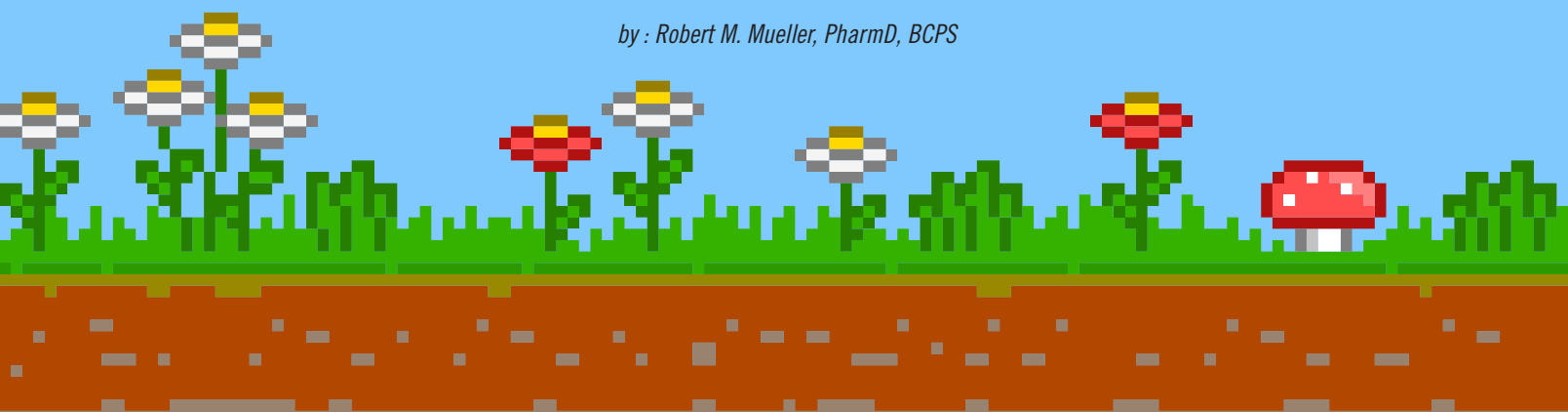


PRECEPTOR SERIES:

PRECEPTING MILLENNIALS

Strategies and Tips for Teaching the Nintendo Generation

by : Robert M. Mueller, PharmD, BCPS



When precepting, it is important to consider the needs of the individual learner.¹⁻⁴ Sometimes those needs are identified by the learner themselves, but in many instances those needs are identified by the preceptor. Some learners need to be challenged, others need to be supported or encouraged. Some learners need more direct instruction, others need more facilitating.⁵ Identifying the needs of the learner, and adapting to those needs, can be a big challenge even for a veteran preceptor. One tactic that can be helpful for preceptors in navigating this challenge is to consider the learner's generation.

Generation Theory

Generation theory suggests that people who were born during a certain cultural era and share common experiences and similar influences (e.g. economic, sociological, and societal) can exhibit similar traits and characteristics.⁶ Each generation of

individuals develops a collective persona and shares specific attitudes regarding a variety of subjects including work, friends, family, and learning. Today, there are at least four different generations (Table 1) working side-by-side in the pharmacy workforce. With this diversity in the workforce comes the potential for misunderstandings across generations, which can lead to miscommunication, conflicts, and poor work relationships. Consider the following example:

An experienced preceptor from the Baby Boomer generation (Table 1) stays an extra hour after the completion of the shift to give a lecture-based topic discussion with PowerPoint slides to a young pharmacy resident. The resident pulls up the slides on the computer, but in the middle of the topic discussion the preceptor notices something else on the resident's computer screen. When asked what the resident was doing, the resident states, "I just wanted to look up some information real quick about a drug information question a physician asked me earlier." The preceptor becomes

frustrated by resident's disengagement while the resident feels discouraged for trying to work and learn at the same time.

Currently, most students graduating from pharmacy school belong to the "Millennial" generation (also called Generation Y, Nexters, or the Nintendo Generation), which refers to people born between approximately 1980 and 2001 (the exact time frame is the subject of much debate).⁶ As a result, it can be helpful for preceptors to know the common characteristics and traits, particularly of the millennials, so that preceptors can potentially adapt their teaching style accordingly to meet the needs of their individual learners.

Knowing information about a learner's generation does not guarantee the preceptor's ability to adapt to their needs, but without such information attempts to do so may be insufficient. At the same time, preceptors should be cautioned from stereotyping. One cannot assume that every millennial learner will exhibit the same characteristics and traits, just like

one cannot assume that every Hispanic patient speaks Spanish or that every Jewish patient will avoid taking capsules made with gelatin. Not every learner will display the classic millennial tendencies, but each learner will be faced with the realities of living within a specific generation. Outlining common information about a people group is not stereotyping, if the information is applied appropriately. In the book *Culture and Clinical Care*, authors Lipson and Dibble state, “In stereotyping, one makes an assumption about a person based on a group membership without learning whether or not the individual in question fits that assumption. It is different from generalizing, which begins with an assumption about a group but leads to a quest for further information as to whether the assumption fits the individual.”⁷ It is important for preceptors to be educated on the common characteristics and traits of millennials; but perhaps the most helpful thing preceptors can do to tailor experiences is to simply ask questions. The focus of this article will be on listing the distinguishing characteristics of specific generations, describing key traits and characteristics of millennials, and outlining several strategies for precepting millennials.

Characteristics of Millennials

There are approximately 90 million people considered to be millennials in the United States, which exceeds the size of the Baby Boomer generation.^{6,8} The term “Millennial” was first developed to apply to the people who would enter college, or the workforce, at the turn of the millennium.⁴ Millennials have been described as “trophy kids who are high maintenance and needy”, “highly protected and overscheduled”, and “the brightest bunch of do-gooders in modern history”.^{6,9,10} They are more racially and ethnically diverse, more civic-minded, and less overtly religious than previous generations.^{11,12} Millennials want to be entertained, they embrace self-expression, and they will likely be the most educated generation in American history.¹¹ According to Howe and Strauss in their book *Millennials Go to College*, the seven core traits of millennials are as follows: special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving.¹³ Millennials may owe some of these traits to

TABLE 1. Summary of Generations^{6,21,22}

Generation	Year of Birth	Formative Influences and Experiences	Characteristics and Traits
Traditionalists	1925-1945	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great Depression • World War II • Korean War • Cold War 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patriotic • Dependable • Respect authority • Solid work ethic
Baby Boomers	1946-1964	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vietnam War • First man on the moon • Watergate scandal • John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. assassinations • Television • Rock and Roll music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workaholic • Loyal • Seek personal fulfillment • Value titles • Idealistic • Competitive
Generation X	1965-1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIDS epidemic • Challenger catastrophe • Fall of Berlin Wall • Oklahoma City Bombing • Multiculturalism • Personal computer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reliant • Adaptable • Cynical • Distrust authority • Resourceful • Savvy with technology
Millennials	1980-2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School violence • September 11 attack • Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan • Internet • Globalization • Environmentalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entitled • Optimistic • Close parental involvement • Impatient • Expertise with technology • Like to multitask • Team oriented • Sheltered • Resilient



TABLE 2. Strategies and Tips for Precepting Millennials^{4,9,20}

Strategies	Tips for Preceptors
Ask questions	Get to know the learners on a personal level. Ask the learners where they are from, what they like to do for fun, and about their families.
	Get to know the learners on a professional level. Ask the learners about their goals for your rotation and for their career. Ask about their strengths and weaknesses (e.g. knowledge in clinical topics, interprofessional communication, identifying drug therapy problems, or patient education).
	Ask learners questions about their learning style. Ask about how and when they like to receive feedback, and how they work in teams.
	Teach with purposeful questions to keep learners engaged.
	Ask them about their communication preferences (e.g. text, email, phone call) outside of rotation time.
	Ask for their feedback on your teaching style and rotation.
Communicate early and often	Set the bar high and outline clear, explicit expectations.
	Provide examples of previous “successful assignments” (e.g. case presentations, patient handouts, or responses to drug information questions).
	Explain the “why” behind policies, procedures, processes, and assignments.
	Communicate with verbal feedback, using the word “feedback”, and also provide written feedback. Use the “feedback sandwich” with positive, constructive, and then positive feedback.
	Describe what learners can expect from you as the preceptor.
	Highlight the learners’ value and praise their positive contributions.
Encourage appropriate use of technology	Use an electronic calendar to display the rotation’s schedule and important due dates.
	Implement the “flipped classroom” technique for topic discussions (e.g. assign preparation work such as readings and a brief presentation that can be completed at home, then while on site, facilitate active learning through a discussion where the information is applied using patient cases).
	Use a file sharing site (e.g. Dropbox or Google Docs) for assigning, answering, and sharing drug information questions.
	Avoid giving lectures for topic discussions, but if lectures are used, incorporate case discussions, use multimedia, and make the presentations aesthetically pleasing.
	Set clear rules for the use of technology (e.g. using cellphone while on rounds).
	Stress the importance of utilizing proper drug information resources (e.g. discourage using UpToDate as the sole source for answering questions and discourage using Wikipedia altogether).
	Avoid asking “content-based” questions and focus on asking questions that promote higher levels of learning.
	Model appropriate use of technology (e.g. not using cellphones during meetings or presentations).
Engage in mentoring	Meet with learners for regularly scheduled mentoring meetings.
	Help learners prioritize their time with rotation assignments and responsibilities.
	Ask learners to reflect on their previous experiences and what can be learned from them.
	Share your own experiences, especially those relating to work/life balance and your philosophy of teaching.
Stress professionalism	Model professional behavior.
	Include a detailed orientation where professionalism is specifically addressed. Address professionalism in appearance, attitude, punctuality, accountability, communication (verbal, non-verbal, and written), and social networking.
	Focus on the learner’s observable behaviors.
	Facilitate opportunities for the learners to engage in teamwork and emphasize the importance of accountability.
	Describe consequences and effects to lapses in professionalism.

their childhood upbringing and constant hovering from “helicopter parents”. In *Personal and Professional Growth*, Tipton states that as children, millennials were given “gold stars for showing up and given

trophies for finishing ninth. Rather than being trained by their parents, they were nurtured. They were special. They were sheltered.”⁶

These characteristics make millennials

the subject of much scrutiny, but also the source of much potential.

At times, millennials have been characterized negatively by managers, educators, and preceptors. Managers and

educators have viewed millennials as selfish, lazy, and unmotivated.¹⁴ These perceptions may be fueled by millennials' tendencies to not have work at the top of their priority list and to focus on how their employing organization fits into their lives, not the other way around.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ Preceptors may see millennials as whiny, needy, seeking instant gratification, and as very grade oriented.⁶

Despite the negative perceptions, millennials do also display many positive characteristics. Millennials are known to be earnest, ambitious, optimistic, and hard workers.^{6,13,17} They tend to be very good with technology, enjoy working in teams, and want to have a positive impact on the world.^{13,17} Millennials are socially connected and value close relationships with authority figures, similar to what they had with their parents.⁹ However, their most defining characteristic may be their resilience.¹⁸ As a generation, millennials have already encountered many challenges, but have demonstrated the ability to persevere, adapt, and rise to the occasion.

Strategies for Precepting Millennials

When working with a millennial learner, preceptors may feel a tension between wanting to encourage the learner's strengths and reinforce his/her appropriate behavior while not appeasing or enabling any inappropriate behavior. It is important to recognize that a millennial learner will not change his/her personality overnight, but neither will a preceptor. Both preceptors and millennial learners will have to be patient, flexible, and learn with, and from each other. Remember, both learners and preceptors have strengths, weaknesses, talents, goals, problems, and pressures.⁶ Never the less, the preceptor should set high standards and address areas of deficiency, poor performance, and unmet expectations, but also be willing to build on commonalities and manage differences to adapt the teaching style to meet the learner's needs.

Based on the characteristics and traits of millennials, advice adapted from other disciplines, and pearls gleaned from anecdotal and personal experience, there are several strategies for precepting millennials, which can be grouped into five broad

categories: ask questions, communicate early and often, encourage appropriate use of technology, engage in mentoring, and stress professionalism. A summary of specific tips for each of these strategies can be found in Table 2.

Ask questions

Millennials want to feel special and want their preceptors to care about them personally.¹⁹ Preceptors should invest time in asking questions to get to know the learner on both a professional and personal level. Ask the learner questions about his/her learning style, strengths, and weaknesses. In this way, preceptors can determine if the learner fits into the typical millennial mold and gain insight into how to customize the learning experience. Preceptors can also ask purposeful questions as a means of enhancing learning and to keep learners engaged.²⁰ Also, preceptors should ask questions about their own precepting style and then be open to the learner's honest feedback.

Communicate early and often

Millennials dislike ambiguity; therefore, it is important to communicate with them early and often.^{9,19} Let learners know what is expected of them (and why), give them time to digest the information, and then follow-up to tell them how they are doing. Millennials crave constant, positive feedback, but are often not accustomed to receiving negative feedback.^{16,19} So, it will be helpful to give a mix of positive and constructive feedback. Since millennials tend to be impatient and feel entitled, preceptors should communicate what learners can expect from them as preceptors, especially regarding turnaround time with email communication.

Encourage appropriate use of technology

Millennials grew up with the internet and the power of computers at their fingertips.⁴ Therefore, millennials are very savvy and accustomed to using technology. They also have the potential to abuse it. It is helpful for preceptors to model appropriate professional use of technology and to be clear in explaining the standards and rules of its use, especially about when it is and is not appropriate to multitask. Also, preceptors should avoid asking learners to

provide simple "content-based" answers to questions which can be thoughtlessly regurgitated from a quick internet search.⁴ Instead, preceptors should focus on asking questions that require interpretation, analysis, application, or synthesis to engage learners in higher levels of thinking.

Engage in mentoring

Millennials tend to respect authority and also expect a close relationship with authority figures.⁹ Millennials also expect their leaders to show them opportunities for growth and development.⁸ Preceptors should make themselves available to give guidance and advice, but also to share their own experiences. This will help create a connection with the learner and demonstrate the relevance to the lessons being taught. Encourage learners to reflect on past experiences, help them set goals, and then check in periodically to monitor their progress. Parental-like guidance on things like time management, organization, or setting priorities may seem over the top, but may be needed to help reinforce these skills and help hold learners accountable.

Stress professionalism

A perceived lack of professionalism in millennial learners is a concern often cited by preceptors. Modeling and coaching the learner on professional attributes can have a significant impact. Preceptors should model professionalism in their own actions and focus on the learner's observable behaviors. Give the learner specific examples of professional attire, communication, and conduct. Do not assume that things relating to professionalism are "common knowledge".⁹ Facilitate opportunities for the learner to work as a member of a team (on a project, with other pharmacy personnel, or with other health professionals), and emphasize the importance of professional communication and accountability. Coach the learner by outlining the consequences when there are lapses in professionalism.

Conclusion

Based on the characteristics and traits of millennial learners, preceptors are faced with a difficult challenge to adapt their precepting style to meet the needs of their individual learner. Strategies that

may be helpful for preceptors include asking questions, communicating with the learner early and often, encouraging the appropriate use of technology, engaging in mentoring, and stressing professionalism. ●

Robert Mueller is an Assistant Professor of Pharmacy Practice at Concordia University Wisconsin School of Pharmacy, Mequon, WI.

Disclaimer: The author declares no real or potential conflicts or financial interest in any product or service mentioned in the manuscript, including grants, equipment, medications, employment, gifts, and honoraria.

References

1. Baltimore JJ. The hospital clinical preceptor: essential preparation for success. *J Contin Educ Nurs.* 2004;35:133-140.
2. Hilli Y, Melender HL, Salmu M, et al. Being a preceptor—a Nordic qualitative study. *Nurse Educ Today.* 2014;34:1420-1424.
3. Wisneski, SS. Tailoring the Experience. In: Soric MM, Schneider SR, Wisneski SS. The Effective Pharmacy Preceptor. Bethesda, MD: American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, Inc, 2017.
4. Roberts DH, Newman LR, Schwartzstein RM. Twelve tips for facilitating Millennials' learning. *Med Teach.* 2012;34(4):274-278.
5. American Society of Health-System Pharmacists Starring Roles: The four preceptor roles and when to use them. http://www.ashpmedia.org/softchalk/softchalk_preceptorroles/index.html. Accessed March 20, 2017.
6. Tipton D. Personal and Professional Growth for Health Care Professionals. Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning; 2017.
7. Lipson JG, Dibble SL. Culture and Clinical Care. San Francisco, CA: The Regents, University of California Second printing; 2005.
8. Williams VN, Medina J, Medina A, et al. Bridging the millennial generation expectation gap: perspectives and strategies for physician and interprofessional faculty. *Am J Med Sci.* 2017;353(2):109-115.
9. Eckleberry-Hunt J, Tucciarone J. The challenges and opportunities of teaching "Generation Y" *J Grad Med Educ.* 2011;3(4):458-461.
10. Hoover E. The millennial muddle. The Chronicle of Higher Education. <http://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Millennial-Muddle-How/48772/>. October 11, 2009. Accessed March 1, 2017.
11. Taylor B, Kreeter S. Millennials: A portrait of generation next. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center; 2010. <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf> Accessed February 20, 2017.
12. Gardner SF. Preparing for the nexters. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2006;70(4):Article 87.
13. Howe N, Strauss W. Millennials go to college: [strategies for a new generation on campus: recruiting and admissions, campus life, and the classroom] (2nd ed.). Great Falls, VA.: LifeCourse Associates; 2007.
14. Tulgan B. Not Everyone Gets a Trophy. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; 2009.

15. Espinoza C, Ukleja M, Rusch C. Managing the Millennials. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons; 2010.
16. Lipkin NA, Perymore AJ. Y in the Workplace. Franklin Lakes, NJ: Career Press; 2009.
17. Hewlett SA, Sherbin L, Sumburg K. How Gen Y and Boomers will reshape your agenda. *Harv Bus Rev.* 2009 Jul-Aug;87(7-8):71-76,153.
18. Zemke R, Raines C, Filipczak B. Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace. New York, NY: American Management Association; 2000. pp. 127-50.
19. Epstein M, Howe P. The millennial generation: recruiting, retaining, and managing. *Today's CPA.* 2006 Sept-Oct;24-27.
20. Schlitt B, Peppard WJ. Teaching with questions: avoiding the pitfalls of "grilling" to become a better preceptor. *J Pharm Soc Wis.* 2016;19(4):22-24.
21. McCrindle M. Understanding Generation Y. Australian Leadership Foundation 2005. http://www.communicationcache.com/uploads/1/0/8/8/10887248/understanding_generation_y.pdf. Accessed March 20, 2017.
22. Alsop R. The Trophy Kids Grow Up. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; 2008.



Jeffrey Fish Recognized by the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy

Congratulations to Dr. Jeffrey Fish, Pharm.D., BCCCP, BCPS, University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Pharmacy preceptor. Dr Fish is among seven individuals recognized as a master preceptor by the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy. The distinction is bestowed for their dedication and commitment to excellence in experiential education and professional practice.

Dr. Fish is currently a clinical pharmacist at UW Hospital and Clinics in Madison, WI, and has served as a preceptor for 22 years. "Precepting students has been one of the highlights of my career," said Fish. Adding, "Continually challenging myself, so I can answer the questions they pose, makes me a better pharmacist. Being elected a Master Preceptor shows that all the years I have been teaching has made a difference with my students."

Pictured (left): Jeff Fish at UW-Madison School of Pharmacy Hooding Ceremony 2017. Photo used with permission from Empire Photography