

Making Safety Training Effective for Millennials

Prior articles have addressed employee safety training, however, recently our awareness of the ever-growing number of millennials in veterinary practices has helped us realize the significant business impact of this generation. Millennials, those born between 1981 and 1996, currently comprise 30 percent of the U.S. labor force according to the Pew Research Center. Being "digital natives," this generation presents challenges from a training and work engagement perspective.

Being technologically savvy is one of six main characteristics of the millennial generation. Other characteristics include the ability to multitask, a desire for structure, their focus on achievements, being team-oriented, and seeking attention and feedback. Studies find that the millennial generation most likely benefits from active engagement in learning events, especially those using team or collaborative activities.

What may be a surprise is that millennials place a higher value on workplace safety than earlier generations. Here are some tips to better communicate safety awareness to your younger colleagues.

Small Bites Versus Big Bites

Millennials are often criticized for having short attention spans, but the fact is, everyone does. Safety training should be segmented into several 10 to 15-minute sessions versus hours-long marathons. Shorter learning sessions allow millennials to engage frequently throughout the busy week when they have a few minutes between treatments and other veterinary duties.

Acknowledge Achievement and Teamwork

Serve up the soundbites then release your millennials to investigate, analyze, and report back on ways to improve communication. Create small teams and task them to develop methods and procedures that can enhance their ability to identify situations that contribute to fractious animal behaviors, and spotting hazards and other procedures in the practice which have contributed to injuries. Then, publish their contributions and publicly acknowledge all participants.

Social Media Makes Safety Sense

Social media gives everyone the power to speak up, influence, and join the conversation. Use short videos to grab their attention. Start an Instagram account and ask employees to comment on the latest safety glasses, lab apparel, or safety observation.



Sell Safety with Infographics

Visual communication using infographics has become a very popular way to communicate complex subjects in a simple, digestible way. Infographics can be used to summarize job safety procedures, highlight workplace safety tips, and include statistics on accident prevention.

Mentoring and Coaching

Millennials are always looking to learn and are responsive to mentorship programs. Have trainers and managers provide their younger peers with regular feedback and keep the lines of communication open. Often stereotyped as ready to leap to their next employer, millennials get bored quicker than other generations. Keeping these multitaskers engaged through mentoring and coaching, direct feedback, and providing opportunities to learn new technical skills are some keys to retaining this safety-conscious generation.

Let Them Lead

Not only do millennials value being mentored, but they also wish to share their skills with other staff members. Reverse mentoring enables older employees to learn from millennials. Whether it is adopting new software or adding a social component to a workplace safety initiative, millennials can share knowledge to help create new solutions. Invite them to take the lead on specific practice communication initiatives involving safety. For example, put them in charge of updating safety tips on digital displays in the practice.

Although this article focuses on millennials, it is important to note that intergenerational teams bring out the best in all staff. They allow many views to be heard and generate unique approaches to safety in a veterinary setting. Collaboration across generations fosters an inclusive and dynamic high-performing culture. ■