

# Develop millennial leaders with generation collaboration

A team approach will foster young leadership.

By Amy McCarthy, MSN, RNC-MNN, NE-BC

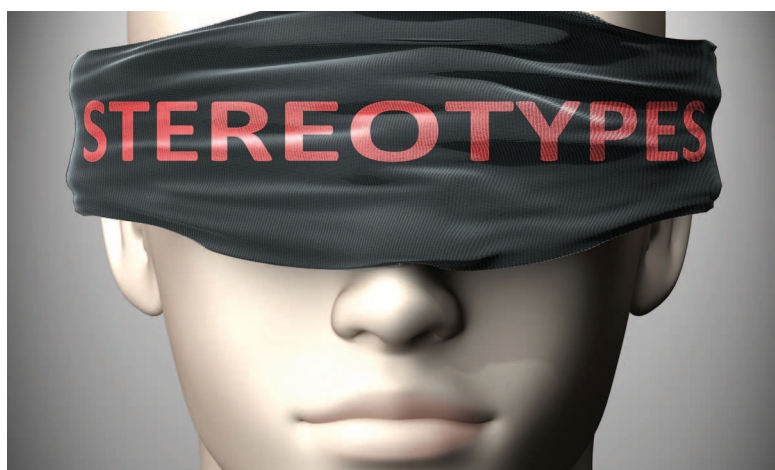
**MILLENNIALS**—the generation that spans 1981 to 1996—have created quite a buzz in the nursing profession over the past decade. Much attention is focused on their attributes, how to retain them, and how they seem to want to change the rules. This group of individuals is described as goal-oriented, open to change, and innovative. However, they're also perceived as possessing a sense of entitlement and being willing to hop from one job to next. (See *Unraveling the stereotype*.) As of 2016,

millennials are the largest generation within nursing, but you'll find few of them in nursing leadership roles. As the older members of this cohort begin to take the reins and develop interest in moving into upper leadership positions, differences must be put aside and collaboration among generations encouraged. (See *Need creates opportunity*.)

## Promoting collaboration

Providing millennials with opportunities to





## Unraveling the stereotype

A 2018 survey conducted by AMN Healthcare indicates that millennials are very interested in pursuing leadership roles and have a tendency to view leaders in a more optimistic light than previous generations. Results of the survey show that 36% of millennial nurses would consider moving into a leadership role compared to 26% of Generation X and 10% of Baby Boomers. Although this difference may be attributed in part to the fact that many Baby Boomers are already in these roles, 86% of millennials who participated in the survey stated that they strongly believe nurses should pursue executive healthcare leadership roles.

Millennials have a keen interest in leading and moving up the professional ladder faster than previous generations. They value work-life balance, flexibility, and fulfillment, and they're quick to leave an organization that doesn't support those needs. These traits have a tendency to paint a negative picture of millennials. Although it may seem that these individuals aren't loyal, are "promotion-hungry," and lack a strong work-ethic, if placed in an environment that supports their drive to explore and grow, millennials can help transform a workplace, using technology and new evidence-based practice methods to lead improvements in patient care and quality outcomes.

enter into leadership roles, introducing them to professional organizations, and explaining the local and national impact these roles play are critical. However, it requires collaboration among the generations. Not only must millennials be open to understanding nursing's past, but older generations must be willing to re-evaluate established practices, be open to new viewpoints, and offer guidance to those just beginning their leadership journeys. More organizations are addressing this issue by offering professional development resources as well as implementing leadership and mentoring programs for newer nurses to get them connected early. Both current leaders and millennials have important roles to play in ensur-

ing this generation has a seat and voice at the leadership table.

### Advice for leaders developing millennials

Millennials must lean in and find their place at the nursing leadership table, and all generations must be engaged and willing to collaborate to preserve the gains that have been made over the past several decades. Here are some tips for success when developing millennials within your organization.

**Identify what they're passionate about and help facilitate it.** Nurses can still lead from the bedside even if they're not interested in a formal leadership position. For example, do you have a nurse who loves research? Ask them to lead a unit project and submit their findings to a nursing journal. Professional development opportunities can be key to recruiting and retaining young nurses.

**Provide autonomy.** A work environment where millennial nurses have a sense of independence must be combined with knowledge that their efforts are valued. Providing them with opportunities to reach their goals and offering feedback along the way builds trust and ultimately helps these nurses develop confidence and hone their leadership skills.

**Engage in mentorship.** Take time to mentor and be mentored. With a wave of baby boomers retiring and millennials becoming the largest generation in nursing, we find ourselves facing a knowledge and experience gap. Using techniques such as reverse mentorship can help all generations. Millennials appreciate leaders who ask for feedback and promote a collaborative approach to problem solving.

**Embrace the differences.** Millennials will approach nursing and leadership differently than previous generations. Their informal, collaborative approach and tech-savvy nature break from tradition, but learning to work with this style while providing real-time constructive coaching can help engage and develop these individuals and introduce new ideas to your organization.

### Advice to millennials interested in leadership

Although being a millennial leader has its challenges, much can be gained from pursuing these positions. You'll not only begin to understand nursing on a global level, you'll also be

presented with opportunities to have a voice in changes being made within the profession.

**Embrace rejection.** Press forward, embrace rejection and learn from it, and continue to seek opportunities to lead. Eventually, you'll find the path that's right for you. Although it may not always be evident in the moment, rejections may prepare you for opportunities you never thought possible. Stepping up and applying for positions helps you get comfortable with the interview process, and it shows leaders that you're ready to take the next step. You may not get the position you applied for, but you may be recommended for other opportunities soon after.

**Establish a circle of mentors.** Seek out mentors who are right for you. These individuals serve as your sounding board throughout your nursing journey. They're advisors and are the people who will tell you not what you want to hear but what you need to hear.

**Engage the generations as you lead.** Focusing on the new and exciting things that can help promote nursing is easy, but you must recognize who your audience is and engage them appropriately. Don't fall into the stereotype trap. Instead of focusing on the differences between the generations and how they've been categorized by society, place your attention on understanding individual nurses' viewpoints and values. Making time to sit down one-on-one with each nurse to find out how they best learn and what they might be interested in can help new leaders develop communication tools and programs. This approach builds rapport and trust early on and helps everyone achieve more successful outcomes.

**Take advantage of all learning opportunities.** Attend conferences, read articles, network with those around you. Taking the time to educate yourself on issues and innovations within the profes-

sion will not only strengthen your leadership abilities but also will help you develop a well-rounded perspective on healthcare trends.

### Shared responsibility

Regardless of the generation, all nurses have a responsibility to help shape the future of the profession. Nursing has always been a team effort when it comes to patient care. We

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**We care for  
our nurses,  
so they can  
care for others.**



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still so few, and gender stereotypes so strong, that we self-title as “Murse.” It isn’t that male nurses are afraid of being assumed to be female, gay, or to exhibit stereotypical feminine traits, like empathy, that make successful nurses. Rather, it is an attempt to embrace our “otherness” in the field, celebrate our uniqueness and pride, and label ourselves, albeit comically, to advertise for potential initiates. It’s an opportunity for us to offer other examples of men who have played a historic role in nursing, such as:

- **St. Camillus de Lellis**, the patron saint of the sick, hospitals, nurses, and physicians, and founder of first ambulance service and first home hospice
- **Luther Christman**, who established the National Male Nursing Association and was the first man to be inducted into the hall of fame of the American Nurses Association (ANA)
- **Joe Hogan**, an African American nurse who fought for ending sex discrimination in publicly funded nursing schools
- **Walt Whitman**, American literary treasure

and nurse, who captured his experiences in his poem “The Wound Dresser”

- **Edward L.T. Lyon**, the first male nurse commissioned as a reserve officer in the U.S. Army Corps
- **Ernest J. Grant**, current President of the ANA and a man of color.

During this year of reflection, I offer that we should simultaneously plan for future growth into the next millennium of care. In addition to this year’s global Nightingale Challenge to provide leadership and development training for 20,000 nurses and midwives aged 35 and under, let’s remember that numbers are only part of fulfilling the need. Nursing needs more caregivers who represent our patients. The more diversity we bring to nursing, the more empathy we can provide. This will include more men.

Let’s hear it for the boys (men) in nursing—past, present, and future. Shout it loudly enough that more hear the call and make the pledge.

AN

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must use that teamwork mentality to promote the growth of generations to come. As the nation’s most trusted profession, we should have a sense of duty to safeguarding nurses’ role as advocates for the rights of those who can’t speak for themselves. Using collaboration and mentorship to ensure that the youngest voices of our profession are stronger and louder than previous generations is more than a choice—it’s a commitment to the legacy of nursing.

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## Need creates opportunity

According to Auerbach and colleagues, an estimated 80,000 nurses are set to retire annually by the end of this decade, taking with them a wealth of knowledge and experience. This shift creates an opportunity for millennials to move into leadership positions, not only in traditional healthcare organizations but also in the communities they serve. In fact, it’s imperative to resolving the state of our healthcare system.

Laurie Benson, BSN, RN, executive director of the Nurses on Boards Coalition, works with her organization to engage with millennials and ensure they recognize the importance of serving in leadership roles and engaging in board service in communities where they live and work to improve health across the nation ([nursesonboardscoalition.org/about](http://nursesonboardscoalition.org/about)). The demand for nurse leaders to serve in expanded roles is increasing, and Benson believes that if newer nurses don’t recognize, create, and act on these opportunities, the profession will miss the window of opportunity to elevate the roles, perspectives, and collective impact of nurses.

But it’s not only millennials who should step up and mobilize community change. Benson encourages nursing students, nurses new to practice, and those with significant experience to find their seat at the table on local, state, national, or global community boards.

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