

Millennials Want to Be Coached at Work

By Karie Willyerd

Imagine showing up to play an important college basketball game on a fabled rival's home court, only to find you've forgotten your shoes. Now consider what to expect from your coach, after losing the game. A royal chewing out for not having your head in the game? The cold shoulder? Worse?

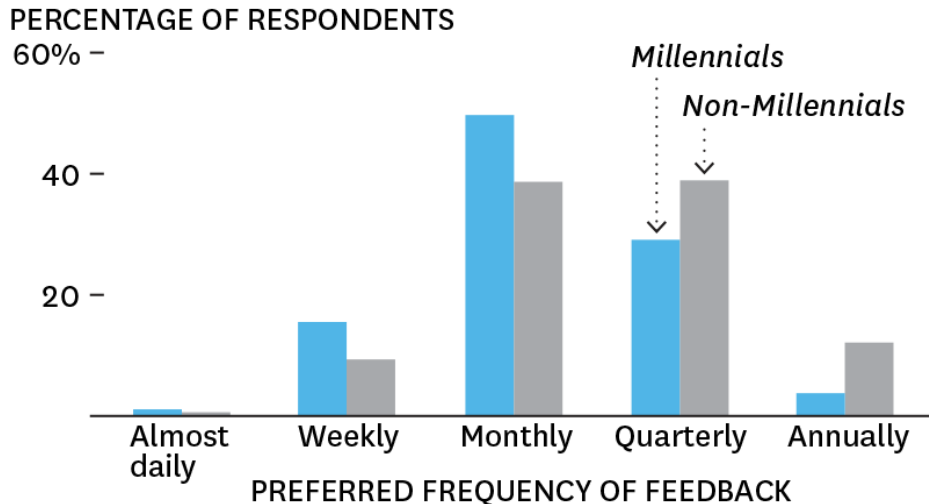
Neither, according to NBA hall-of-famer Grant Hill, as he recalls the incident. His coach was Mike Krzyzewski of Duke, affectionately known as "Coach K," and the winner of over 1,000 games, including the 1992 Olympic gold medal. Instead of a blistering by Coach K, there was an ice cream sundae party and another practice to help the team recover from the humiliation of the loss. Coach K's focus was not on defeat, but on teambuilding and getting the heads of the young players ready for the next game. And recover they did, winning two national titles in 1991 and 1992.

The young people in your office aren't so very different from the young Grant Hill at Duke. They crave — and respond to — a good, positive coach, who can make all the difference in their success. In a global survey that SuccessFactors conducted in 2014 in partnership with Oxford Economics, 1,400 Millennials told us they want more feedback from their managers. As you can see in the chart below, most Millennials want feedback at least monthly, whereas non-Millennials are comfortable with feedback less often. Overall, Millennials want feedback 50% more often than other employees. They also told us that their number one source of development is their manager, but only 46% agreed that their managers delivered on their expectations for feedback. There's a lot of room for improvement, according to the data.

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HOW OFTEN EMPLOYEES WANT FEEDBACK FROM MANAGERS

Most millennials prefer monthly.



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Our subsequent conversations with hundreds of Millennials made it clear that what they want most from their managers isn't more managerial direction, per se, but more help with their own personal development. One Millennial we spoke with summed up a theme we heard again and again: "I would like to move ahead in my career. And to do that, it's very important to be in touch with my manager, constantly getting coaching and feedback from him so that I can be more efficient and proficient." For coaching to resonate, managers should also consider a young person's psyche. In an analysis of psychological tests of 1.4 million college students from 1938 to the present, Millennials were found to have more self-esteem while also having more anxiety and a higher need for praise. Great coaches understand this, and know that to create a winning team, they need to meet people halfway in their coaching needs. Specifically, Millennials have told us that they want managers to:

Inspire me. In all aspects of their lives, Millennials engage with causes that help people, not institutions. The team and the mission, especially tied to a higher

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purpose, are far more compelling motivators than a message of “Do this for the company,” or “Work on the department goals.”

Hill reminisced that, “One of the things that really impressed me [about Coach K] ... was his ability to motivate and inspire ... before games, in the locker room, having that right message to get you fired up, ready to run out there, and run through a wall. And that’s not an easy thing.”

When was the last time you experienced that level of motivation and inspiration from your manager, or the last time you created that experience for someone else? The good news is that you can learn how to inspire others, according to Joseph Folkman, founder of two leadership development companies. In his analysis, the four biggest traits of inspiring leaders are:

- providing a vision,
- enhancing relationships,
- driving results, and
- serving as a principled role model.

To a lesser degree, being enthusiastic and being an expert also matter. In fact, every behavior of a leader matters, and the little efforts add up. Just by noticing an employee’s efforts, commenting on it privately or at a team meeting, and telling her how she’s progressing toward her goals inspires an employee. I personally have a hand-written note from an old boss, Bill Johnson, who was then the CEO of H.J. Heinz, that says, “You made a difference.” Fourteen years later, it still sits on my desk, inspiring me to live up to that belief.

Surround me with great people. Young people repeatedly said, “Help me up my game by working with people who are talented and better than I am (now).” As Coach K said “All the players who arrive at Duke are immediately humbled in some ways because of the level of the work, the speed at which they have to play, and the fact that they are not always the best player on the court. A lot of them have never had to work that hard before because they had always been the best player.”

That same experience can play out with a new college graduate who shows up in your office to find herself surrounded by extraordinary talent. Your job as a

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manager is to coach that new person while they are most fragile, rather than fostering a sink-or-swim environment. Take a lesson from Coach K, who uses techniques such as asking a more experienced player to boost the ego of the new player. Newcomers are fragile and malleable, and a little boost can go a long way toward reducing anxiety and improving performance.

Be authentic. Millennials seek an approachable manager and a role model whom they can emulate. Telling stories of your own failures and struggles, as well as your victories, makes you more approachable. Consider how Coach K would share his own stories about times when he's felt overwhelmed whenever he'd see a new player daunted by the skills of those around him. Good coaches aren't afraid to show emotions or experience those of their team, whether it's the rush of victory or the disappointment of defeat. What an honor it is to share the deepest of human feelings with our coworkers. Managers who are authentic coaches and good listeners build trust — an essential foundation upon which to build a great team.

According to Tim Gallwey, author of a series of books about the inner game, “Coaching is unlocking a person’s potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn, rather than teaching them.” Or as applied to the business world, coaching is not about telling people what to do, but helping them to achieve all they are capable of doing and being. The best managers — and, indeed, the teams that go on to greatness — are the ones who understand this important distinction.

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