

Generation Y Defined

The millennial generation (also known as “Generation Y”) is a unique group.

Born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s, they’ve been brought up at a time when technology and education have become more accessible. This means that their needs, aspirations, and life experiences are markedly different from those of older people.

For example, people from previous generations are more likely to build their lives around social institutions, such as political parties and religious groups. Millennials, however, tend to rely more on [friendships and other social networks](#) for support and guidance.

Millennials are also often [more highly educated](#) than their parents.

Professional training and development is an [important career requirement](#) for this group, which means that working millennials highly value the opportunity to develop their skills. However, the differences between millennials and other generations can make it a challenge to engage them in workplace learning.

In this post, we’ll look at some of the typical characteristics of millennials in more detail, and we’ll suggest several ways that you and your L&D team can engage with them effectively.

Provide Opportunities to Apply Skills

Millennials want to [put what they learn into practice](#) quickly. So, help them understand how they can use what they have learned in their roles and careers, and provide opportunities for them to do this in a timely manner.

You can also use [Active Training](#), [Case Study-Based Learning](#), and [On-the-Job Training](#) to encourage millennials to apply their learning.

Meet Their Expectations

Millennials tend to expect information to be available instantly, because they are used to having access to a wide variety of resources, such as e-books, online videos, Web articles, blogs, and more.

You therefore need to make sure that learning is easy to use, and that it’s available when people want it – at work and at home, where this is appropriate. That way, people can take control of their learning and development, and engage with it at a time and in a place that suits them best.

Also, bear in mind that, compared with other generations, younger people are [more likely to use social media](#), such as Twitter and chat rooms to find the information that they need. Encourage managers to allow them to use these resources without any negative consequences. But, remember that there’s a fine line between work and play in these situations – managers and learners may need guidance on what is and isn’t acceptable.

Encourage Discussion

Younger people are more likely to get a deep understanding of a subject when they can [discuss](#) ideas and concepts with their peers. Therefore, it’s useful to provide opportunities for millennials to talk about their learning with one another.

For example, you could set up chat rooms and forums where people can discuss what they've learned, and share how they've applied their skills in their roles. Or, you could encourage learners to explore topics alone, and then discuss their findings with a group.

Explain the Bigger Picture

Millennials like to get [overviews of subjects](#) before they learn about them in detail.

Make sure that you provide learning resources that explain how subjects fit into the bigger picture, as well as “just in time” resources that learners can use to fill knowledge gaps.

Work With Shorter Attention Spans

Younger people tend to have [shorter attention spans](#) than other generations.

Keep this in mind as you develop your learning programs – use a mixture of approaches (for example, webinars, online videos, articles, discussions, and so on), and present information in a way that people can absorb quickly and easily.

Make Learning a Game

Millennials have grown up with easy access to games on consoles, computers, and mobile devices. [Research](#) has shown that some millennials subconsciously equate their lives to a game that they're trying to win.

This means that it can be beneficial to use elements of “gamification” to engage younger people in their learning. This is when you apply game-design thinking to non-game uses.

For instance, you could add competitive elements, such as scores and leaderboards, to training exercises. Or, you could use quizzes that allow learners to share scores, and compete against one another.

Avoid Stereotyping

While it's useful to understand the typical characteristics and learning styles of millennials, it's clearly also important to remember that people are individuals, and that they need to be treated as such.

Involve all learners when you develop learning interventions and programs, and get their feedback on what does and doesn't work, so that you can [engage everyone](#) – not just your millennials – in workplace learning.

How do you engage your millennials in learning? Share your ideas below, and join our LinkedIn group for L&D professionals.