**Millennial Managers Can Change Company Culture for the Better**

**By Ursula Kralove**

Whether or not you believe [the Great Resignation](https://www.cnbc.com/2021/07/13/employers-dont-think-many-workers-will-quit-great-resignation.html) is upon us, it’s safe to assume that how we think about attracting, retaining, and nurturing employees needs to change in light of the upheaval caused by the pandemic. Much of that change will start with company culture — a word that has taken on new meaning this past year.

Culture is an aspect of work particularly important to Gen Z, many of whom are just now entering the workforce after having spent the past two years grappling with the impacts of Covid, as well as social and political injustices around the world. Combined, these events have driven their desire to [instill meaning and purpose](https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/help-your-employees-find-purpose-or-watch-them-leave) into all areas of their lives — [including their work](https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/2021-deloitte-global-millennial-survey-report.pdf).

Fortunately, Gen Z has strong advocates at the top who feel the same. Millennials, another generation known for seeking purpose in their jobs, have now moved into management roles. In fact, [more than 60% of millennials now have direct reports](https://zapier.com/blog/millennial-managers-report/), giving them the opportunity to drive real change within their organizations and on the teams they lead.

If you’re among those leading the charge, you may wonder where to start, especially if you are in a management role for the first time. As you consider ways to foster a more meaningful work environment, one that helps your team members grow as both employees and as people, remember that incremental change often has a long-lasting impact.

With more than 20 years of experience leading teams at organizations like McKinsey, T-Mobile, and now at Bloomreach, I’ve seen firsthand how small changes beget large cultural shifts. More specifically, there are five key steps you can take that are likely to have a big impact on your company culture.

## **1)** **Unlock the power of transparency.**

For generations that have grown up with all the world’s knowledge just a click away, access to information is important. Your team members will likely place high value on organizations that are transparent about both their successes and business challenges — as well as the roadmap between the two.

As a manager, there are a few ways you can be transparent.

First, be as open as you can about the inner workings of your business. Your direct reports should understand what’s driving your decisions as a leader and what part their contributions play in the larger organizational strategy. Once your company sets its quarterly goals, for example, schedule one-on-one meetings with each of your team members and explain how their individual responsibilities fit into the big picture. Then, leave room for questions and feedback. Do they understand why their role is important to the organization’s overall success? Do they see other ways to contribute?

Next, don’t hide business challenges from your team, but do keep in mind that this kind of transparency requires balance. Avoid stating problems without offering some kind of proposed solution or plan of action — otherwise, you risk inciting unnecessary panic. If you remain level-headed and place your focus on the path forward, your team will likely follow suit.

For instance, if you work in sales and lose a big deal, be honest. Provide context and explain how you plan to recover. You might say, “Our competitors won the deal over us this time, but here’s what we learned and what we’re going to change to ensure that doesn’t happen again.”

Finally, when sharing valuable information, remind your team that knowledge comes with responsibility. If you say it’s confidential, then it must remain so. The trust that comes with transparency is a two-way street.

## **2) Trust employees to be productive from anywhere.**

This past year, companies around the world were able to see just how efficient their employees can be without the structure of an office. The freedom to work from anywhere not only allows your people greater balance and flexibility, it also cultivates a culture of trust. It is a way to signal to your employees that you have confidence in their ability to perform even without a manager looking over their shoulder.

Though you may not have control over your company’s work-from-policy, this level of trust can still be achieved in an office. The trick is to focus on outcomes as opposed to hours worked. Try giving your employees the freedom to manage their own projects and schedules, so long as they reach their goals, meet expectations, and deliver results on time.

You can lead by example by making your own calendar open. Schedule gym time or short breaks during your less productive hours, even if those hours are in the middle of the day. Demonstrate that outcomes matter more than the time spent at a desk.

## **3) Emphasize autonomy.**

Today’s employees have big aspirations and no shortage of ambition. If you give them independence and autonomy at work, you’ll stoke that drive rather than stifling it. Once you’ve created an environment where people can thrive — get out of their way.

A manager’s role should be to remove obstacles and provide useful feedback or coaching. The more you can empower your team to figure things out on their own, the more those employees will feel pride and find meaning in the work they’re contributing.

For example, try to share your experiences instead of giving answers when offering learnings to your team. Let them judge if and how your experience might fit into the situation they are trying to solve. It can often be a springboard to an even better idea. This approach keeps people in the driver’s seat as they search for a solution.

## **4) Explain what your company is doing for the greater good.**

In a [survey from Monster](https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/gen-z-boss-0816), 74% of Gen Z ranked purpose as more important than a paycheck at work, so show employees the impact your company aims to have on the world. What gives your work meaning, on a large or small scale?

Your answer may come from the impact you’re having on society or the ways in which your product revolutionizes the space you’re in. It may also come from the impact your company has on its employees’ lives: creating meaningful jobs within a community, centering itself as a career launch pad for new graduates, or establishing an inclusive work environment that encourages all to grow and learn.

If you’re struggling to answer this question, think about what you can do as a leader to make your work more purposeful. Can you introduce mentoring programs for your interns or junior team members? Can you partner with nearby universities and offer guest lectures? Can you promote ways for your team to lend their professional expertise to volunteer organizations or small businesses?

## **5) Focus on the whole employee.**

As established earlier, our jobs are no longer confined to the hours of 9 to 5, nor are they restricted to the four walls of an office. Employees want to know that you recognize the strain this can cause and are actively trying to help. From free therapy and counselling to additional time off or employee fitness programs, there are a myriad of ways you can focus on the *whole*employee, helping them succeed not only in their professional lives but in their personal lives too.

As a new manager, you can also take smaller, more immediate actions to let your team know you are prioritizing their wellbeing, such as making it clear that you’re logging off at a decent hour and you expect the same from them, promoting “Meeting-Free Mondays,” or encouraging team members to take mental health days as needed (no questions asked).

After decades of enduring company cultures that often seem stale or out of touch, the time has arrived for real change — a new evolution of culture that emphasizes trust, purpose, mission, and employee wellbeing. If you’re finally in a position to affect real change, don’t miss your opportunity.

<https://hbr.org/2021/10/millennial-managers-can-change-company-culture-for-the-better>

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