



# Mentoring Millennials

Adapted from *Effective Generational Ministry* by  
Dr. Elisabeth Sbanoffo, *Launching Leaders*

I was sitting in a room filled with 20-somethings who had graciously shown up to help me understand what makes Millennials, Generations Xers, and Baby Boomers so distinct from one another. We were talking about how the Millennials in the room understood the uniqueness of their generation when a young woman made one of the most profound statements I'd ever heard. She said of her cohort:

“We’ve been told our whole lives that we can do anything and we believe it. But we haven’t been taught how to manage our time, or manage our goals. We haven’t been taught how to form priorities, you know, we’ve been told we can do anything we want but at that same time we’ve been told that you have to pick one thing. And we haven’t really been taught how to do that.”\*

Millennials' self-concept is that the world is theirs for the taking and making. People of older generations often mistake this for entitlement or grandiosity, and in some ways it is reflective of an inflated sense of self-efficacy. But think about this – it is also reflective of the training, parenting, and feedback they have received their entire lives.

Your opportunity as a mentor is to lend your years of experience, know-how, wisdom, and expertise to Millennials, and help them learn “how to do that.”

**So here are a few tips for mentoring Millennials, and how to approach the unique, expectant generation they are.**

## 1. Be Intentional

Seek a genuine relationship. Deliberately cultivate the character, traits, skills, and maturity that you and your Millennial have collaboratively identified as desirable for him or her.

## 2. Be Authentic

Own what you know, what you have experienced, and what you have learned – not in an arrogant way, but in a way that reflects your own struggles, challenges, successes, and journey. Be honest about your limitations. Authenticity is about being honest with who you are, where you are, and how you got there. Millennials expect authenticity.

### 3. Be Teachable

Be willing to learn from your Millennial. You both will benefit from what they bring to the relationship, not just from what you bring. Enter the relationship with an attitude of humility and strength – humility rooted in awareness of your own need for patience and goodness, and strength grounded in an understanding of who you are and what you have to contribute.

### 4. Serve with Relationship in Mind

Rather than assuming that a mentorship can only happen in a coffee shop or in your home at the kitchen table, consider creative activities that speak to the social sensibilities of many Millennials. The specific activity you choose to engage in together doesn't matter as much as the opportunity to do something together for someone else.

### 5. When Possible, Go with Them

Step into their world and experience where they exist. Try to understand the context in which they need to use the skills you have to impart. Make your relationship about what they need, and not about what makes you comfortable.

### 6. Focus on the How and the Why, not the What

Millennials think outside the box. They have an amazing ability to come up with new and creative ways of doing things. Let them! Help them sort through the implications of their new idea or creation. Don't let "we've never done it that way before," get in the way.

The very nature of the Millennial generation makes it difficult to provide specific examples of "how to."

**So much of approaching mentoring of Millennials comes down to:**

1. Inviting them into the development process and
2. building intentional, authentic, and transparent relationships with them over time. This cannot be scripted. It must be pursued with prayer, vision, purpose, and flexibility.

We commend you for taking an active role in helping Millennials learn the rules of the game and navigate to find fulfillment and success.

**\*Elisabeth A. Nesbit Sbanotto, *Effective Generational Ministry*,  
(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 178.**