**Chapter 4: It’s Not Hand-Holding, It’s Agility**

Modern talent believes that they need frequent, meaningful feedback to course-correct and to focus on meeting goals more efficiently, while maintaining job security. Some view this as needing to be hand-held, but the desire is actually to be agile instead of encumbered in today’s information-overloaded world. This runs counter to the traditional mindset of slowly learning on the job and annual performance reviews.

**One Coin, Two Sides Model: Hand-Holding or Agile?**

For this particular stereotype, the observable behavior is that millennials desire feedback. From a traditional perspective, this can be perceived as needing to be held by the hand. From a modern, top talent perspective, gaining information quickly and frequently is the way to be agile in today’s fast-paced, digitally enabled world.

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| **One Coin: One Observable Behavior**  Asking for feedback | |
| **Side 1: Traditional Interpretation**  Require hand-holding | **Side 2: Top Talent, Millennial-Based Modern Interpretation**  Desire agility |
| Supporting Beliefs:   * The trophy generation wants praise for even the smallest things. I’m not going to give you an award just for showing up. * I shouldn’t have to give someone all the answers. It’s okay to help out once in a while, but ongoing, they should have the initiative to find it themselves. Someone who has to be given the answer isn’t a self-starter and probably doesn’t have the right capability for the job. * Cultivating deep knowledge and expertise takes time and is the best and/or only way to be successful. Some things you can only learn through experience. There isn’t really a better way to learn it. | Supporting Beliefs:   * Feedback is another form of learning and is not always related to performance. I can learn a lot and gain a lot more experience faster if I ask for feedback. It is the beginning of agile leadership. * The more meaningful feedback I have, the more I can adapt to situations in real time. * I am more likely to appreciate meaningful feedback than recognition for just showing up, which oftentimes feels inauthentic. * There isn’t value in working for the answer. Only make me work for the answer if there is value in me working for it. If the value is learning how to cut through red tape and bureaucracy, the feedback isn’t for me, but for the organization: figure out more efficient ways to get your people the info they need to actually do their jobs. |

Table 4.1. One Coin, Two Sides model for needing to be hand-held vs. agile interpretations of modern behavior. Source: Invati Consulting.

***Exploring the Traditional Interpretation: Needing to Be Hand-Held***

When millennials ask for feedback and exhibit “needing to be hand-held” type behavior, it sounds like:

* Did I do a good job?
* Can you tell me how I’m doing?
* Can you help me make this better?
* Can you review this?
* How would you recommend I do this?
* Am I on track?

Given how much managers loathe the time and energy required for annual performance reviews, doing a quick performance review seemingly every other day seems absurd.

Additionally, when a boomer or gen Xer started a job, it was possible to learn your way into the role, to spend time figuring things out without structured training or resources. Expectations for ramp-up time were lower because the pace of change was slower. As such, they may believe that employees should be able to sort through information on their own, because they were able to do that when they entered the workplace.

***Exploring the Modern Interpretation: Agile***

Modern talent believes that asking for feedback serves a single, critical purpose: it allows one to course-correct, to be agile in the moment. If you wait around for the answer, time is lost that could have otherwise been spent leveraging the answer. Millennials grew up watching many layoffs occur during the Global Recession and experiencing a time of rapid change. The more individuals knew about the situation, the higher the probability that they would be able to navigate changes.

Asking for feedback is also a way to get around the limited time and availability of training resources. It is a way to learn, learn fast, and grow your expertise. It is a way to reduce uncertainty around job security by knowing whether one is on or off track from expectations.

For top talent, asking for feedback is *not* intended to be a full performance review or pat on the back. The feedback being sought ranges from what to do in a particular situation to assessing performance after a task is complete. This is a significant difference from the perspective of many managers, who struggle to disconnect feedback from performance management and associate it with learning instead. Millennials want to show they are worthy of the job every single day, not just during annual performance reviews. They want to move as fast as the external environment around them.

**Leveraging Agility to Build Modern Organizations**

There are three interventions to leverage modern talent’s need for agility:

* Encourage a shift in attitude to understand that every moment of feedback is simultaneously a moment of performance management *and* a moment of learning.
* Provide better access to resources and information by expanding the training department’s scope. This can be accomplished by moving learning outside of the classroom and by leveraging the strengths of the information technology department.
* To increase employee agility, a part of the manager’s job should be to provide ongoing feedback—not just once a year at the annual performance review. In addition, managers should help create a culture where team members feel comfortable providing feedback to peers.

**Tales from the Trenches**

***Inside the Mind of a Digitally Enabled Learner***

Scott Young, 28, has spent the last 10 years pushing the limits of learning and productivity through a variety of experiments and research using today’s tools. One of his “ultra-learning” challenges was the MIT Challenge in which he independently assembled and learned the equivalent of a four-year computer science degree at MIT in 12 months. Another one of his challenges was to spend “A Year Without English,” where he traveled to Brazil, China, Korea, and Spain for three months each and learned the local language through an immersive mindset. Although Young is a firm believer that first and foremost the individual has to be motivated to learn, he feels organizations can deliver learning more effectively from his millennial perspective, including promoting insight-driven learning; putting more emphasis on the *why*, not just the *what*, when training on new skills; emulating the environment that new skills are going to apply to during training sessions; and taking advantage of MOOCs for ongoing professional development.

***A Process for Designing Modern Learning Programs at Work***

I partnered with Lisa MD Owens, owner of Training Design Strategies and a 30-year-plus veteran of the learning and development industry, for a year-long research project to create the Modern Learning Design Process, whose ideas and tools we have validated through workshops. We discovered that training departments could improve their approaches and outcomes by understanding learners better through building “learner personas”; modernizing existing programs (e.g., chunking, autonomous learning, experiential learning); expanding outside of formal training programs; and modernizing measures to track improved capability and employee performance.

**Summary: From Hand-Holding to Learning and Feedback Systems that Grow Agility**

The traditional perception of asking for feedback is based on a slower-paced environment and is tied to the process of performance management. When given too much feedback, the traditional interpretation may be to perceive it as micromanagement and wasted time. In contrast, modern top talent focuses on feedback as an avenue for learning and growth, based on the need to quickly navigate an information-overloaded environment. It is the beginning of becoming an agile leader.

**How Modern Is Your Culture?**

Take the [“How Modern Is Your Culture?” diagnostic](https://goo.gl/forms/Me6MhSMeUv8tzBaI2) to determine if your organization is leaning toward a traditional perspective of hand-holding vs. agility that is at risk of disengaging modern talent.

**10-Minute Champion**

[View and contribute](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1t8JXUyYyyjSBjqOii3UkM6AKxGf_Fm7nR05TqhtKreY/edit?usp=sharing) ideas for actions you can take in 10 minutes or less.

**Chapter 4: Questions for Further Discussion**

1. In today’s digital world, how has the overload of information, in terms of both quantity and access, changed the way you do your job? How steep do you feel the “learning curve” is today in comparison to the past?

1. Do you feel new employees are more adept at navigating the new digital landscape? If so, do you see it as a positive development or a threat?
2. What are the benefits and consequences of frequent feedback?
3. What does feedback mean to you? Is it welcomed or a cause for concern? Is it seen as a part of performance management? How has your perspective changed since reading this chapter?

**Chapter 4 Resources and References**

Karl Moore, “Agility: The Ingredient That Will Define Next Generation Leadership,” *Forbes*, June 12, 2012, accessed October 17, 2016, http://www.forbes.com/sites/karlmoore/2012/06/12/agility-the-ingredient-that-will-define-next-generation-leadership/#cd55d41208fb.

Nicholas G. Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010).

Todd Tauber and Temple Smolen*, How the Workforce Learns in 2016*, degreed, 2016, accessed August 8, 2016, <http://get.degreed.com/hubfs/Degreed_How_the_Workforce_Learns_in_2016.pdf>.