doesn't stumble.

##### 2 *Watch Your Messages*

Your intentions are golden when you say "this is the way we've done it and here's why"; however, it can brand you as part of the past and not the future. Try something like, "I agree that we need to get this changed. Let me share some of the recent history so you're not blindsided."

##### 3 *Share Your Street Smarts*

Support your manager by sharing your networks—introduce your manager to key colleagues with the deep expertise and savvy needed to support change efforts. Your tribal knowledge makes all the difference.

## We ♥ Mature Workers—and Millennial Managers

The resounding work ethic and commitment from the Silent, Boomer and Xer generations put the United States at the top of global productivity and economic success. The wisdom and gravitas of these generations continue to steer our organizations and country through volatility, change and astounding new achievements. Likewise, we are excited to embrace a new generation of committed, change-oriented leaders who bring new ways of thinking and working. Our research uncovered resounding appreciation for the experiences and talents of every generation. Without a doubt, we are stronger together and better at facing challenge when we actively bridge the generation gap.

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### The Learning Cafe

For two decades, **Diane Thielfoldt** and **Devon Scheef** have specialized in creating productive work relationships among the generations. Their insight about the reality of a changing workforce comes from successful corporate track records at Xerox, TRW and Bausch & Lomb, as well as extensive primary research. Their clients encompass 100+ organizations in two dozen industries, not-for-profit, and the federal government.

Located in Charleston, South Carolina, Diane holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from Pennsylvania State University. An accomplished workshop facilitator and engaging speaker, Diane has educated thousands of managers about practical, everyday actions that contribute to a motivated, engaged workforce.

Located in Westlake Village, California, Devon holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Southern California. She is passionate and expert creating coaching and development programs for leaders. A popular speaker at conferences, Devon combines an energizing speaking style with thought-provoking content.

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“ For those who have seen the Earth from space, and for the hundreds and perhaps thousands more who will, the experience most certainly changes your perspective. The things that we share in our world are far more valuable than those which divide us. ”

*Captain Donald Williams, Astronaut*

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