

Preferences of Millennials in Coaching Relationships

Eileen B. Springer,
Teacher's College, Columbia University – CCCP

This paper focuses on the preferences of Millennials in coaching relationships. The research included a focus group with Millennials and their parents. Literature reviews included publications, books and articles sourced through Google Scholar and the Columbia University - TC Library. Two major findings are that Millennials do have unique preferences in coaching relationships, and that coaches need a client-centered approach with clear boundaries when coaching Millennials.

Keywords: Millennials, Gen Y, Coaching, Parents of Millennials, Generations in the Workforce

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the unique preferences of Millennials in coaching relationships compared to other generations who receive coaching. Since starting a coaching practice that is targeting Millennials, I am interested in learning more about how Millennials and their parents view coaching; why Millennials seek coaching, and what attributes they attach to high quality coaching.

By conducting a focus group targeting both Millennials and their parents, I led with an assumption that parents often remain involved with their adult child's career development while millennials are early in their careers. Thinking of both the Millennials and their parents as the consumers for coaching services, I was able to gain insight into the commercial market for coaching. I learned more about parents' interest and perception related to coaching, the comparable services in the market and how they would measure success. I also learned more about Millennials' preferences in coaching, the typical reasons why they would want coaching and how they would define success.

As of 2017, Millennials represented 35% of the U.S. labor force. This reflects 56 million Millennials, ages 21-36. (Pew Research Center, 2017). With the millennial population growing, and outpacing other generations, it is important to understand the needs and preferences of the millennial generation to have an effective workforce in the future. Through effective coaching and development opportunities, that are

differentiated to the needs of Millennials, both organizations and individuals can benefit and be well prepared for the future.

This paper is organized by the following major sections: (1) a review of selected literature, (2) summary of major findings, (3) application and implications for coaching, and (4) conclusions.

Review of Selected Literature

The researcher's interest in this topic is aligned with the target market for a new executive and career coaching practice. With over 25 years of executive level Human Resources (HR) and Talent Management (TM) leadership roles in large international companies, the researcher was able to bring a combination of current HR knowledge and a realistic view of how Millennials are operating in the workforce. There are many innovations in the delivery of coaching services targeting the millennial generation, and the researcher highlights new technology and organizations that are successfully scaling these offerings.

The researcher started her primary research by conducting a focus group with millennial participants (ages 21–18) and their parents in July 2018. She then interviewed several college admissions counselors. For her secondary research she conducted searches using Google Scholar and The Columbia University electronic library. Additionally, she reviewed journals such as the Harvard Business Review and annual reports based on surveys such as Gallup's 2016 report on How Millennials Want to Work and Live. The researcher also had the opportunity to incorporate insights from digital content on sites targeting Millennials, such as the Muse, as well as insights from The Shift Conference hosted by Better Up. Better Up is a company providing coaching through video on a global scale, utilizing cutting-edge research practices in leadership development and success for the millennial generation. Finally, she read several books such as **The Extraordinary Coach** by Zenger and Stinnett (2010) and **Co-active Coaching** by Henry Kimsey-House, Karen Kimsey-House, Phillip Sandahl and Laura Whitworth (2011). She used

key terms in these searches which included combinations of the following words: Millennials, Gen Y, coaching, parents of Millennials and generations in the workforce.

The researcher found that there were some variations in the definitions of Millennials, including Gen Y, which is sub-set of the millennial generation. Below are some select definitions of Millennials and Gen Y that are most commonly referenced in this research.

Table 1.

Definitions of Millennials / Gen Y

DEFINITIONS OF MILLENNIALS / GEN Y	
Source /Author	Description
Gen Y Leaders / Boomer Coach, IJCO 2008, Sandy Smith	Generation Y represents a cohort born between 1980 and 1994 with a reputation for strong positive parental attention coupled with high educational aspirations and expectations. They have experienced repeated affirmation that they can accomplish anything they set their minds to, and as a result, many are more confident and ready to test new ideas than any previous generation.
How Millennials Want to Live and Work 2016 Gallup Inc.	In the U.S., roughly 73 million Millennials were born between 1980 and 1996. Like those in every generation before them, Millennials strive for a life well-lived.
Harvard Business Review (HBR), Mentoring Millennials, Jeanne Meister and Karie Willyerd, May 2010	The global workforce is undergoing a seismic shift. Millennials – the people born between 1977 – 1997 will account for nearly half the employees in the world. In some companies, they already constitute a majority.
Twenge & Campbell, 2012	The members of the latest generation to enter the workforce are known as ‘millennials’; those people born between the years of 1980-1999.
Coaching Preferences of Gen Y, Knight 2010	Those from Generation “Y,” also known as the Millennials, were born in the mid to late 1980’s and are just now entering the workforce. Raised during the birth of the internet, this generation is very technological savvy. Due to the technologically rapid environment they were born into, they are able to focus on many things at once.
Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennials	Millennials, also known as Generation Y or Gen Y, are the generational demographic cohort following Generation X and preceding Generation Z. There are no precise dates for when this cohort starts or ends; demographers and researchers typically use the early 1980s as starting birth years and the mid-1990s to early 2000s as ending birth years. Millennials are sometimes referred to as "echo boomers" due to a major surge in birth rates in the 1980s and 1990s, and because millennials are often the children of the baby boomers. Although millennial characteristics vary by region, depending on social and economic conditions, the generation has been generally marked by an increased use and familiarity with communications, media, and digital technologies.

Origins / History of Generations Prior to Millennials

To truly understand the millennial generation, it is necessary to contrast them to prior generations in the workforce. The generation born before the Baby Boom grew up mostly in the 1930s and 1940s. Their young adulthood was defined by a period of confidence and stability following the upheaval of depression and war. The Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, were defined by two distinct eras: the first was characterized mostly by the stability of the 1950s and early 1960s, while the second coincided with the major social changes of the 1960s. Generation X came onto the scene in the 1970s, when adults were steeped in the self-absorption of the “me decade.” By the time they came of age in the 1980s and early 1990s, globalization and technology were making the world highly interconnected, rapidly changing, fiercely competitive, and information driven. Their first days at work were also the first days of downsizing— and the last days of job security. While the older workers were hanging on to their desks groaning, “Hold on! It’s a workplace revolution! Please, don’t downsize me,” Gen Xers, in the vanguard of the free-agent mind-set and self-directed career path, shrugged: “Downsize me. Whatever.” (Tulgan, Bruce. *Not Everyone Gets a Trophy: How to Manage Generation Y*, 2015).

Like their GI Generation great-grandparents before them, members of the millennial generation began to enter the workforce in significant numbers just when the American economy was shedding jobs at a record pace. Older observers questioned whether the young generation’s optimism and sense of personal confidence would fade under these economic pressures, or at least cause its members to lose their taste for liberal, interventionist economic policies. Survey results suggested the answer to both questions was a resounding “no.” Despite enduring higher levels of unemployment than any other generation, a Pew survey conducted in May 2009 at the height of the Great Recession found that 56 percent of Millennials were pretty well satisfied with the way things were going for them financially, a significantly greater degree of optimism than aging Boomers expressed in the same survey (46%). (Winograd & Hais, *Millennials Momentum: How a New Generation is Remaking America*, 2011)

Young adulthood has changed dramatically since the middle of the 20th century. Research over the past two decades has documented this restructuring, relabeling the late teens and 20s under the auspices of “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2014; Furstenberg, 2017). Historically, young people took circuitous paths in their careers and love interests, but a recent U.S. Census report shows that young people today are less likely to achieve traditional markers of adulthood such as completion of education, marriage, moving out of the parental home or securing a job with a livable wage as they did in the mid to late twentieth century (Vespa, 2017). Individuals who achieve such markers do so at later ages, and patterns vary by socioeconomic background (Furstenberg, 2017).

Related Concepts

One can find several labels for the Millennial Generation, with Generation Y, Gen Y, and Echo Boomers being most common. In addition, many articles mention the following names, which can add some insight into the unique qualities of Millennials to be considered by coaches.

Table 2.

Names / Descriptions for Millennials

NAMES / DESCRIPTIONS FOR MILLENNIALS / GEN Y	
Name	Description
Internet Generation	Few if any remember life before web sites or cell phones
Gen Next	Forward focused in perspective
MyPod Generation	Besides the digital music reference, they expect mass customization
Baby Boomlets	Most are the progeny of the Baby Boomer generation
Boomerang Generation	Many are returning home after college, still trying to find their way
Generation Now	Little patience for accepting things the way they are
Generation Waking Up	Raising the bar on global sustainability and change

(Michael Margolis, Believe Me, 2009)

When considering starting my coaching practice, I reflected on the experiences and population I enjoyed the most over the course of my career. All of the most rewarding experiences involved working with early-in-career hires as part of my roles in talent acquisition, succession planning, performance management and learning and development. As with any entrepreneurial venture, I knew I would need to validate whether offering coaching to Millennials was a need in the market.

College graduate statistics for May 2018 graduates show that there are 1.8 million graduates. 42% of the Class of 2018 in the U.S. did not have a fulltime job upon finishing school. 65% of recent graduates have moved back in with their parents, or are planning to do so (Collegefactual.com, 2018). There is an average of 23.4 graduates applying for entry level roles per position. 41% of recent graduates earn \$25,000 or less (iCIMS.com, 2018). In 2018 the average ratio of students to college career center personnel was 2672 to 1. The average time it takes an unemployed recent graduate to find a position is 7.4 months (CareerServicesCentral.com, 2018).

With these statistics in mind, I spoke with several private college admissions counselors. The college admissions counselors told me that they see a need for more career coaching offerings in the market, and that often parents return to ask for referrals to career coaches when their children are graduating college. An important consideration is that clients of private college admissions counselors are typically upper middle class to upper class, and are accustomed to sourcing supplemental support for their children's education. (The Academic Match, 2018, Brad Hoffman, 2018, Solomon Admissions Consulting, 2018)

Armed with this data, I targeted early-in-career professional Millennials in their 20's, from affluent areas in the Greater New York City area for a focus group. I invited them to come for dinner and to bring one parent, and explained that I was gathering a small group of young professionals to provide feedback for my new business. The focus group was facilitated by Paula Friedman, Managing Director of the Academic Match and a market research expert. Below are the highlights of responses to the prepared questions.

Table 3.

Responses from Focus Group

RESPONSES FROM FOCUS GROUP		
Key Question	Response from Millennials	Response from Parents
1. Are you familiar with the concept of Career Coaching or Executive Coaching?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All were familiar with both concepts, and two of the participants knew of others using career coaches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All were familiar with both, and several had either worked with an executive coach themselves or their spouse had.
2. Would you see value in receiving early-in-career coaching for yourself (or child)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All believed they would benefit now or in the future, especially when considering a job change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All saw value in this for their adult children, and only 1 out of 7 parents believed their child received adequate support from their college career services office.
3. What is most important to you when selecting a coach for yourself (or child)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fit, with most preferring a direct communication style Expertise in helping with job search / networking Trust Availability / accessibility through a variety of mediums (in-person, video, text, phone) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expertise in coaching / career assessment Support for their child Structure for job search if needed Realistic feedback to their child
4. What is your preferred medium for meetings?	In order of preference 1) In person 2) Video (Skype or Facetime) 3) Text 4) Phone	In order of preference 1) In person 2) Video 3) Phone 4) Text
5. What length of time would you prefer per meeting?	In order of preference 1) 45 minutes 2) 1 hour 3) 30 minutes	In order of preference 1) 1 hour 2) 45 minutes 3) 30 minutes
6. What length of time and frequency of meetings would you prefer for a coaching engagement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All preferred starting with 3- month engagements, meeting weekly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depending on the coaching goal, all parents were indifferent when considering 3, 6- or 9-month engagements.

7. When selecting a coach, how would you research options?	A combination of: 1) Word of mouth / references 2) Internet search 3) Online advertising	A combination of: 1) Word of mouth / references 2) Organization affiliation / certification 3) School resources recommendation 4) Internet search
8. What type of coaching would you (or child) anticipate needing in the near future?	In order of stated need: 1) Job Search 2) Career counseling / career discovery 3) Leadership coaching 4) Work / Life balance	In order of stated need: 1) Career counseling / discovery 2) Job Search 3) Interview Practice

Some of the more valuable insights came from the conversation with the millennial participants in the focus group. Six of the eight Millennials in attendance were 24-28 years old. They all agreed that there is something they define as the “Two Year Itch”. Forbes recently shared that the average worker today stays at each of his or her jobs for 4.4 years, according to the most recent available data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, but the expected tenure of the workforce’s youngest employees is about half that. Therefore 91% of millennials expect to stay in a job for about two years, which means they would have 15 – 20 jobs over the course of their working lives! (Fulton, 2016, Fuel50.com). Interestingly even the participants who were happy in their jobs and optimistic about their career progression, felt that they needed to consider some sort of change after two years. Many of the participants were comparing themselves to peers who graduated at the same time, and felt it important to “keep pace” with their former classmates.

All of the millennial participants were receptive to coaching, and while none had received coaching yet, the majority had received private college admissions counseling. All of the parent participants were prepared to fund career coaching for their child if needed, and all equated it to continuing education; similar to college admissions counseling. In general, they felt that the workplace and job search has changed significantly in recent years, and that providing a coach would be beneficial and something they would be willing to pay for.

All of the millennial participants were attending or had graduated from top ranked private and public universities in the U.S. While the majority had a career path in mind when they graduated, several had changed their minds once exposed to the workplace. None of the millennial participants choose to go into a career similar to their parents, and all of the parents preferred that their child select a profession that offered them career satisfaction.

Summary of Major Findings

There is a lot of research about the generational differences between Millennials and prior generations, however there is not a lot written about the similarities. Much of the research, and even the names assigned as described in Table 2, imply that Millennials are different, hard to please and dependent. When considering preferences in coaching amongst all generations, there are many similarities. Characteristics of a good coach are generally described by all ages as being positive, focused, enthusiastic, trusting, observant, one who sees the big picture, respectful, patient, clear, curious and objective (Cook & Poole, 2011).

While research shows that millennials do appreciate these characteristics in a coach, there is an emphasis on the unique preferences and circumstances of Millennials that supports the following eight differentiators.

- **Parental Involvement:** Arnett and Schwab (2012) propose that there is a new life stage entitled “emerging adult” between the ages of 18-29. Currently many millennials are in that life stage, one which enables young people to gradually become more independent from their parents. (Arnett & Schwab, 2012) Based on my primary research from my focus group, this is the life stage when parents are most likely to fund coaching for their adult children. Some scholars suggest that over a third of the financial costs of parenting occur after children are age 18 (Mintz, 2015). Additionally, parents from higher socioeconomic strata provide more financial assistance to adult children, with better off parents investing money in their adult children who are pursuing

education or who have not yet secured steady employment. (Albertini & Kohli, 2012). Finally, when considering parental involvement and coaching millennials, research suggests that better off parents are more likely to give information and to spend time listening to grown children compared to less well-off parents. (Fingerman, 2015)

- **Expertise:** Technology has redefined coaching and mentoring offerings for millennials; often blending the concepts when marketing to organizations as early-in-career solutions that can reach a large scale. New companies have emerged in recent years such as Mobile Coach, the Muse and Better Up, utilizing artificial intelligence, mobile applications and online assessments to match coaches and clients for virtual connections around the globe. At the recent conference of coaches for Better Up (Shift Conference in 2018), there was much discussion about the democratization of coaching, providing access to coaching expertise and mentoring through technology. Whether virtual or in-person, a surprise perk of coaching is that a coach can bring lots of expertise and do more than the client hired them to do. In a recent post on The Muse, Erica Brauer explains how a coach can work with a client to create a networking strategy, and even introduce you to other talented people. She goes on to say a coach can help with one's branding, especially on Linked In and on other social media sites. (Erica Brauer, The Unexpected Benefits of Getting Executive Coaching, The Muse, 2018). While the definition of coaching can become cloudy in this new age, the dynamic of the older coach and millennial client is important to consider. It can often lead to coaches adopting a mentoring role or coaches recognizing the generational age difference in a way which reminded them of familial relationships or triggered parental-type behaviors. (H. Franklin, 2015).
- **Frequent contact / Accessibility:** Often coaches see their millennial clients interacting with the world differently from them, which affects coaches' ways of working and work-life balance expectations. (H. Franklin, 2015) Research on coaching millennials and my own practice finds that millennial clients want frequent contact between sessions, especially by text messaging.

Millennials like on-going contact, and many still have close relationships with their parents and contact them every day. (Arnett & Schwab, 2012). Millennials prefer texting, tweeting, Skyping, etc.....channels of communication that are real-time and continuous. This not only affects the workplace, but can affect the dynamic between a coach and client because millennials are accustomed to constant communication and feedback. (Gallup, 2016). With continual communication comes habits of last-minute planning and scheduling, so when working with Millennials it is important to keep in mind that scheduling commitments need to be clarified at the start of the engagement. Finally, in order to provide accessibility and flexibility for millennial clients, coaches often find themselves meeting clients in public places such as cafes. (Franklin, 2016)

- **Recognition of Work-Life Balance:** The topic of work-life balance comes up a lot with millennial clients of mine and in much research related to the organizational commitment of Millennials. Work-life balance is one of the most publicized values of the millennial generation and while the millennial leader wants time for their life outside of work, they will not forego career advancement in order to achieve such a life, preferring to change company to get both (Espinoza, 2010). Since coaches are often older than their millennial client, consideration should be given to these value differences when coaching them on work-life issues. Also worthy of consideration is the cultural differences between work and home domains, where employees will communicate less to supervisors about life issues. It is possible that, if not talking to supervisors, Millennials may not be able to reconcile their difficulties and instead choose to seek a better work-home cultural fit in another organization. (Cook and Poole, 2011).
- **Safe Environment:** Although generational differences are often overstated in the workplace, Millennials do face a unique challenge, thanks to the modern 24/7 communication: “ruthless competition” with peers. The ruthlessness of this competition creates anxiety and uncertainty in one’s self. Based on interviews by Emerson Csorba, three specific reasons for this surfaced: 1)

false representations of achievement on social networking platforms 2) the sharing of stories of hyper-successful Millennials and 3) the rise in choices and options that Millennials have in building their careers. (E. Csorba, HBR, “The Problem with Millennials? They’re Way Too Hard on Themselves”). While providing a safe environment for coaching is important for all generations, as explained by Alan Fine, author of “The Coach’s Guide to Millennials,” Millennials effectively require coaching to adapt an “inside out” approach. This is an approach that focuses on the goal, realities, options and a way forward. Fine says, “Inspiring greatness from Millennials is based on one key principle: Make it safe for people to explore their own experiences. That’s a crucial component of effective coaching.” (Gail Dutton, 2017). Fine goes on to explain, “Good coaching for any age group means engaging in a conversation that’s respectful, partnership-oriented, and supportive. The need to find a balance between allowing every learner to have his or her own journey, and helping the learner understand reality when he or she hits obstacles.” (Fine, 2016)

- Customized: To understand how Millennials prefer to be coached, it is helpful to understand how they prefer to learn as well. Millennials appreciate big picture understanding, new information, and rapid application to help them learn quickly and perform well on the job. There is often a “receive new information and then apply that information” cadence to Millennials’ thoughts, with emphasis on just the right amount of new information so that successful application can occur. There is an expectation that reference information from a coach or mentor be of high quality and easy to get to, and in a logical place (K. Thompson, 2016). Tony Glocker, CEO of SolidProfessor, an online learning provider, explains the need for employing creative coaching options with Millennials. There are common characteristics coaches must fully consider. Specifically, Millennials often have short attention spans and frequently lack job experience. Matt Stewart, CEO of College Works, which mentors more than 1000 college students per year for internships, explains that his organization captures Millennials’ attention by

giving them projects that can be measured with short-term metrics. They mentor employees in time management and teach them how to create a healthy work-life balance. Relationships are everything to this generation. By focusing on individuals versus generations, a coach will be best positioned to 1) pay attention to what the client wants 2) understand the client's strengths and weaknesses 3) facilitate leadership development. By customizing a coaching engagement for individual clients, coaches are more likely to move toward a client-centered approach which tends to align with Millennials' preferences.

- **Flexible Communication Modes:** Consistent with Millennials' desire for instant gratification, they expect a coach to be available, and available through a multitude of channels. They prefer regular sessions and crave constant and consistent feedback from managers, coaches and mentors. As first-generation digital natives, smartphones, tablets and laptops have revolutionized the way they connect (Gallup, 2016). While technology has democratized coaching for many by connecting coaches and clients via video or phone, if convenient for the client, there is still a preference to make a live connection when possible. Research studies exploring how Millennials prefer to be coached, show an overwhelming preference for face-to-face coaching, with phone and online meetings a distant second (Kevin Knight, 2010).
- **Structure:** While Millennials enjoy being spontaneous and flexible, they often look for a coach to help facilitate setting boundaries and providing structure. Millennials and their parents often seek out coaching for help in setting a roadmap for success. Routines can be scheduled. Regular meetings with a clear agenda and goals can help Millennials to achieve long term goals and get organized. Coaching them to effectively schedule work and set realistic goals can provide structure and help them sharpen their focus. This can lead to sustainable enthusiasm and quick wins as well (Cyrus, LifeHack Blog)

Application and Implication for Coaching Practice

As stated before, there are fundamental characteristics in coaches and coaching relationships that all generations value. When considering the Columbia Coaching Certification Program (CCCP) Guiding Principles, research and my own coaching experience with both Millennials and Baby Boomers, my findings support that a coach should follow the four core principles to achieve coaching effectiveness. For a coach that has millennial clients with engagements funded by their parents, as is the case for seven of my clients, there are some specific areas that require extra attention / caution by the coach.

- 1) Adhere to High Standards of Ethical Conduct. It is important for both parents and adult children to understand that the adult child is the client, and that the confidentiality and privacy of the client will be honored. This is included in the coaching contract which is shared with both the parents and the client, and is signed by the client. It is agreed that the only way information from the coaching will be shared is if the client chooses to share information with the parents or requests for the coach to speak with the parents. Additionally, the coach needs to keep in mind that the nature of the relationship can easily take on characteristics of a parent-child scenario, and managing personal boundaries with the clients and treating them as adults is crucial. This includes avoiding any conflicts of interests that may arise when discovering information that may conflict with the desires of the client's parents.

- 2) Focus on the Client's Agenda. Concentrating on the client's context and where they are in their learning can be particularly challenging for a coach when working with clients in their 20's who have little work experience. This can require greater patience and longer engagements than either the coach or the client's parents prefer. When asking, "What's in it for the client?", the coach needs to consider that it's the learning, the self-discovery and the process that is often very important for someone in their 20's.

- 3) **Earn the Right to Advance.** Much of the research describes the desire of Millennials to keep pace with their peers and the typical later age of becoming financially independent. With that in mind, a coach of Millennials may need to be more deliberate in helping clients move from the general to the specific. Helping them to find those quick wins and making their progress explicit as they succeed. Additionally, clients in their 20's may not be able to easily articulate their personal values and needs, so patiently facilitating their self-discovery in this area may be required throughout the engagement.

- 4) **Build Commitment through Involvement.** One of the key differentiators highlighted is the Millennials' need for customization and a flexible communication style. For a coach to be effective with Millennials, they will need to understand that they likely will need to talk less than with their older clients, especially early in the relationship. They will also need to have comfort doing so through a variety of communication channels, especially video. Coaches will often see opposition and resistance that they may need to deeply explore with millennial populations in ways that their clients are not accustomed to. Finally, and this is the most difficult challenge, a coach of Millennials must involve the client in the process of defining their situation, determining their needs and exploring options. As research indicates, Millennials prefer working with experts for quick answers, and are often surprised to learn that a coach does not provide all the answers, but is facilitating their self-discovery.

The CCCP Core Coaching Competencies are aligned with both the research and my own experience related to coaching Millennials. All competencies tied to Co-Creating the Relationship, Making Meaning with Others and Helping Others Succeed apply to this population of earlier-in-career clients. An area of caution for coaches when coaching Millennials is the challenge of calibrating Contributing and Organizational Acumen competencies. Considering that the millennial generation grew up with access to instant information through technology, a coach will need to be aware that their client may have that

expectation of a coach. With “coaching apps” that offer “advice”, “mentoring”, and other “life coaching”, the waters have become muddied.

In the book, **The Extraordinary Coach**, the authors discuss what business coaching is and isn't. They highlight where coaching and mentoring can be confused. A mentor is typically a more senior person who is attempting to guide the “mentee” and convey wisdom. Also highlighted is where coaching can be mistaken for teaching. A teacher by definition possesses knowledge and information that the student lacks. The final point made is that coaching gets confused with counseling. Counseling often involves people who are experiencing dysfunctional behavior or internal turmoil, which can focus on healing past wounds and looking for origins of the behavior. Coaching on the other hand, takes a future focus, aiming to create a desired state and a series of actions to facilitate moving toward the future (The Extraordinary Coach, Zenger and Stinnett, 2010).

Since there is typically a significant age difference between coach and the millennial client, it is easy to understand how the Contributing and Organizational Acumen competencies can be over-emphasized. Striking the right balance when outlining coaching objectives, speaking with captions when sharing feedback and challenging client's commitment to a course of action will be critical when employing the Contributing competency. Monitoring issues that characterize the client's context, establishing credibility by applying the language of their business and bringing a system perspective and results orientation will still be appropriate when employing the Organizational Acumen competency, as long as this does not become an overplayed strength of the coach.

Interestingly, when comparing the CCCP Coaching Process effectiveness with Millennials to older generations, it has proven to be equally effective in my experience. Regardless of the differences in preferences identified in the research, taking a millennial client through the phases of Context, Content and Conduct are important with some additional emphasis on the Content phases of Exploring Options and Planning. As described in the research, Millennials, as well as their parents, typically have a strong

preference for structure. Parents who initiate the first contact with a coach, often are seeking a coach's support to help their adult child create structure around exploring career interests and planning for a career path. Structure is a key preference of Millennials as well. As described in **Co-active Coaching**, structures are devices that remind clients of their vision, goals, or purpose, or the actions they need to take immediately. Collages, calendars, messages and alarm clocks can serve as structures (Co-active Coaching, H. Kimsey-House, et al., 2011).

When exploring options with Millennials, a coach may take a different approach when asking questions about the future, being careful not to overwhelm them with the novelty of the many new responsibilities they are experiencing. Practicing "feed-forward" can be especially helpful with younger clients, to encourage them to envision their future and formulate their own opinions. Prompting clients to consider potential benefits and costs is one coaching task where a coach may need to become a bit more involved in helping the millennial client explore pros and cons due to little life and career experience.

Planning is the other component that may require additional emphasis. Again, simply due to little life and career experience, Millennials may require additional prompting to integrate insights and define focus. It may also require a coach to spend extra time collaborating with clients to create a plan and goals. Finally, when considering coaching the millennial generation, a coach needs to be mindful that young adults are likely still defining their personal values and still discovering the organizational priorities of their current environment, therefore reaffirming the client's agenda to align with values and priorities may be an iterative process to be revisited several times.

There are two tools that I have found to be particularly helpful when getting started with a coaching engagement with Millennials. The first is the Wheel of Life, a tool introduced in **Co-active Coaching** and used in CCCP. This is used as part of the discovery phase and focuses on where clients are today and how they got there (Co-active Coaching, H. Kimsey-House, et al., 2011). The second is The Seven Stories Exercise, an exercise that helps one examine the most satisfying accomplishments of their life and

discover skills they want to use going forward. This helps the client reflect on their accomplishments throughout their life that they enjoyed doing (Five O’Clock Club, TFC Worksheet Series, 2015). I have found this to be effective with younger clients because it gives them an opportunity to reflect on accomplishments in their early years, while still in school. Often times young adults have not had an opportunity to have what they consider to be significant accomplishments since graduation, and this can help them reframe their situation and construct a compelling story of success and enable them to exude confidence at work or in interviews.

Conclusions

When I identified the topic for this research, I was interested in learning more about how Millennials and their parents view coaching, why Millennials seek coaching, and what attributes they attach to high quality coaching. Once I started researching, I learned that the view of coaching and the reasons are similar to prior generations. While not explicated stated, all of the research implies that there is generally a positive view of the benefits of career coaching by Millennials and their parents. Millennials often seek coaching for the same reasons as others, however the concept of “emerging adult” is real, and important for a coach to understand in order to be effective. Finally, Millennials and their parents do appear to have preferences when selecting a coach that they would consider high quality. One that exhibits an understanding of the eight differentiators and is willing to adapt to the way that Millennials work and learn.

Table 4.

Eight Differentiators for Millennials

Eight Differentiators for Millennials	
1.	Parental Involvement
2.	Expertise
3.	Frequent Contact / Accessibility
4.	Recognition of Work - Life Balance
5.	Safe Environment
6.	Customized
7.	Flexible Communication Modes
8.	Structure

For any coach working with Millennials, keeping these differentiators in mind and planning for how to adapt one's approach and process will be important. To be effective with Millennials, a coach will need to accept that Millennials are the first "digital natives," and therefore often have different expectations of a coach when considering how and when to communicate, and the level of customization expected. Regardless of the age of the coach, if the coach can embrace these differentiators, and translate these differences as an opportunity to make a valuable impact with their client, they will have a very interesting and rewarding coaching experience.

References

Albertini, Marco and Kohli, Martin, (2009), *What childless older people give: is the generational link broken?* Oxford University Press, *Aging in Society*, Issue 29, (pgs 1261-1274).

Arnett, Jeffrey (2014), *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*. Second Edition, Oxford University Press.

Arnett, Jeffrey and Joseph Schwab (2012), *The Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults*. Worcester, MA: Clark University.

Brauer, Erica (2018), *The Unexpected Benefits of Getting Executive Coaching*. The Muse.

Cook, Marshall J. and Poole, Laura, (2011), *Effective Coaching*, Second Edition. The Attributes of a Good Coach, Chapter, McGraw Hill Education, AccessEngineering.

Csorba, Emerson (2016), *The Problem with Millennials? They're Way Too Hard on Themselves*. Harvard Business Review, May 2016 Issue.

Cyrus, Yiwen, (2017), *How to Coach Millennials*. LifeHack Blog, www.lifehack.org.

Dutton, Gail (2017), *Tips for Coaching Millennials....and Everyone Else*. Training 54.4, Lakewood Media Group (pgs. 42–48).

Espinoza, Chip (2010), *The Challenges Millennials Face in the Workforce and What They Can Do About Them*. Dissertation for PhD in Leadership and Change from Antioch University

Fine, Alan (2016), *The Coaches Guide to Millennials*. Inside Out Development. Utah.

Fingerman, Karen L. (2015), *Millennials and Their Parents: Implications of the New Young Adulthood for Midlife Adults*. The Gerontological Society of America, *Innovation in Aging*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (pgs. 1-16).

Franklin, Helen (2015), *Coaching millennial leaders: Life stage versus the times we live in*. International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring, Special Issue No. 9 (pgs. 63-76).

Furstenberg, Frank (2017), *The Use and Abuse of Millennials as an Analytic Category*. Council on Contemporary Families, Online Symposia, University of Pennsylvania.

French, Jordan (2017), *Is Your Company Prepared to Attract Millennial Talent?* The Muse.

Fulton, Anne, (2016), *Millennials and the "2 year Itch."* Anne Fulton, CEO of Fuel50.com, July 13, 2016 article, Fuel50.com.

Gallup, Inc. (2016), *How Millennials Want to Work and Live*. (based on Gallup's 2016 survey).

Kimsey-House, Henry, Kimsey-House, Karen, Sandah, Phillip and Whitworth, Laura (2011), *Co-Active Coaching: Changing Business Transforming Lives*, Third Edition. Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Knight, Kevin (2010), *Coaching Preferences of Gen Y*. A Research Project Presented to the Faculty of The George L. Graziadio School of Business and Management, Pepperdine University.

Knight, Rebecca (2014). *Managing People from 5 Generations*. Harvard Business Review, May 2014 Issue.

Meister, Jeanne and Willyerd, Karie (2010), *Mentoring Millennials*, Harvard Business Review, May 2010 Issue.

Margolis, Michael (2009), *Believe Me: Why Your Vision, Brand and Leadership Need a Bigger Story*. New York: Get Started Press.

Mintz, Dr. Steven (2016), *What Do Millennials Value in the Workplace?* Blog posted on workplaceethicsadvice.com., February 25, 2016. Dr. Mintz, aka EthicsSage, is on the faculty of Orfalea College of Business at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

Shift Conference 2018, presented by Better Up (a provider of mobile coaching solutions). October 2018, Philadelphia, PA.

Smith, Sandy (2008), *Gen Y Leaders / Boomer Coach*. International Journal of Coaching in Organizations, IJCO, Issue 1 (pgs. 34-46).

Thompson, Kevin S. (2016), *Organizational Learning Support Preferences of Millennials*. New Horizons in Adult Education & Human Resource Development, Vol.28, Issue 4 (pgs. 15-27).

Tulgen, Bruce (2015), *Not Everyone Gets a Trophy. How to Manage Generation Y*. Jossey-Bass Publishing.

Twenge, Jean and Campbell, Keith (2012), *Birth Cohort Differences in the Monitoring of the Future Dataset and Elsewhere: Further Evidence of the Generation Me*. Association of Psychological Science, Perspectives on Psychological Science 5(1), (pgs. 81-88).

Vespa, Jonathan (2017). *The Changing Economics and Demographics of Young Adulthood: 1975-2016, Population Characteristics*. United States Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce.

Winograd, Morley and Hais, Michael (2011). *Millennials Momentum: How a New Generation is Remaking America*. Rutgers University Press.

Zenger, John H and Stinnett, Kathleen (2010), *The Extraordinary Coach: How the Best Leaders Help Others Grow*. Chapter 4, What Business Coaching Is and Isn't, New York: McGraw Hill, (pgs. 43-57).