

Break From the Past: Survey Suggests Modern Leadership Styles Needed for Millennial Nurses

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Now constituting 35% of U.S. workers, Millennials (age 19 to 36 years) represent the largest generational segment in the American labor force, and their percentage is expected to grow over the next decade.¹ In addition to their sheer numbers, Millennials bring their own unique attitudes on such factors as leadership, work environment, and organizational culture. Because the growth of Millennial nurses coincides with unprecedented demand for and shortages of nurses, workplace preferences and effective management of Millennials take on a magnified significance.

A newly released report from AMN Healthcare, *Survey of Millennial Nurses: A Dynamic Influence on the Profession*,² showed that Millennial nurses display greater interest in and expectations of clinical leadership compared with their generational peers. They also showed greater confidence in their leaders and in their leaders' support for them. The data strongly support what human resources experts have expressed concerning Millennial workers as a whole: traditional models of leadership might not be effective for them.

The *Survey of Millennial Nurses* is based on data gathered in the *2017 Survey of Registered Nurses*,³ conducted by AMN Healthcare and The Center for the Advancement of Healthcare Professionals. The responses of Millennial nurses are extracted and compared with those from Generation X or Gen X (ages 37 to 53 years) and Baby Boomer nurses (ages 54 to 71 years).

STRONG INTEREST IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

Millennial nurses are more attracted to leadership opportunities than their generational counterparts. More than one-third of Millennial nurses (36%) said they were considering a move into leadership positions, compared with about one-fourth of Gen Xers and only 10% of Baby Boomers (*Figure 1*). However, Baby Boomer nurses had a much higher percentage of RNs already in leadership positions compared with their younger counterparts.

The higher percentages of Millennials' interest in becoming leaders remains significant, suggesting an overall stronger regard for leadership or a recognition of how leaders can help nurses achieve their professional and personal goals.

Millennials also showed very high interest in advanced practice nursing; more than one-fourth of Millennial RNs (28%) said they want to pursue advanced education as a nurse practitioner in the next 3 years (*Figure 2*), compared with 19% of Gen Xers and 4% of Baby Boomers. Another 14% of Millennials said they would pursue education to become clinical nurse specialists, and 7% said they would become certified registered nurse anesthetists. That adds up to nearly one-half of Millennial RNs planning to become advanced practice nurses.

Advanced practice carries with it a higher degree of authority and autonomy, while many states and the Veterans Administration are supporting fully independent practice. Considering that advanced practice also includes population health strategies, patient education, and mentorship to other health care workers, the strong desire among Millennials to become advanced practice nurses suggests greater engagement with values-based practices and servant-leader styles, and maybe some dissonance toward command-and-control leadership models.

MILLENNIAL NURSES AND THEIR LEADERS: GREATER TRUST AND EXPECTATIONS

The survey showed that Millennial RNs place a higher value on leadership quality than other generations of nurses. In responding to the statement, "The quality of patient care I provide is positively influenced by effective leadership," 77% of Millennial nurses responded affirmatively, compared with 72% of Gen Xers and 66% of Baby Boomers (*Figure 3*). This represents an 11-point difference between Baby Boomer and Millennial RNs.

Are you considering a move into a leadership position?

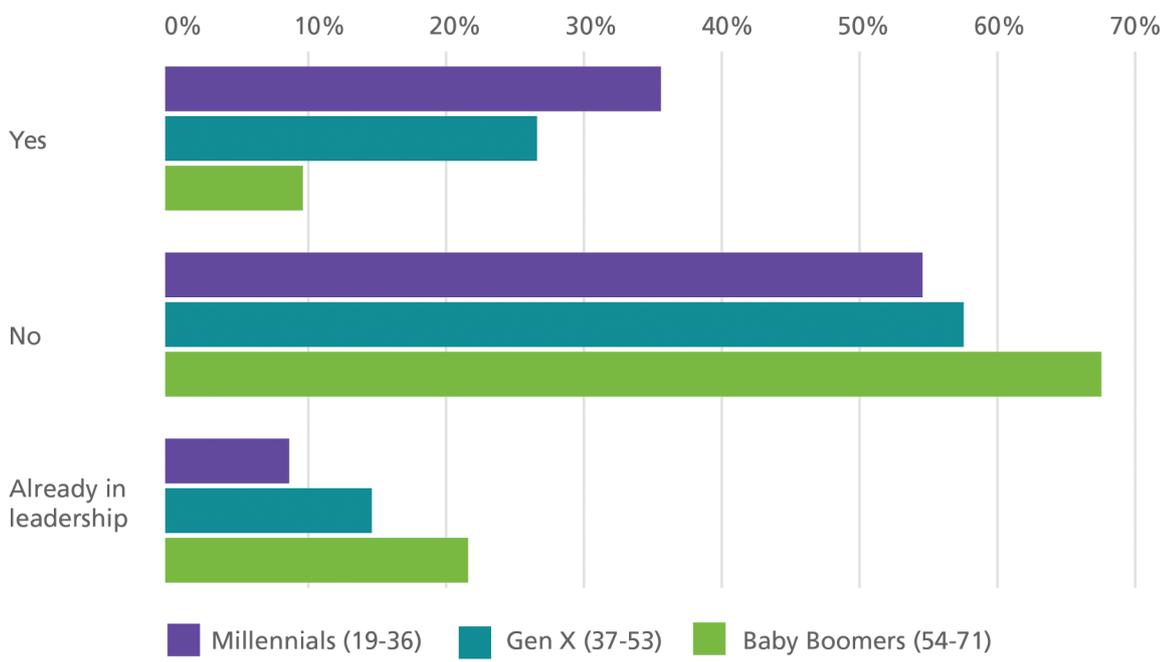


Figure 1. Are You Considering a Move Into a Leadership Position?

Advanced practice degrees pursued in next three years

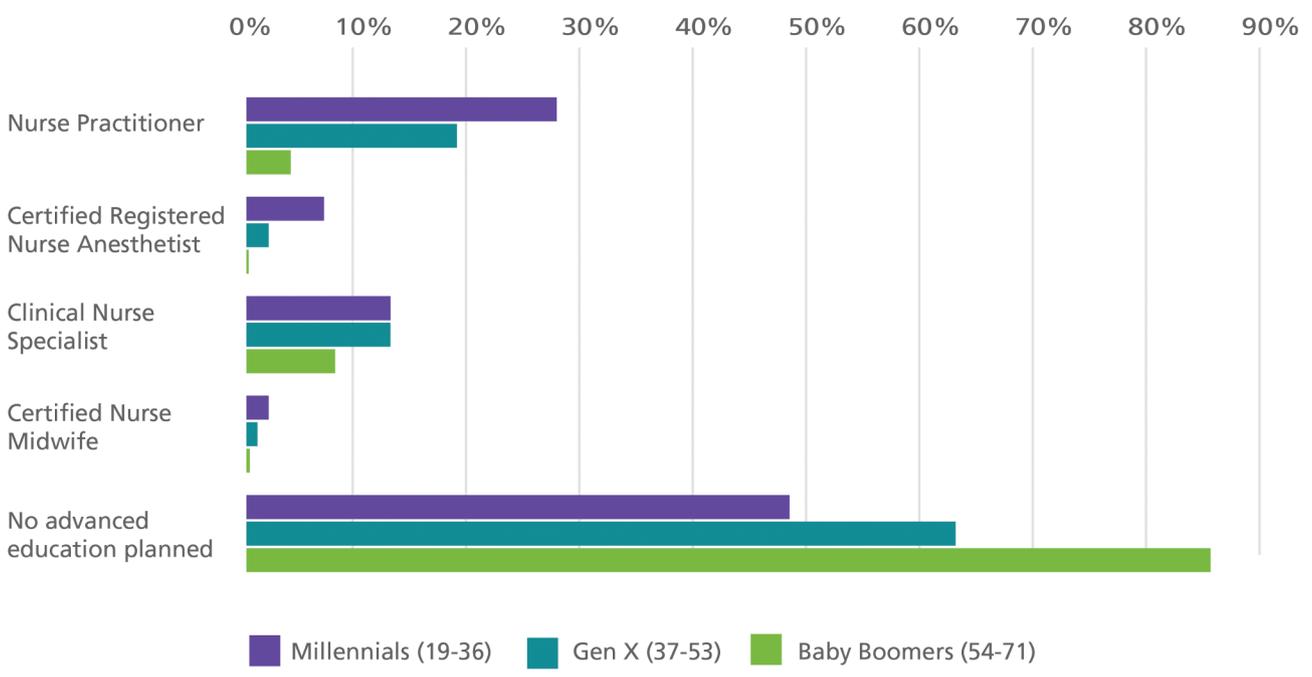


Figure 2. Advanced Practice Degrees Pursued in Next 3 Years

'Agree' or 'strongly agree' quality of patient care is positively influenced by effective leadership

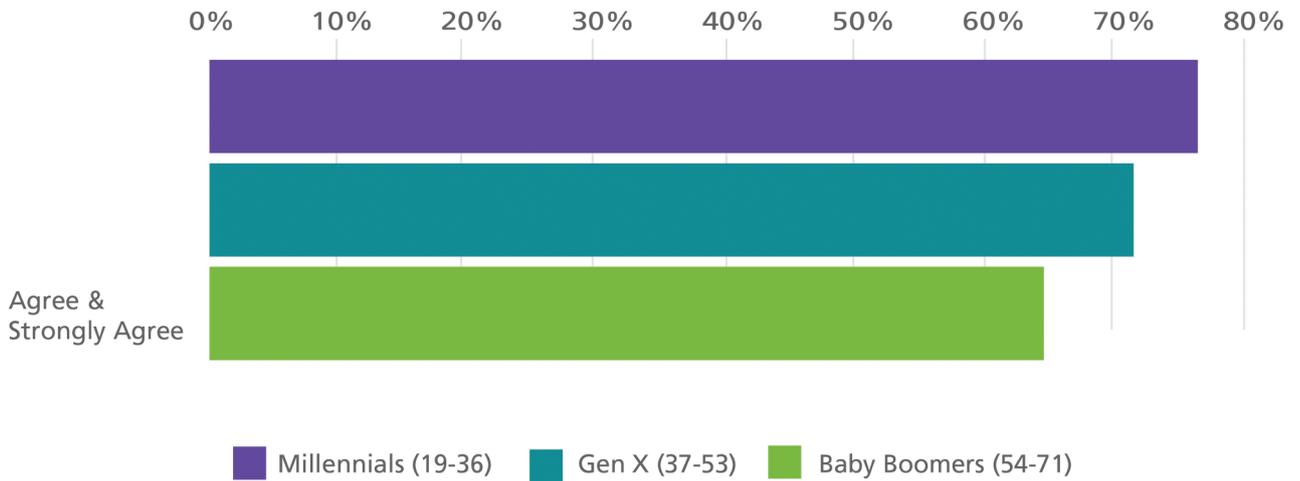


Figure 3. “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” Quality of Patient Care Is Positively Influenced by Effective Leadership

Combined responses of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' about leadership

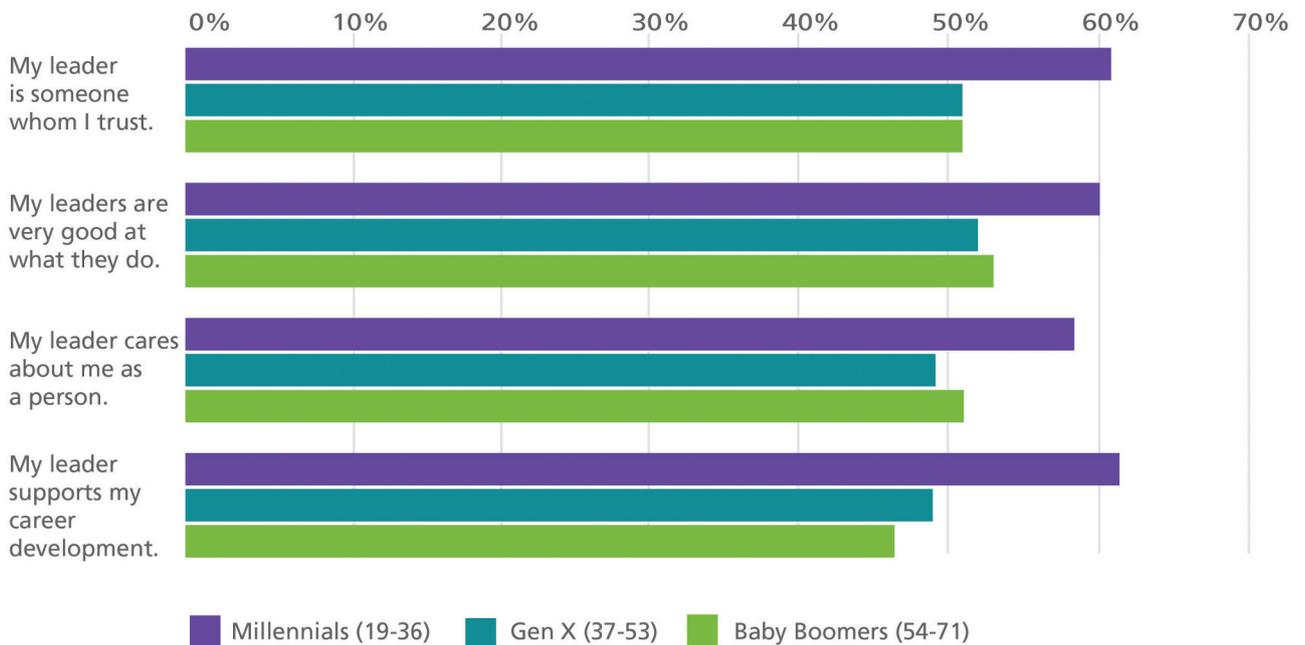


Figure 4. Combined Responses of “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” About Leadership

Millennials also tended to be more optimistic toward leadership than other nurses, and they expected their leaders will actively work on their behalf. This was evident across several questions, including how much they trust their leaders, and whether leaders care about them and their career development. Older nurses, and particularly Baby Boomers, began working in an era

when command-and-control models of leadership were pervasive (and have continued at some workplaces to this day), so these issues may not be as meaningful.

But, Millennials want active and vocal participation with leaders; they want to make a difference. In health care organizations, Millennial nurses may need to feel that they can take part in operational and patient-

Combined responses of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' about professional development

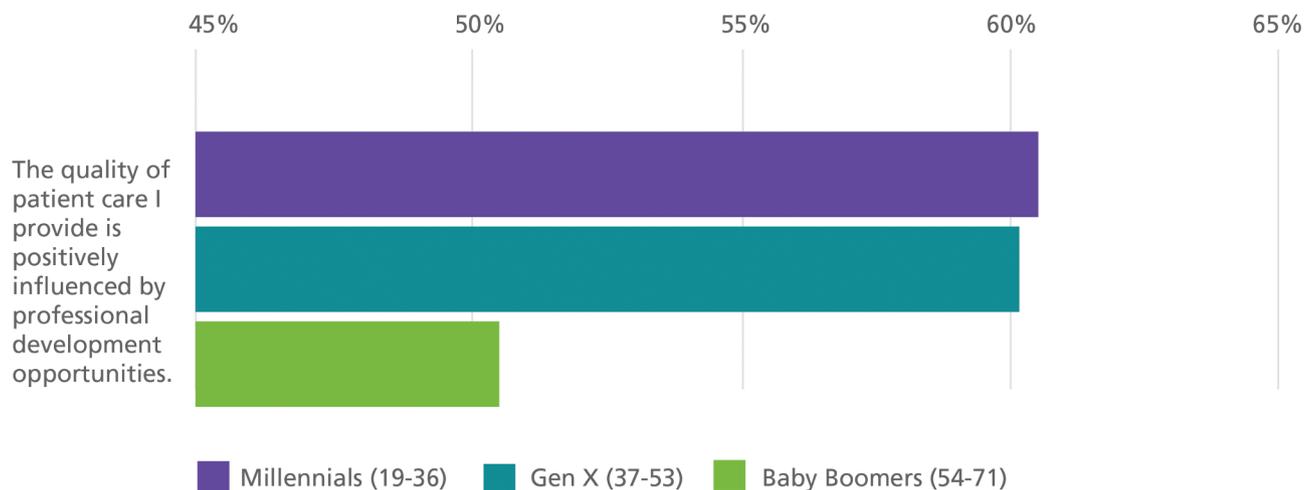


Figure 5. Combined Responses of “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” About Professional Development

'Agree' or 'strongly agree' that patient care quality is positively influenced by culture

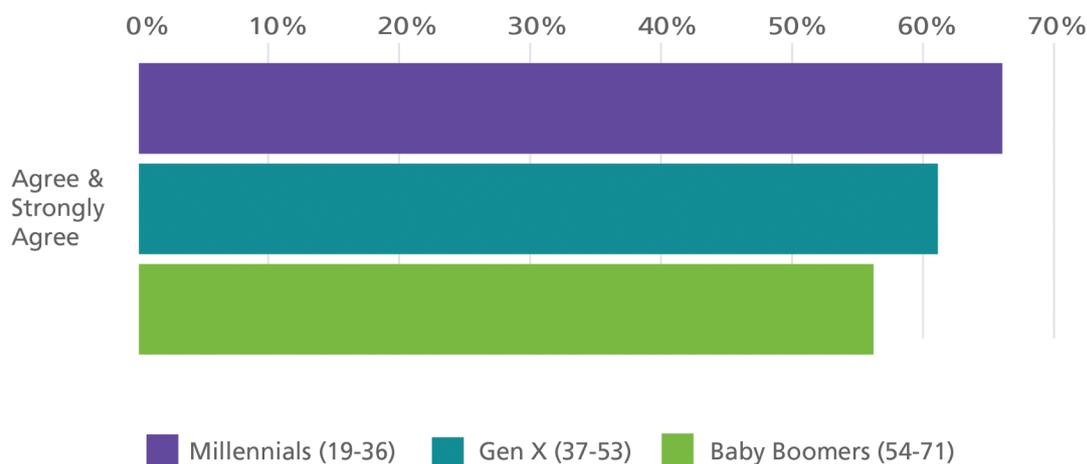


Figure 6. “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” That Patient Care Quality Is Positively Influenced by Culture

care decisions. This type of engagement could be fundamental to their decisions on where to work.⁴

The generational responses to questions on leadership (Figure 4) suggest that Millennial nurses are more willing to believe in their leaders, with the expectation that their leaders will believe in them and support them.

VIEWS ON WORK ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

Millennial nurses’ views on workplace environment and organizational culture also present challenges

and opportunities for clinical leaders. With a better understanding of Millennial nurse preferences in their workplace, leaders can set about to build or transform their organizational culture to improve nurse engagement. The Millennial Nurse Survey reveals the expectations for professional development opportunities, transparent quality measures, a positive culture, and earnestly supportive leadership.

Although most of their generational peers also see quality measures as positive, Millennials place a higher

'Agree' or 'strongly agree' transparency of quality measures positively influences care quality

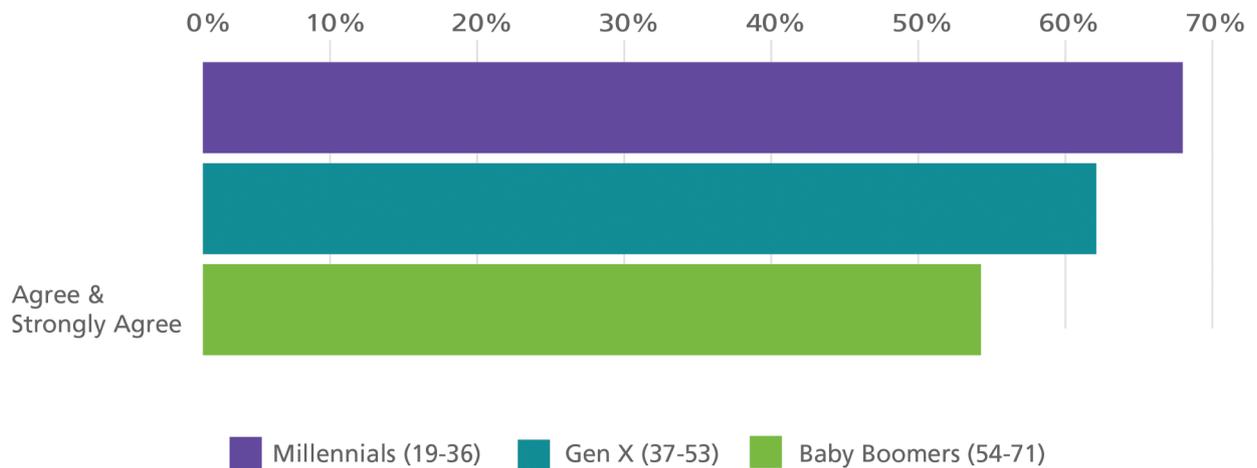


Figure 7. “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” Transparency of Quality Measures Positively Influences Care Quality

value on them across the board. For instance, 63% of Millennials responded positively when asked to respond to the statement, “The quality of patient care I provide is positively influenced by professional development opportunities.” Gen Xers weren’t far behind at 61%, whereas 53% of Baby Boomer RNs saw these opportunities as important (*Figure 5*).

The gap between younger and older nurses grew with questions about culture and the transparency of quality measures. Specifically, 68% of Millennial RNs responded affirmatively when asked if culture was an important factor that could positively affect patient care quality. This compared with 62% of Gen Xers and 57% of Baby Boomers who responded this way (*Figure 6*).

Similar numbers were seen regarding transparency of quality measures. Among Millennials, 68% responded affirmatively to a question on whether the transparency of quality measures positively influenced patient care. This compared with 62% of Gen Xers and 54% of Baby Boomers, who agreed with this sentiment (*Figure 7*).

Figures 6 and 7 suggest areas of focus where organizational leadership can improve engagement with Millennial nurses. Building a strong values-based and inclusive organizational culture, embracing projects to expand transparent quality measures, and striving for an improved skill mix on the unit can help to attract and retain Millennial nurses for whom the quality of patient care is fundamental. Effective leadership, with qualities highlighted in *Figure 4*, is clearly an important way to engage Millennial nurses.

Conclusion

The findings of the *Survey of Millennial Nurses: A Dynamic Influence on the Profession*² have important bearing on strategic decisions related to organizational culture and leadership models. The Millennial generation of nurses wants to be inspired and to have meaningful input into decision-making on organizational management and patient care. They want more collaboration, a values-based culture, greater autonomy, and even more authority. They want leaders who care about them and their careers, leaders who they can trust and who are very effective in their leadership.

The command-and-control model of leadership that was prevalent during most of the careers of Baby Boomers and even Gen Xers may be inappropriate for managing Millennials. Leadership theories from previous generations are not necessarily effective in engaging and motivating Millennial nurses.⁵ Stereotypes about Millennial workers, such as that they are too demanding and prone to disloyalty, may arise from attitudes engendered by command-and-control leadership models, where respect is required rather than engaged.

The evidence suggests that a servant-leader model of leadership may be more suited to clinical management of Millennial nurses. The servant-leader model is focused on putting employees first, empowering them, helping them grow and succeed, behaving ethically, and thereby creating value for the organization.⁶ An analogous style is leader-coach, where the leader focuses on building a relationship of trust, helps nurses develop their own goals, and then facilitates the achievement of those goals or collaborates

with the nurse. Unlike authoritative leadership styles, the servant-leader or leader-coach does not dictate terms but rather demonstrates the optimal behavior and promotes learning from a person's own experience.⁷

Successful leadership of the Millennial nurse workforce may depend on an organization-wide development and adoption of leadership models that break from the past and adhere to the values of the cohort that now dominates the profession.

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1541-4612/2019/ \$ See front matter
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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.mnl.2018.12.003>