

הקשר היהודי שלך

Your Jewish Connection

Brought to you by the Lifelong Learning Committee – *Written by Linda S Trapasso*

Got Millennials?

Let's start by defining the generations. According to an [article at The Atlantic](#), these are the last six generations:

The Greatest Generation is the people that fought and died in World War II and this generation ended when the war ended in 1945.

Baby Boomers are the generation that falls within 1946 to 1964.

Generation X is within the time-frame of 1965 to 1984.

Generation Y is not real – it overlaps Gen X and Millennials.

Millennials are those born in 1982 through approximately 2004.

There is no designation yet for those born since 2004, though some call it **Generation Z**.

Who are these Millennials and why is it so important to engage them? ([Want to Engage Millennials in Jewish Life?](#) article). By 2020 Millennials will make up a third of the adult population in America and by 2025 they will make up 75% of the American workforce. Study after study continue to show that Millennials are very much value driven; in some ways, far *more than the previous two generations*. Their idealism is manifest in their choices of products, jobs, and lifestyle.

What most sets Millennials apart is the way they communicate. Their preference is to curate their own lives, packaging their experience and presenting different versions of themselves to different constituencies. And one other noteworthy characteristic: Millennials are gam-

ers. By age 21, the average young person will have spent some 10,000 hours playing online games. So they are fluent in the language of games, game theory, rules, and visual stimulation ([Three Ways to Connect to Jewish Millennials](#) article). Whatever they do, it needs to jive with their digital personas.

So the question is how do we engage this cohort – which does not follow the same norms as other cohorts – in traditional Jewish community life?

The good news is that study after study proves that when young people are involved in meaningful Jewish experiences during their teenage years, they are much more likely to be active, lifelong members of the Jewish community. And yet, the bad news is that as far as we have come, we still have a long way to go before we fully address the disturbing fact that in most communities, an estimated 80% of Jewish teens drop out of Jewish life after their *b'nai mitzvah* ([Jim Joseph Foundation](#) article).

Millennials want to *understand* what good it does *for them*; they want to know *why they are doing this* and what personal touch it might have. They will not just join a synagogue because they are Jewish; for them, joining needs to mean being part of something. We need to focus on what the takeaway can be for them. Loyalty to the past and a sense of communal responsibility are no longer motivators. The motivator is being part of a larger project that does something for *you*. Teens and

Millennials today are looking for more direct meaning and relevance in their lives ([New Jersey Jewish News article](#)).

Another important thing about Millennials is that they also *need to be recognized* for their individuality; they need to realize how making this particular choice affects who they are.

For example, today instead of having 1 *pushka*, they would need at least 5 *pushkas*, as well as an explanation of how they differ and how each one might cater to what they personally value. They need more choices, and also their personal space. They don't want to do everything with others. This should not be a threat or detract from Jewish life involvement. Not every Jewish function needs to be in a crowded room. There can be more options for phone or FaceTime *chavruta*, individual meditation and prayer, listening to online classes, and individual *chessed* (acts of kindness) projects. Service increasingly is a central part of lives for Jewish Millennials; often it is the primary way they engage in Jewish life and learning ([Jim Joseph Foundation 3](#) article).

Let's make more opportunities for Millennials (and teens) to step into leadership roles in the Jewish community. This applies not only to programs for them specifically, but across all of our organizations. Invite them to have internships, take on board positions, attend and speak at conferences, contribute their voice

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to writing projects, and help plan and lead new initiatives. We must remember to see Millennials and teens not as “leaders of the future” but rather as “leaders of today” ([Jim Joseph Foundation 2](#) article).

By giving them leadership roles, and making sure they are included in the programming and shaping of different initiatives, they will be engaged in the planning and “sitting around the table” ([eJewish Philanthropy article](#)). By establishing a framework in which Millennials can come together and contribute what they actually know best and care about, organizations can create a dedicated following of young Jewish Americans.

Let’s host “gatherings” and not “events.” Jewish organizations should be a real community – one that hosts happy hours, potlucks, Shabbat dinners, informative lectures, roundtables about Israel, and trips to the farmer’s market. We need to feel more like a community and less like an organization that’s hosting an event ([How to Engage Jewish Millennials](#) blog).

Jewish organizations are stuck in a rut. And while it might not be any fault of their own, the time has come to shed unsuccessful approaches. An innovative strategy toward Millennial engagement should be adopted – one that enables meaningful contribution, 21st century community, and inspires young Jewish Americans to stay involved. Provide people with an opportunity to contribute whatever they’d like, however they’d like. This is good for the whole community, not just Millennials and teens ([How to Engage](#)

[Jewish Millennials](#) blog).

And more important than anything, be warm, welcoming, and genuine in your interactions with Millennials and teens. As New Englanders, we often are characterized as cold. But the Millennials I’ve engaged with are open and warm, and looking to participate in some way to make a difference in their lives and their communities. Let’s open the door and invite them in!

