



Those Pesky Millennials!

From Jones Loflin-The Speaker With TWO Last Names



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A recent program started as normal. I arrived into the room over an hour early, worked with the meeting planner and a/v manager to get my technology ready, and had 45 minutes left to talk with the arriving conference members. It was lining up to be another fantastic day.

About 15 minutes before the conference was to start, I noticed a young (mid-20s) man working on my laptop, which had previously been set up for my presentation. I walked up, introduced myself, and asked how I could help. He said that he also had a presentation in the opening session, but had a MacBook computer. When I asked if he had the converter for the projector cable, he said, "No." As we stood there in awkward silence for a few moments, I waited for him to offer a solution. Finally, I offered him my laptop if he had his presentation on a flash drive. His concern lightened as he loaded the file on the drive and then we transferred it to my computer. Problem solved... or so I thought.

I returned to talking with audience members until I was interrupted by "John" once again just before the session was to begin. He said that he wanted to show a video, but forgot to mention it earlier. I once again offered my laptop, but reminded him that I had no access to audio so his video would be a silent movie. Another few moments of awkward silence passed before I looked at him and said, "I think you may need to forego using the video. We have over 200 people and a meeting planner expecting this conference to start in about 3 minutes." Disappointed, John went to his seat and waited for his turn on the program.

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If you know anything about generations in the workplace, you know that Generation Xers are those born between 1964 and about 1980. I am from Generation X. Those born from the early 1980's to the year 2000 are called Gen Y or Millennials-that's John. As with Baby Boomers (those born between 1945 and 1964), we all have different attitudes, behaviors, and perspectives due to the culture and time period in which we grew up. These differences can often be a source of frustration as all these generations attempt to get things done in the workplace.



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My experience with John is probably not too different than ones you are having with Millennials who are rapidly increasing in number in the workplace. They do think and act differently, and it would be so easy to discount their value. I am also the parent of a Millennial, and have dealt with many of these cultural differences on a personal level. If you are, or soon will be, working with a Millennial, here are some of my thoughts on making the relationship work for you-and them:

Appreciate their passion to make the world a better place. John was part of a non-profit organization doing some amazing things. I loved his passion to get his message out to others. Regardless of their official position within an organization, Millennials place a high value on making a difference in the world. They see work as a means to improve the lives of others. When possible, connect tasks or projects to how the work will benefit others well-being and you will find them more engaged in getting it done.

Learn from their embrace of technology. While often maligned for their constant connection to technology, we should use their technological prowess to better understand how to connect with co-workers, customers, and others. I can recall several conversations with millennial age individuals in which I learned a new way to use my existing technology to improve my efficiency or effectiveness in some way. In fact, some of my favorite questions to Millennials are, “What’s your favorite app?,” or “What have you learned lately about how to use technology to make your life better?” Oh, and the most important question to ask... “Can you show me how to do that?”

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Shift the focus from "me" to "we" when needed. John was willing to delay the entire conference opening because of his genuine desire to share his video. As parents of Millennials, we have worked hard to equip our children to be successful in every way. That constant attention to their growth and development can manifest itself as a sense of entitlement. John needed to be reminded that his work was not the only thing happening that day, and that he couldn’t expect everything to revolve around his needs.

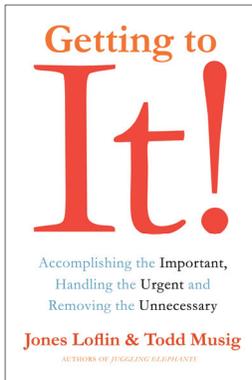


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Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.
-Carl Jung



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Teach them the importance of details. John said that he called earlier in the week and asked if the meeting room had the capability to show video and they said yes. What he *didn't* inquire about was if both PC and Mac formats were possible, *who* he would need to talk to when he arrived, or *when* he needed to arrive to get things set up. And notice what John did when it came time for action... he simply waited for someone to “fix” the problem. When planning with a Millennial take the time to show them the need to ask the right questions (the first time) to get all the information they need to move forward and get the task done. In other words, help them to mentally walk through the process to get a complex task or project completed, identify any details they don't know, and where they might get the information. While Millennials are extremely creative and innovative, they don't always have the critical thinking skills of older generations. Changes in education like a higher emphasis on testing and focus on core competencies have sometimes left little room for this group to learn critical thinking skills, or how to take an idea from conception to reality.

Help them see the big picture. John didn't think about the fact that the meeting planner would be pulled in a hundred different directions and wouldn't have time to assist him if he arrived just 15 minutes before the session. As a parent of a millennial, I can fully attest to doing too much for my daughter and not giving her the chance to see how all the parts fit together to make something happen.

Lastly, **enjoy their creativity.** Millennials have grown up in such a "can do" environment and see so few limits or obstacles to making something happen. Let them be a sounding board for you more often. Ask them questions like, “How might we...?” or “I'm stuck here... give me your perspective on this challenge.” Millennials, like other generations in the workplace, have so much to offer.

How can you learn from a Millennial today? What can they learn from you?



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Jones Loflin is an internationally-recognized speaker and trainer. His messages focus on change, motivation, time management and work/life blend. He is the author of two books: *Juggling Elephants* and *Getting the Blue Ribbon*. Jones' new book, *Getting to It*, will be released by Harper Collins in the fall. His humor, energy and audience engagement make an **impact** on every member of your group, not just an impression.