



Communicating With the Next Generation of Dentists

Tips to make your interactions with dental students and new dentists memorable, meaningful and successful.

Millennials (sometimes called Generation Y, Generation Next, or Echo Boomers) are the generation who follow Generation X who, in turn, follow the Baby Boomers. Millennials represent the majority of today's dental students.

Be Ready for Multi-tasking Mania

Many of today's dental students grew up highly involved in extracurricular activities and rarely experienced down time. To accommodate a rigorous schedule, they learned to multi-task and are accustomed to doing many things all at once. Bottom line — a Millennial may be paying attention even if it doesn't appear to be the case. Assuming that the multi-tasking approach is a sign of disrespect may be the wrong conclusion.

Tips:

When giving a presentation

- Ask at the beginning how many people can access the internet here and now. Make them your buddies. "Great! I may need your help later."
- Integrate a relevant opportunity to meet the challenge of finding information fast. You could ask, "Is anyone planning on moving out of this state after dental school? You're going to Boise? Who can give me the names of three dental labs near Boise? Let's say you wanted to narrow that down to one lab — could you call the Idaho State Dental Association for a

recommendation? What's their phone number?"

- Integrate the Internet into the presentation:
 1. Who can name three issues that ADA talks about on the Hill? (ADA.org/advocacy)
 2. Your New Dentist Committee can be a great resource. Who can find information about the committee in [your state]?
 3. "What results come up when you do a search for a dentist in your home town? Does your dentist appear on the first page of listings?" (Find-a-Dentist on ADA.org)
 4. The ADA offers systematic reviews via the ADA Center for Evidence-Based Dentistry. Who can find a recommendation on the use of sealants?

When on the phone

- Send a link to online application while you have the person on the line.
- Be very clear about what exactly you want the student/new dentist to do. Offer specific steps and clear instruction.
- Be sure to ask for an email address to send a follow-up summary — quick bullets and links are the best!

Recognize that new graduates are enthusiastic about their profession and want to learn more about what life as a dentist is like.

Encourage Interaction and Collaboration

Millennials are often team-oriented and prefer to work in groups rather than individually. They are confident and want to be heard.

Tips:

When giving a presentation

- Set the tone that this presentation is for “you” — encourage students to ask questions.
- When possible, pose statements as questions. “How many of you have loans greater than the average?” vs. “I’ve heard that loan debt is greater than ever.”
- Ask them to do a group exercise or icebreaker. “Get together to talk about what you think dentistry will be like in five years.”

When on the phone or in person

- Ask open-ended questions to facilitate an interactive discussion.
 - “I see that you graduated in 2011. Congratulations! What are your practice plans?”
 - “How can we help make your transition to practice a good experience?”

Authenticity Matters

When students disagree with an approach, they prefer to offer solutions to fix the problem, rather than maneuver around the rules (or “game” the system). Millennials appreciate honest and straightforward approach, and as savvy communicators, they can see through disingenuous behavior.

Tips:

In every situation

- Be yourself. If you’re not an iPod listening, Tweeting, video-streaming dentist — don’t pretend to be. They will respect your honesty and experiences.
- Don’t sugarcoat tough facts (like the access to care issue, debt, available associateships or jobs).
- Survey, survey, survey! Millennials love to give and receive feedback and appreciate that you care enough to ask. Give them an opportunity to comment on their experience, whether it was a presentation, phone call or event.

Tell a Story

A story makes a more memorable experience for everyone. Millennials will find the story even more valuable if it relates to them personally.

Tips:

In every situation

- Make it personal. Share your experiences in dental school and out in the field.
- Talk about your memories of your first few months in practice.
- Recognize that students like information “just in time.” They may not want to hear all the details right now, even if it’s important information. Telling a story can provide context that will help make the content more relevant.
- Remember authenticity—if the theme of every story is, “I came, I saw, I conquered,” it may be a turnoff. It’s okay to tell stories about achievements, but it’s equally helpful to hear stories about missteps.

Expect High Achievers

Expect today’s dental students and recent graduates to be knowledgeable about the profession, goal-driven and achievement-oriented.

Tips:

In every situation

- Respect the individual’s opinion. If a response is incorrect or off-base, use a positive reaction first. “Thank you for your response. That’s a good thought. I look at it in a different way.” Or, “I can appreciate that conclusion [or approach]. Another way of looking at it is...”
- Treat the new dentist as peers and colleagues. If the person has graduated, be sure to call the individual “Doctor.”
- Reference dental publications and articles that you read. “Did everyone read the study in *JADA* last month about Endocarditis? For those of you who haven’t gotten to it yet, there are new guidelines that address...”

Thanks for your outreach to the next generation of dentists! Your leadership is valued and appreciated.