# We Have Met the Enemy, and He is Us

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## Why we shouldn't blame the millennials for their lack of success at work.

As a parent of three successful, hardworking and satisfied millennials, I disagree with the idea that external validation is the only thing that matters to millennials. External validation matters to all of us who wish to remain valued in our jobs. Feedback, relevant, positive and negative feedback, is crucial to all of us if we are to continuously improve our abilities to add value in our work, relationships and quality of life.

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The issue I have observed is that many millennials lack the ability to discriminate between useful and token feedback, so they continue to water the weeds as well as the crops. The inability to critically think, to recognize the assumptions, the implications and to have the courage to challenge those assumptions or speak out about the implications, seems to lie dormant in many millennials.

To me, the inability of the folks in this cohort to exercise judgement as to what is significant and what is trivial is the real issue. The inability to recognize Pareto's "Significant Few" as opposed to the "Trivial Many," has resulted in many not being able to make the choices that will really make a difference for them.

I think we err in blaming the millennials for the issues that they continue to fail at mastering in the workplace. The "Silent Generation" learned the hard way about disciplining baby boomers, that giving time off the job as discipline was really positive reinforcement and not a punishment. We need to look to what we are doing as leaders that fails to convince our new workers of the intrinsic and transcendent value that their jobs can really give them. We need to help them see and value the inherent joys of doing the work, as opposed to the bragging about their pay, over which many seem to obsess. We need to help them recognize the satisfaction of building deep and respectful relationships, as opposed to bragging about the sheer numbers of people in their networks. That means reaching out to them to create respectful relationships.

Most important, we need to help them see the real value of the work they accomplish, the value they create, the respect they earn and the gratitude their actions create in their customers. Until we can convince them that these are the things that truly matter, our millennials will continue to be distracted by all of the mindless and petty diversions that our inter-networked and hyper-choice media and online games use to hypnotize them and keep them from reflecting on their own values and aspirations.

Wagging fingers to say, "Millennials need to...," only builds more generational separation, interpersonal animus, and higher turnover in our shops. If we are going to help the millennials, and our organizations, bridge the gap, it will be by modeling behaviors that work, demonstrating and sharing the satisfaction and rewards of true accomplishment, and helping them recognize the value of substance, rather than the shiny distractions of surface perception. It is up to us to make it possible for everyone around us to see what works and what doesn't. It is on us to provide feedback that is useful and relevant. Millennials have everything they need to make their own dreams come true, just like we did when we first entered the workforce. We need to help them recognize that, and help them put it into practice.