



Road Tested

The Truth About Millennial Teachers

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In my first year as a high school principal, I hired six new teachers straight from college. Although I adored these teachers, I was too overwhelmed with my new responsibilities to pay them much attention. No one guided me through my first teaching experience, so I assumed that they'd be fine.

I don't want to say that they weren't fine, because they were—they managed and survived the day-to-day challenges of our high-poverty district. But they didn't *thrive*. Now, they all have jobs in other districts, which made me wonder if I could have done more for them as a leader and mentor.

I wish I knew then what I know now: these Millennial educators have different needs and expectations. As a card-carrying member of Generation X, I grew up learning how to be self-reliant, independent, and resourceful. However, like many other Gen-Xers, I became a hypervigilant parent who provided support to my kids that I wasn't provided with when I was a child. I created schedules, activities, and play dates, and I managed almost every aspect of their lives. In essence, I raised the teachers that I am now hiring.

Millennials are sometimes called Generation Y, which is fitting because that is a question they often ask—why? As a new principal, I was completely unprepared for their frequent questions and sometimes constant need for approval. At the same time, I was delighted by their optimism, collaboration, and ability to move effortlessly in the world of digital literacy. There was so much to love about my new teachers, yet they all chose to leave. To quote them—why? What could I have done differently?

In a 2013 article in *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, Delise Teague, director of human resources for McNairy County Schools in Tennessee, and Joyce Swan, professor at the University of Tennessee at Martin, identify three needs that leadership should address to help new teachers be successful: induction, collaboration, and value.

Induction

New teachers expect a comprehensive induction system that includes extensive training, resources, and supplies. My mistake was believing that the new teacher orientation my district provided was enough. It wasn't. In my initial meeting with the group, I didn't offer the nuts and bolts that they craved. Essentially, I pointed each of them to a mentor and left them to figure it out. I should have developed a staff manual of procedures, guidelines, and important numbers to help them avoid early stumbles and checked in with them both individually and collectively. Investing time with these new teachers in the beginning might have made a difference in the end.

Collaboration

Like many generations in the past, Millennials can be quick to analyze their elders' shortcomings. Conversely, although my new teachers quickly bonded with one another, they were regarded with suspicion by my veteran teachers. The staff needed more opportunities to work together and develop authentic relationships beyond meetings and trainings. If I had focused on building a family spirit, I would have created a better team.

Value

New teachers will not stay in an environment where they don't feel valued. Although I gave them plenty of opportunities to shine, my efforts to have them take the lead on technology integration and innovative lesson planning only widened the gap. My new teachers whizzed through their presentations, hoping to connect with the veterans and offer support, while the veterans crossed their arms and deepened their resentment of technology—and of the new teachers. I figured the ice would eventually melt, but what I didn't realize was how passionate my new teachers were about making a difference in the school. If I had worked to lessen the resistance among staff, the new teachers could have accomplished that goal.

Although some veteran educators may view this younger generation of teachers as demanding, the truth is that they want to be in schools where they will be successful, with colleagues who appreciate them, and with leadership who supports them. Not only is this a reasonable request, but it is also what we should have been providing all along. Administrators who build these types of environments will attract and retain the best teaching talent available, and our students will reap the benefits.