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Tips on Teaching Millennials

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Why focus on this topic?

- A survey of our SOM faculty conducted in Nov/Dec 2018 revealed this topic to be among the top requested topics overall
- **Disclaimer** - please recognize that a discussion of generational differences is stereotypical. Also know that individuals of a given generation may exhibit characteristics that vary from their generational group.

> "...the differences within generations can be just as great as the differences across generations…"
>
> Michael Dimok, PhD

Why are we interested in "generational" differences?

- What is a "generation"?
  - According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a generation is, "all the people of about the same age within a society or within a particular family, or the usual period of time from a person's birth to the birth of his or her children"
  - It's important for us to have an appreciation for generational differences and use this understanding as a lens through which we can view societal change. We want to avoid using this lens to create a limited view of groups of individuals. This appreciation can lead to better communication and collaboration between people from different generations.

Who are the Millennials?

- Also known as Generation Y, Millennials are anyone born between the years 1981 - 1996, according to the Pew Research Center
  - In an article in JAMA by Jennifer Waljee and others on Mentoring Millennials, the authors note that, "Although sometimes labeled as impatient, distracted, overly socialized, and entitled, millennials could also be characterized as deeply empowered, collaborative, and innovative."

- Some Generational Characteristics ("Managing the Millennials", by Espinoza, et al):
    - Comfortable with informal, frequent communication
    - Technologically savvy; constantly connected to their network of people
    - Expect a structured environment but don't want to be micromanaged
    - Don't believe in paying dues but expect to be highly compensated
    - Want to socialize with colleagues & want work to be fun; attracted to teamwork and community building
    - Achievement-oriented; want to make a difference
- The president of Pew Research Center, Michael Dimock, specifies that, "…the differences within generations can be just as great as the differences across generations, and the youngest and oldest within a commonly defined cohort may feel more in common with bordering generations than the one to which they are assigned. This is a reminder that generations themselves are inherently diverse and complex groups, not simple caricatures."

8 tips for teaching Millennials

1. **Educate yourself about the concept of generational differences** - You've already completed this first tip!
    1. 4 Reasons Why You Should Understand Generations, by Ryan Jenkins
2. **Recognize the characteristics of the Millennial generation that may impact their learning preferences** - Tech savvy, expect a structured environment, attracted to teamwork, achievement-oriented, prefers instant gratification/feedback
3. **Understand where your generational preferences may lead to tensions** - avoid frequent comparisons to "the way I was taught…", which can place students on the defensive. Look for ways to encourage curiosity and discovery.
4. **Provide guidance and focus to enhance critical thinking skills** - there's no shortage of access to information but setting-up an experience that allows Millennials to locate information/content and then use this to synthesize, apply, analyze, reason and interpret are those higher-level critical thinking skills we need to help them develop; avoid an abundance of experiences that just ask for content answers they can search and find in a millisecond.

5. **Expand your understanding of current teaching technologies** - see the prior podcast episode on Tips on Working With an Instructional Designer. You don't have to be the expert in all of the different teaching technologies, just be open to knowing that there are ways to engage your learners more actively to take advantage of their generational learning preferences to enhance their learning.

6. **When possible, provide opportunities for direct observation of their performance with timely feedback** based upon your observation. Millennials are more open to feedback and want it more often than prior generations. See our prior podcast episode on Tips for Giving Effective Feedback to help with this.

7. **When possible, encourage experiences that allow Millennials to work in teams or groups** - they are generally considered to prefer working in groups than on their own. Build in some time to pair-up and consider something during a learning activity. If it's a clinical activity, consider how a group might research some aspect of clinical care and build in time to debrief about it.

8. **Provide clear learning objectives based upon the learners level of training** and work to ensure the learning activities provide the Millennial with a sense of purpose in the overall activity.

Remember, we want to avoid using the generational lens to create a limited view of groups of individuals. Get to know your learners! A more personalized approach to learning, mentoring, and managing in the workplace can lead to better communication and collaboration between people from different generations.

Resources:

- **"The Millennial Generation: Understanding & Engaging Today's Learners"**, by the Center for Teaching Innovation, Cornell University

- **"Twelve tips for facilitating Millennials' learning"** by Roberts et al, from Harvard Medical School