

## **THE ART OF CONVERSATION**

Daily connects are beneficial for managers to provide feedback and help millennials navigate their roles. But these connects can be — and should be — about more than performance. Managers should use those ongoing check-ins to get to know their employees and what's going on in their lives, to ensure they are continually using their strengths, and, when authentic and appropriate, to discuss their well-being.

### **Conversations Must Be About More Than Work**

Millennials appreciate and desire communication with their manager, not only about their roles and responsibilities, but also about what happens in their lives outside of work. While conversations about their jobs are absolutely important, they are not enough to meet millennials' workplace needs.

Millennials are a highly connected and empathetic group; they are social and caring by nature. They look for the same qualities in a manager and want to build a holistic relationship. Unfortunately, slightly less than one in two millennials strongly agree that their supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about them as a person.

When managers are open and approachable — when they make employees feel comfortable sharing their needs, challenges and questions — their employees are more likely to be engaged. Gallup finds that 59% of millennials who strongly agree that they can talk with their manager about “non-work-related issues” are engaged. Millennial workers who can speak more freely with their managers are also more likely to stay with their company.

Only  
**29%**  
OF MILLENNIALS  
strongly agree that they feel comfortable discussing life  
outside of work with their manager.

However,  
**62%**  
OF MILLENNIALS  
who feel that they can talk with their manager about  
non-work-related issues plan to be with their current  
organization one year from now.

Reinforcing these findings, 53% of millennials who strongly agree that their manager responds to their messages within 24 hours say they plan to stay with their current organization for at least one year. The implication for managers is clear: Talk to your employees about their lives and pay attention to them when they reach out.

When managers get to know employees as people, trust develops between them. That trust is vital to helping employees feel safe and supported, as well as to building a productive workplace in which people feel comfortable enough to experiment, challenge, share information and support one another. The outcome of this trust is higher engagement and retention. Despite wanting and needing a trusting relationship with their manager, the sad truth is that a majority of millennials don't feel comfortable bringing concerns to their manager or talking with their manager about work and non-work-related issues.

But managers can do something about this problem. To start, they need to make a concerted effort to get to know their employees and help them feel comfortable talking about any subject, whether it is related to work or not. Managers should strive to understand their individual employees, including how they like to be motivated and how to build genuine relationships with them. Like all employees, millennials deal with various successes and challenges both in and out of the office — and they need to be led by managers who see and understand them as people.

### **Conversations Must Be About Strengths**

Millennials want to do work they can feel good about; over half (54%) say it's extremely important to do what they are “really good at” in a job. This need is reflective of human nature. When employees are mismatched in a role, they can struggle to succeed or become bored and restless. Their days — even their careers — can feel wasted, along with their sense of purpose. For millennials, having a job that enables them to make the most of their knowledge and skills is of the greatest importance.

Millennials are drawn to do what they do best every day — they naturally want to play to their strengths. Managers must talk to their employees about their strengths, helping them identify and capitalize on their talent, skills and knowledge. A strengths-based approach to performance management just feels better for all employees, and it enables their engagement to soar.

Gallup has found that

70%

OF MILLENNIALS

who strongly agree that their manager  
focuses on their strengths are engaged.

In contrast, 39% of millennials who strongly agree that their manager focuses on their weaknesses or negative characteristics are engaged at work.

By focusing on their millennial workers' strengths, managers also dramatically increase the likelihood that these employees will stay with the company. Gallup found that 62% of millennials who strongly agree that their manager focuses on their strengths or positive characteristics plan to be with their current company for at least one year — 22 points higher than millennials who state otherwise.

However, far too few millennials have the opportunity to do what they do best every day. Only 28% of millennials strongly agree that their manager focuses on their strengths, lower than the 31% of non-millennials who say the same. When managers do not know and cannot leverage their employees' strengths, they essentially undercut their performance, preventing them from doing what they do best and achieving excellence.

Managers must help employees know their strengths, teach them to consistently apply strengths to their roles and encourage them to use their strengths every day. However, while people generally enjoy the process of discovering what they are good at, employees' strengths need a clear purpose. Managers have to know what their team members do best and use the information with intent — aiming it at performance.

### **Conversations Must Be About the Whole Person**

Millennials and their managers must work up to conversations about well-being. Here, “well-being” refers to the whole person and takes into account all of the factors that affect how an individual thinks about and experiences his or her life. Well-being is important to millennial employees, and they want their managers to take an interest in their lives outside of work, but well-being conversations require a certain level of trust between employees and managers. Employees have to feel comfortable talking to their manager about the personal aspects of their life, perhaps including their physical, social and financial goals.

Likewise, managers have to know their employees well enough to understand when it makes sense to bring up well-being as a topic of conversation. They have to gauge what guidance or encouragement to offer and where to point employees to help them reach their goals. Once managers master the work, life and strengths conversations, they can introduce well-being into the mix. The best managers ensure that their employees get every opportunity to excel in their lives outside of work. They do not see these types of conversations as outside their realm of responsibility, but they realize it can take time to build up to them.

Of working millennials, just 5% are thriving in all five elements of well-being (defined in the chart on page 43), compared with 6% of non-millennials. Less than 40% of working millennials are thriving in any one of the elements. Compared with employees in other generations, millennials are more likely to be thriving in purpose and physical well-being. However, non-millennials are more likely to be thriving in financial and community well-being.

MILLENNIALS MORE LIKELY TO BE THRIVING IN PURPOSE AND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING THAN OTHER GENERATIONS

**PURPOSE:** Liking what you do each day and being motivated to achieve your goals

MILLENNIALS

37%

OTHER GENERATIONS

35%

**SOCIAL:** Having supportive relationships and love in your life

MILLENNIALS

37%

OTHER GENERATIONS

40%



**FINANCIAL:** Managing your economic life to reduce stress and increase security

MILLENNIALS

32%

OTHER GENERATIONS

38%

**COMMUNITY:** Liking where you live, feeling safe and having pride in your community

MILLENNIALS

31%

OTHER GENERATIONS

39%

**PHYSICAL:** Having good health and enough energy to get things done daily

MILLENNIALS

31%

OTHER GENERATIONS

29%

In many organizations, wellness programs are highly — if not only — focused on physical health. While important, overall well-being encompasses more than physical fitness; it also speaks to an individual's purpose, financial, social and community well-being.

Gallup studied various outcome-oriented metrics and found that, without exception, millennial workers who report high levels of well-being in all five elements outperform millennials who are physically fit but otherwise lacking.

Although all outcomes are striking, it is particularly notable that millennials thriving in all five of the well-being elements are

85%

LESS LIKELY

than those thriving in only physical well-being to say they plan to leave their employer when the job market improves.

WORKERS WHO ARE THRIVING IN ALL FIVE WELL-BEING ELEMENTS OUTPERFORM  
THOSE WHO ARE THRIVING IN PHYSICAL WELL-BEING ALONE

Impact on Outcomes

More likely to always adapt well to change

MILLENNIALS

+93%

U.S. ADULTS

+119%

More likely to always bounce back after illness

MILLENNIALS

+41%

U.S. ADULTS

+36%

Reduction in absenteeism from work

MILLENNIALS

-38%

U.S. ADULTS

-41%

Less likely to intend to move to new employer when job market improves

MILLENNIALS

-85%

U.S. ADULTS

-81%

More likely to donate money to charity in 12-month span

MILLENNIALS

+11%

U.S. ADULTS

+23%

More likely to report volunteerism in 12-month span

MILLENNIALS

+30%

U.S. ADULTS

+43%

Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index  
Data are weighted by age, gender, marital status, education, household income, employment status and region



Some managers may feel lost when it comes to talking about well-being with their employees. As a starting point, Gallup data reveal that there is a need within companies to let current employees know well-being programs are available to them. Among organizations that offer well-being programs, 60% of their employees say they are aware of these programs. Furthermore, only 40% of the employees who know about these programs say they participate in them. Managers have an opportunity to both educate their employees on well-being and encourage their involvement.

Managers can also start well-being conversations just by asking employees, “Is there an aspect of your overall life that I can support?” The five elements can then help managers more clearly individualize activities based on each employee’s situation. They can even apply to progress-review conversations in ways that encourage employees to pursue their well-being goals and that deepen the manager-employee relationship.

## **MILLENNIALS SEEK LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

Millennials’ optimal performance is rooted in knowing what’s expected of them, consistently communicating with their manager about work and life, and receiving ongoing learning and development opportunities.

Managers should take advantage of what they know about each employee to further his or her development, both by linking to strengths and by truly knowing the individual. A striking 87% of millennials rate “professional or career growth and development opportunities” as important to them in a job — far more than 69% of non-millennials who say the same. But when it comes to developing millennial workers, managers are not fulfilling this need: One in four millennials strongly agree that there is someone at work who encourages their development.

87%

OF MILLENNIALS

rate “professional or career growth and development opportunities” as important to them in a job.

It's noteworthy that millennials' relatively greater emphasis on development may be, in part, related to their stage of life. Gallup has found that among all generations in the workplace, opportunities to learn and grow is one of the top three drivers of retention among millennials and the only factor of retention that separates millennials and non-millennials.

Regardless of the reasons behind millennials' desire to enhance their skills and further their careers, this aspect of employee development is a missed opportunity for managers. Although millennials are most interested in opportunities to learn and grow, only 39% strongly agree that they learned something new in the past 30 days that they can use to do their jobs better. Slightly less than one in two millennials strongly agree that they have had opportunities to learn and grow within the past year. To make matters worse, millennials expect these learning experiences to be valuable, but only one-third strongly agree that their most recent learning opportunity at work was "well worth" their time.

One of the most consistent criticisms aimed at millennials is that they haven't "earned" their right to receive development opportunities. They shouldn't expect a company to invest in them until they can show they are worthy of such an investment. They aren't entitled or owed the opportunity to develop.

Managers need to recognize that millennials do not feel entitled; they feel empowered. They want to expand their knowledge and skills, they want to be useful, and they want their work and workplace to have meaning to them. Millennials' development is paramount to them. They view their jobs as growth opportunities and look to their managers to help them progress. In millennials' eyes, development shouldn't only come through tenure. Millennials want managers to find ways to invest in their futures, hone their skills and coach them to become the best workers they can be — starting today.

Managers are largely not providing the developmental opportunities millennials want, and the opportunities they have offered are missing the mark. Managers should know how each employee best learns and ensure that he or she is learning through various outlets. These outlets could include new responsibilities and tasks that allow employees to expand their knowledge and experience — perhaps planning an event, managing a project

or leading a meeting. But employees should also have an opportunity to take part in more formalized learning through classes or coursework.

Above all, flexibility is a necessity in millennials' learning and development. To accommodate their busy schedules, managers should meet them where they are with diverse learning options, such as emailing pertinent journal articles or offering full-day learning seminars. In addition, with millennials' online, tech-savvy lifestyles, managers should consider sharing on-demand learning opportunities via mobile and social network channels.

Ideally, managers should collaborate with their millennial employees to create concrete plans for their learning and development. This aspect of millennial workers' careers is too important to gloss over or save for annual or semiannual reviews. In their ongoing conversations with millennial team members, managers must focus on growth opportunities. They should ensure that millennials are continuously expanding their knowledge, skills and experience, and help them fill in gaps or take on new challenges that can contribute to their individual development.

## **MILLENNIALS VALUE ACCOUNTABILITY**

Another common misconception about millennials in the workplace is that they want to sidestep accountability and forgo responsibility. However, in examining millennials' collective CliftonStrengths data, Gallup finds the opposite to be true. Millennials have high Responsibility and Achiever, meaning they care greatly about seeing tasks and projects completed. Millennials want managers to hold them accountable and possess an innate sense of ownership of their work. They need to feel productive, and this need resets itself each day. Their accomplishments only fuel them to do more.

Gallup's studies on millennials show that these employees not only need accountability, but they are also more engaged when they get it. Nearly six in 10 millennials (56%) who report that their manager holds them accountable at work are engaged, compared with 48% of non-millennials who say the same.

Millennials respond to managers who hold them accountable, and managers who do so greatly enhance the chances that their millennial employees will stay with them.

59%

OF MILLENNIALS

who strongly agree that their manager holds them accountable for their performance say they plan to be with their current organization for at least one year.

Similarly, 56% of millennials who strongly agree that their manager knows what projects or tasks they are working on also say the same of their expected tenure.

But there is a disclaimer in millennials' need for accountability and responsibility. Millennials' collective strengths data portray them as high achievers. Within this generation, many millennials like to take on work and are driven to get that work done. The challenge for managers is to ensure that these employees don't take on too much. They must help their millennial workers prioritize their projects and tasks to ensure they do not burn out.