



Basic Training for Millennials & other Praise Junkies

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In an attempt to motivate employees, managers commonly use excessive praise. Everything is supposed to be a *good job* or *great* or *super!* This is part of the fake happiness phenomenon that has taken hold in the U.S. Some praise is fine when personnel do something really impressive. However, praise is used so much that it actually leads to people who cannot be motivated without it... *Praise Junkies!*

Praise Junkies get hooked early in life with the assistance of parents and relatives who praise much of what the child does. Soon, rather than exploring for the pleasure of learning or understanding the world around them, which they would normally do automatically, the child looks to Mommy and Daddy for praise. Some of this is fine, but most parents over-praise to the point that the child loses his or her *natural* motivation to explore and learn! Instead, they do things to get praise.

This continues in school with teachers who also praise everything. Teachers think that they can motivate students with praise, but they're just continuing to destroy the student's natural motivation to learn by replacing it with the motivation to get praise. This is no way to create an independent thinker who is self-motivated. Soon the child finds school boring because he can no longer motivate himself to learn. When the child gets to college, there's more praise in the form of grade inflation. When these individuals start working, they expect more endless praise. Do you want to play this silly game? I don't!

Thousands of such future employees, or *Millennials* as they are commonly called, graduate from high schools and colleges every year. Much has been written about how "wonderful" this generation is and how they will change the workplace for the better. When I was teaching full-time at universities, I dealt with Millennials everyday and do not see the value some people say their offer. Much to the contrary, they have significant deficiencies in many basic areas. They are characterized by low self-esteem and have thin skin, plus they expect special treatment. Millennials demand endless praise, even when they fail. They might be unique and "special" to their parents and teachers, but that's not a value proposition to potential employers.

Millennial “Specialness” vs. Reality

- **Multitasking** - cannot pay attention long enough to do anything important; can do many things at once, but none of them very well
- **Very team oriented** - do not have a sense of accountability, cannot think for themselves, cannot work or figure things out alone
- **Inclusive and nonjudgmental** - less likely to question things and make them better, so innovation is unlikely
- **Social media experts** - unable to communicate with real people, particularly anyone who is different or as they call anyone who is different... “weird.” They are also unable to write in proper English or articulate their ideas when speaking.
- **Expect to do well** - not willing to work to earn what they expect, no work ethic; cannot bear to hear that they are not doing well and need improvement
- **Like structured activities** - cannot deal with an unstructured real world, which is a problem when working in a dynamic global environment

Some people say that companies will have to change to accommodate this generation. It is rather hard to convince companies to change for millennials (even if there are millions of them) given this set of characteristics. If companies were to do so, they would not be able to get work done! They would be too busy coddling and boosting their fragile egos!

There is a great need to help Millennials and other Praise Junkies grow-up and adapt to the real world ...something like military basic training. The military does not change for the millions of recruits it enlists, they change for the military. Military basic training has turned kids into adults for decades and it works. If the military didn't have basic training, we would lose every conflict. The fact is that people need to grow up and work for what they get. This is true in the military and at work.

At basic training, there's no use of excessive praise. Recruits change from civilian to soldier in a short period of time. Something similar is needed for Praise Junkies and Millennials. They need a training experience that helps them lose their addiction to praise, grow-up and learn to motivate themselves based on how well they perform. It would be a couple of days long, with classes explaining the problem and how to replace praise with self-monitoring and self-recognition. The results will be more mature and *self-motivating* workers.

Basic Training Learning Goals

- You do not automatically deserve special treatment. You are not special until you do special things.
- Work hard for what you get, there is no grade inflation at work. Persistence usually pays off; don't quit when things get difficult.
- Deal with less praise and learn to motivate yourself.
- Pay attention to one thing at a time and do it well.
- Become proficient in written and spoken communication.

- Learn to deal with uncertainty and figure things out.
- You do NOT have a right to never be offended!
- Don't be afraid to critique yourself or have others do it for you. Develop a thick skin! Being a sensitive cry baby is not a virtue.
- Stop being so nice & start being more real. Speak your mind!
- You don't have to be happy all the time; it's normal to be in a crappy mood sometimes.
- Learning does not have to be fun; some of the most important lessons are a product of adversity.
- Optimism isn't saying that everything is "SUPER GREAT"! It's identifying problems, believing you can solve them and solving them; even if it's hard to do.
- Generalizations are valuable, they are not supposed to predict 100%.

Some outdoor activities could also be part of the training to build self-confidence, because unfortunately many Millennials and Praise Junkies also have very low self-esteem. Employees should learn how to recognize when they're performing well, and their jobs should provide much of the feedback they need to do this. In some cases, recognition must be provided by other workers because the employee cannot see the significance of the contribution they make to a product or service. After the training, further adjustment would be provided by openly discussing the importance of lessons learned in the training. Basic training graduates who do not improve and cannot self-motivate, must leave the organization.

Conclusion

If your goal is more innovation, you must have self-motivating creative workers who love to do their jobs. They are more likely to be creative, adapt to a changing environment, and take risks. This is the foundation of innovation firms needs to beat the competition. By doing the hard work necessary to help Millennials and Praise Junkies transform into mature and self-motivating employees, you advance the goal of creating a more innovative and dynamic organization.

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