



# Millennial Leaders:

Now is Our Time and this is Our Voice



# Research Report

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# Definitions

## Millennial

Millennial is a term given to a specific generation of people who reached young adulthood in the first two decades of the millennium. There is variation over the specific dates used, however for the purposes of this research millennials will be identified as people born between 1984 and 2000. This fits in with the majority of millennial classifications.

## Leadership

Leadership does not necessitate a person to have a specific title or position, but it is the process of influencing society and individuals around you. Leaders engage and develop others while working towards a common goal.

## Leadership Development

The process of enabling growth in an individual's character, skill set, and gifting to enhance their leadership ability. This includes a variety of methods such as: coaching, mentoring, in-service programmes, formal university training, online learning and on-the-job training.

# Executive Summary

This research explores the opinions of Christian millennials in leadership positions across all sectors of society in the United Kingdom. The research was undertaken by Forge Leadership Consultancy between September 2017 and April 2018, utilising 50 in-depth qualitative interviews and over 440 responses to a quantitative survey.

This research was carried out to give millennial leaders a voice in this currently volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous leadership environment (Lawrence, 2014), in the hope of contributing to millennials reaching their full leadership potential and creating environments where they thrive.

## This report presents:

- i) the relationship of the Forge Leadership research to the existing literature and views in this area
- ii) a presentation and analysis of the key findings
- iii) some specific recommendations and next steps in light of these findings for millennial leaders, organisations and churches.

## Key themes

1. The research finds that millennials place an extremely high value on integrity, authenticity and self-awareness within their leadership, yet identifies an underlying tension with a strongly felt need for approval and a significant fear of failure.
2. Millennial leaders are aiming to create a culture where relationships flourish, and collaboration and teamwork are priorities. There is a strong desire for purpose to be a driving factor in the workplace. Millennial leaders also seek an environment where there is frequent feedback and encouragement.
3. There is a strong commitment to developing others. Personal growth in skills and character outside of a narrow job specification is greatly desired. Positive past experience of mentoring, coaching and learning on the job make one-to-one leadership development models the most highly sought-after.

4. Millennial leaders are struggling with managing conflict and balancing work and life. They want to get the best out of technology but are challenged by the blurred boundaries that it brings.
5. When exploring spirituality, the church and the Bible have been of significant importance within Christian millennial leaders' development. The majority of millennial leaders working in all sectors of society noted that they had benefitted by being given early leadership opportunities within their church.

## Analysis

Our analysis identifies a lens through which we can view millennial leaders' approaches to identity, culture, leadership development, opportunities and challenges they face and spirituality. The lens is the centrality and priority of relationships within millennial culture that shapes how millennials behave and what they desire. We also identify tensions that are a core part of a millennial leader's life at work, home, and socially. We determine that leadership development for millennials must be personal, and that the environments in which this takes place must be 'high support' and 'high challenge'. Our analysis also shows the importance of assisting millennial leaders in addressing issues around resilience, wholeness and mental health.

## Recommendations

The recommendations from the research are tailored to millennial leaders, organisations and churches respectively. However, they have some underlying characteristics in common when addressing:

- i) tensions around the identity of a leader
- ii) mentoring and leadership development
- iii) creating environments of high support and high challenge and
- iv) conflict management.

We would like to thank all the millennial leaders who took part in the research for their time and energy, and their willingness to let us explore challenging issues with them. Our experience of meeting so many inspiring, intelligent, hardworking and committed individuals gave us huge hope for the future of society. We trust that the recommendations and analysis in this report will enable them to reach their full potential and enable those who are leading them to create environments and cultures that will maximise their impact.

It is our hope that organisations and senior leaders across all sectors of society and those entrusted with the training and development of the next generation of leaders will examine this research in detail, and reflect on the findings and recommendations in strategy and tactical sessions, locally and nationally.

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Forge Leadership Consultancy

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September 2018

## About Forge Leadership and what we do

Founded by Simon Barrington in 2017, our dream is to see a generation of global leaders, confident in their identity, clear about their values and beliefs helping to build inspiring values-based and relational organisations that transform society.

We therefore choose to invest in leaders to help them know and articulate who they are, so that they can lead with credibility and with competence, secure in their identity and inspired to greater levels of influence.

Millennial leadership (and [www.millennial-leader.com](http://www.millennial-leader.com)) is an initiative of Forge Leadership focused on the millennial generation of leaders, informing, equipping and developing them to lead into the future with authenticity and poise.

All of this we do from a solid research base which informs our individual and organisational health checks, our executive coaching, our training and our consultancy. Across public, private and third sectors this is enabling organisations to attract, develop, retain and motivate leaders of character who carry influence.



# Introduction

The world is constantly changing and the world of work with it, with many commentators agreeing that the rate of change in business and society continues to increase year on year. Leadership in this volatile environment can be a daunting task.

Millennials, who are becoming young adults against this backdrop, now constitute a major section of the workforce and occupy many leadership roles (University of Notre Dame, 2017). With various labels being attributed, it is obvious that the label 'kids' 'won't fit for much longer' (Barna Group, 2014: 5).

Millennial professionals 'are one of the most discussed and researched subjects of recent times' (Srivastava & Banerjee, 2016: 148).

We believe they have been unfairly stereotyped and misrepresented, which is why Forge Leadership set out to give millennials a voice. We wanted to understand the people behind the millennial label with the aim of helping them reach their full potential in leadership and to aid society in creating environments in which leaders of millennials and millennial leaders can work harmoniously in ecosystems set up for everyone to win.

The unique contribution of this research is the combination of 50 qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews of millennial leaders, and an online survey of a further 442 millennial leaders. This enabled us to really understand their challenges, experiences, desires and needs. In doing so, we are aiming to inform and influence the leadership development programmes, organisational cultures, and development processes offered to millennial leaders.

Forge Leadership seeks to understand how millennials in leadership can lead well and be sufficiently prepared and equipped in terms of capacity, competency and character. Without focused, contextually-specific training and mentoring, millennials will struggle to become a generation of leaders that are ready to face the unique challenges they will encounter in leading people across the whole of society.

With increasing numbers of millennials already in or now taking up senior leadership positions, this research is highly significant and timely, and the findings will be of widespread benefit.

We wish to express our thanks to Matthew Van Duyvenbode (Director of Impact and Innovation, Bible Society), Dr. Rhiannon McAleer (Head of Research, Bible Society), Dr. Tim Davy (Research Fellow, Redcliffe College) and Rev. Dr. Colin Edwards (Vice Principal, Redcliffe College) for their encouragement, support and technical and academic oversight of the research through all of its stages. Sincere thanks are due as well to our friends at the Evangelical Alliance Public Leadership department, CARE, and Global Connections for their support and time in enabling us to reach so many millennials who are already in leadership.

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**50** qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews of millennial leaders, and an online survey of a further

**442** millennial leaders.



# Current views on Millennials

To get a greater sense of context, a literature review explored existing research on millennials regarding leadership.



We found that the available literature currently highlights a strong bias towards US research, with much less being available from the UK. Moreover, research into Christian millennials in leadership is mainly confined to the church sector.

Furthermore, millennials have been stereotyped in much of the literature with labels such as, lazy/slacker, wanting a trophy for showing up, self-centred/narcissistic, disloyal, pampered/spoiled, lack of respect for authority and entitled (Hobart and Sendek, 2014).

**By giving millennials a voice, Forge Leadership seeks to find the truth behind these headlines.**

It is clear from the literature that scholars and practitioners believe that there are distinct differences between millennials and previous generations, which means that previous leadership models and theories are not necessarily applicable (Anderson et al., 2016).

Notably, millennials are 'wired differently' from other generations (Balda & Mora, 2011).

Hobart and Sendek (2014: 2), argue that 'what worked in the past and passed for leadership will no longer work'.

The literature review found relationships to be a primary part of the life of millennials with instant communication technology allowing the work and life boundary to be blurred more than ever before (Balda & Mora, 2011; Cox, 2016). Work is not seen as a job, but their 'life' (Gallup, 2016). Millennials are found to bring expectations of their quality of life, work-life balance satisfaction and relationship quality that are often higher than previous generations (Murray, 2011). There is an emphasis in the literature

on millennials ensuring they have a sense of well-being and are not working around the clock, but enjoying life within work too (Deal et al., 2010; Hines, 2011). A study suggests that 98% of millennials report having friends at work and a belief that it is important to cultivate community within a work environment (Deal & Levenson, 2016), because millennials 'want to love being at work just as much as they love being at home' (Montes, 2017: 18).

In addition, purpose is the key word for millennials and they have been found to put great emphasis on personal development through their work while gravitating 'towards managers that act as coaches who take a personal interest and guide them as they develop their strengths' (University of Notre Dame, 2017: n.p.). Millennials exclaim that 'work is a place to make a difference, not just earn a pay check (sic)' (Hobart & Sendek, 2014: 28).

From examining the literature, it becomes apparent that there has been a gap in understanding how millennials can be best developed in leadership because of these generational differences, and there is a large gap in the research in this area.

This is a significant time because it is unprecedented for a generation to enter adulthood with 'nearly limitless access to diverse people, ideas, products and information at the click of a mouse or swipe of a finger' (Barna Group, 2014: 10).

The Forge Leadership research reflects many of the findings from the literature, but also adds many nuances and tensions. It adds significantly to the existing literature by filling a gap in UK-focused research aimed at understanding millennials' attitudes to leadership and leadership development, with a singular focus on leaders who are leading across all sectors of society.

**98%** of millennials report having friends at work and a belief that it is important to cultivate community within a work environment.



# Our Approach

Forge Leadership conducted 50 in-depth semi-structured interviews of ten Christian millennials in positions of leadership in each of five sectors – churches, agencies, public sector, private sector, and third sector. These were conducted mainly through online video conferencing and occasionally through face-to-face meetings. This was the most efficient method because it reduced travel, allowing for more time to do a greater number of interviews.

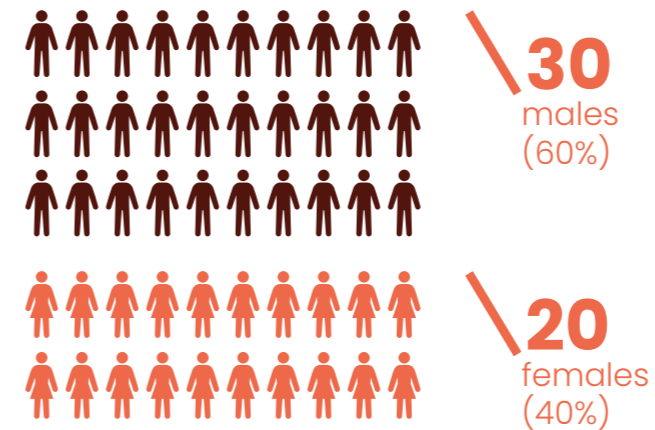


The face-to-face aspect (even on a screen) allowed for emotion and body language to be observed and for a more relaxed relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. The research interviews enabled in-depth qualitative research and the semi-structured nature meant that relevant topics could be explored further instead of following a rigid set of questions. The questions were created after understanding the existing literature available and were reviewed by several individuals, Bible Society and Redcliffe College. They were then reviewed midway through the interviews with some questions added or changed when it was clear several main themes were emerging.

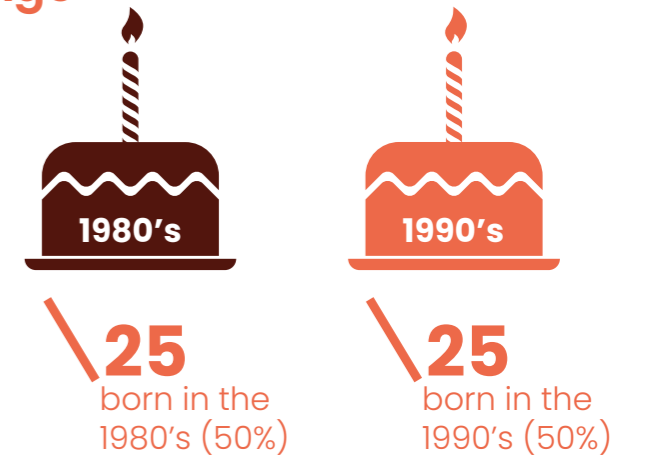
To give context to the types of leaders that were interviewed, some of the job titles of those we interviewed are: Commissioning Editor, Head of Department, Founder, Pastor, Chief Executive and Head of HR. Participants for the interviews were recruited through a variety of methods, including advertising on social media and emails to people we knew who were leading millennials and to millennials themselves. Partner organisations (EA, CARE, Bible Society, Redcliffe College, Global Connections) sent emails to their databases of leaders. We also asked interviewees to recommend other participants.

## Qualitative Interviews

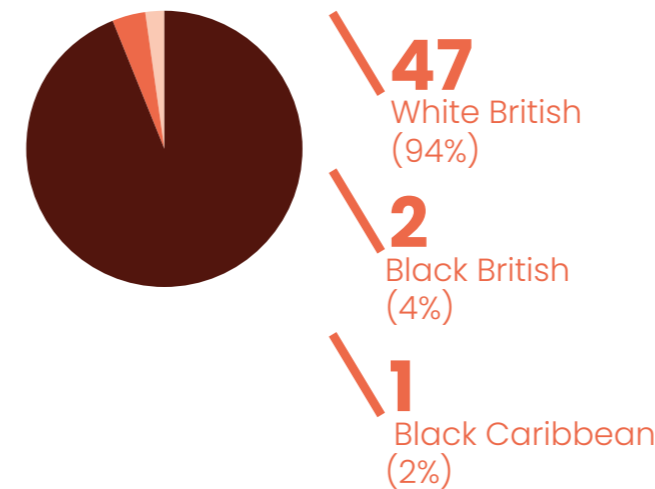
### Gender



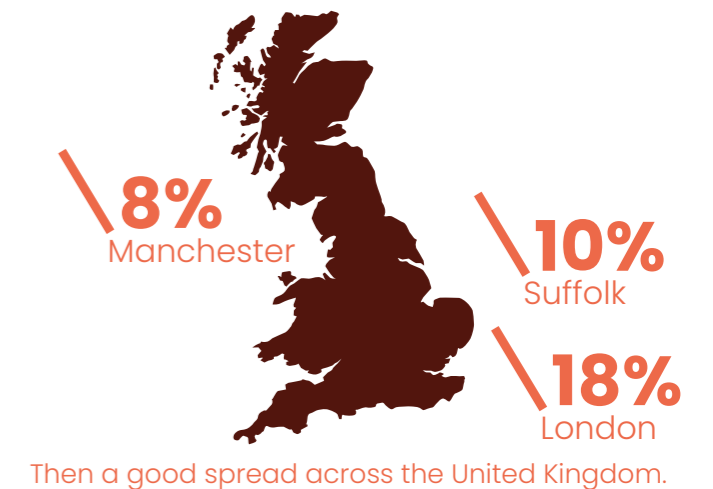
### Age



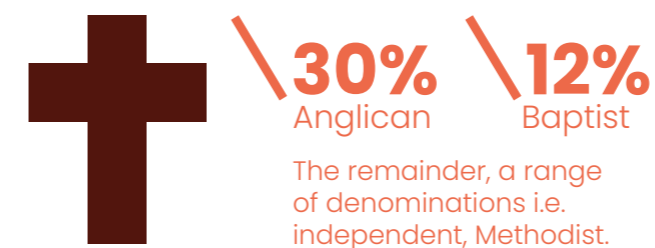
### Ethnicity



### Location



### Denominations



### Churchmanship



To complement the qualitative data, and give a voice to more millennials and greater clarity on their leadership development needs in this changing environment, Forge Leadership conducted an online survey. This was completed by 442 millennials in leadership in the same five sectors. The questions for this survey were created after analysing the emerging themes of the qualitative interviews midway through and were created in conversation with Bible Society and Redcliffe College. It was first piloted by a small sample and then critiqued and edited by Masters students at Redcliffe College.

The survey was advertised through social media networks and through interview participants. The survey was created using Google Forms. The data was then downloaded and analysed as a whole, and with sector and gender splits.

By nature the online survey was a self-selecting, and therefore an a potentially unrepresentative sample. Both the quantitative and qualitative data samples have a limitation in their denominational bias to evangelical/charismatic Christians in the interviews, and Church of England in the survey.

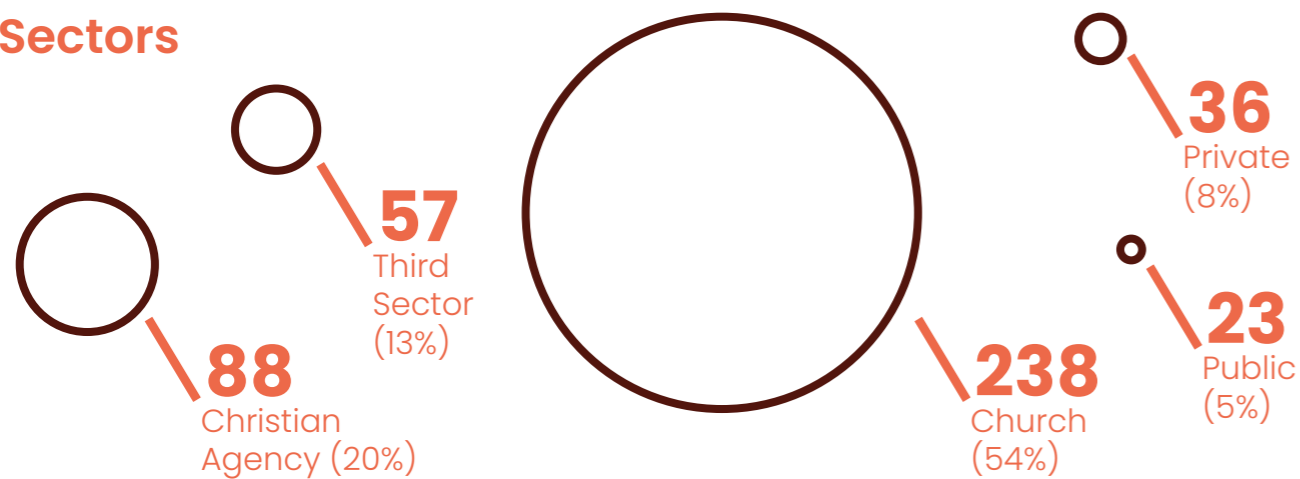
This was expected because of the routes we used to reach participants i.e. Evangelical Alliance. All the other factors seem to be representative of the mix of millennials in leadership across the sectors.

The final themes and findings were reached through coding the data, grouping it, checking the qualitative data against the quantitative, and through discussion with our research partners. Forge Leadership worked closely with Redcliffe College and Bible Society research department to ensure academic rigour throughout, including research ethics.

All names have been changed and identifying details removed from this report.

## Quantitative Survey

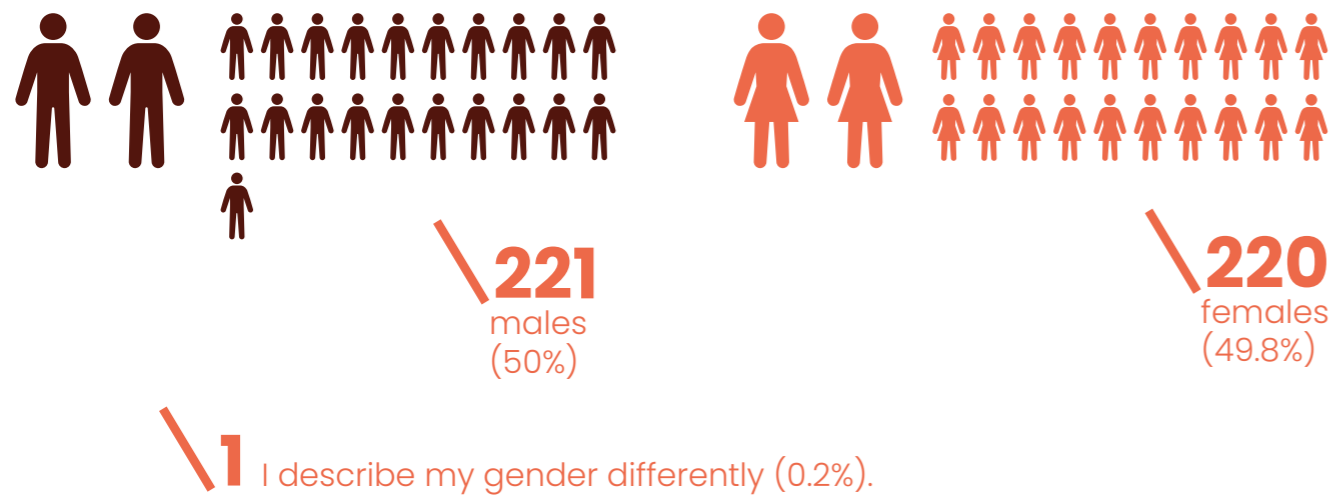
### Sectors



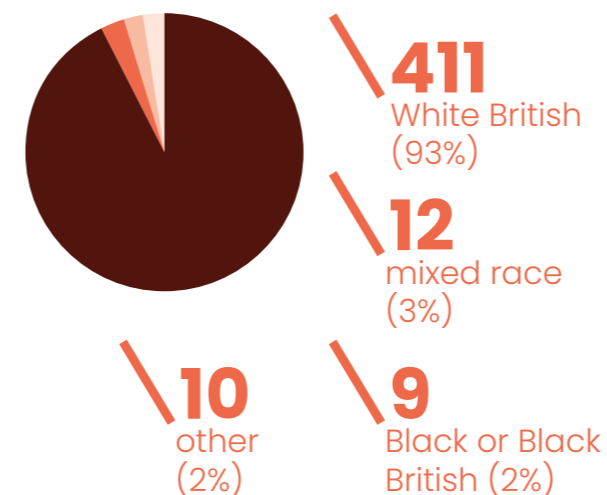
### Age Even spread from 1984-2000



### Gender



### Ethnicity



### Location



### Denominations



### Churchmanship





# Identity

Identity is one of the key themes that emerged from the research. Millennials spoke of where they find their identity and the struggles they have in maintaining a strong identity.



**Millennial leaders shared that their identity as leaders is based on who God says they are, articulating regularly within the interviews their place as children of God.**

However, deeper beneath the surface there is an underlying tension which revealed itself further in the online surveys. For example, 83% of millennials selected that it was either 'important' or 'very important' to be liked by those they are leading.

This is to be expected to some degree, however 52% of millennial leaders also selected 'need for approval' as one of the top three things most likely to negatively impact their leadership.

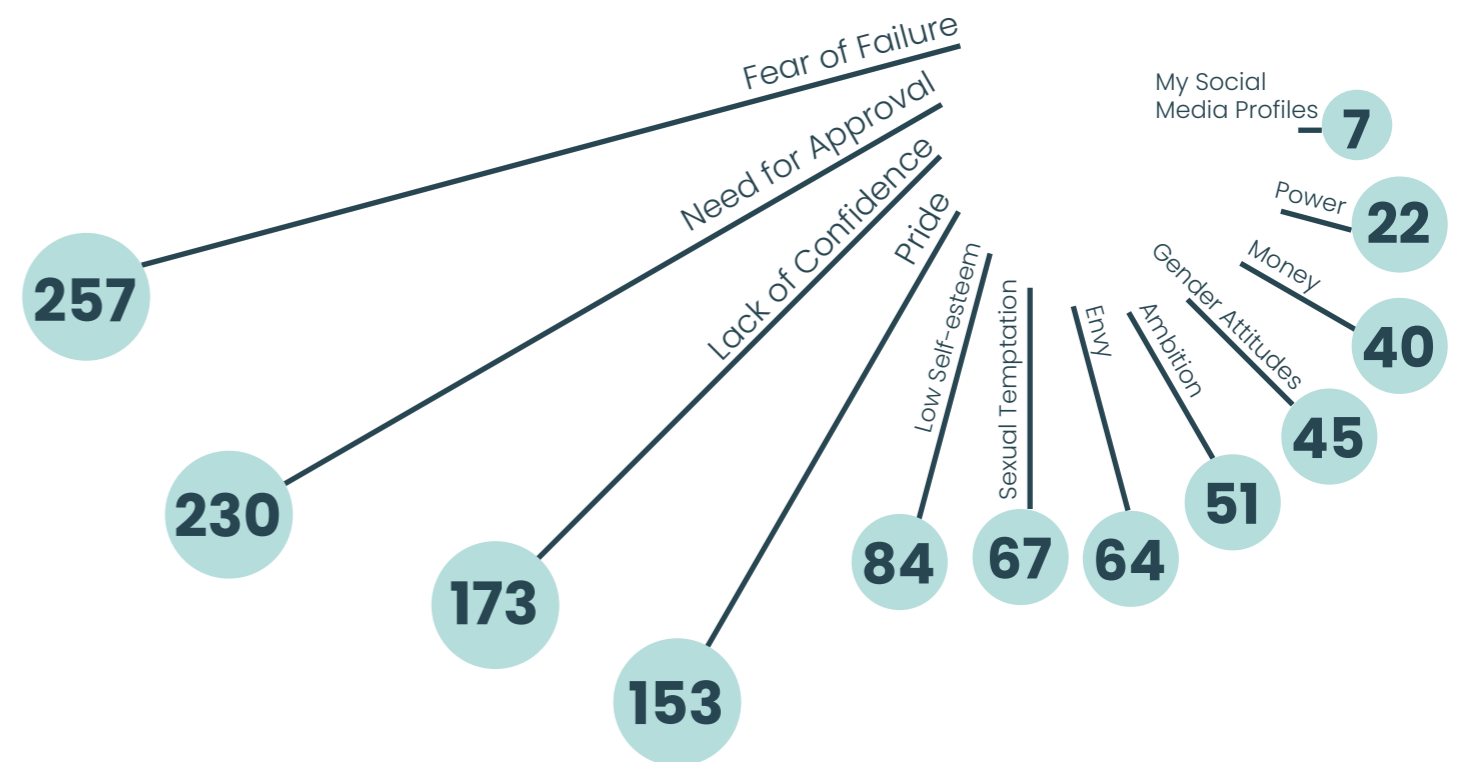
Additionally, leadership performance was identified as being in the top three out of eight factors that have had the biggest impact on their identity as a leader. Millennials reported that it is easy to acquire the mindset that 'your value is found in your work', and the challenge of 'trying not to get caught up in that' can be difficult.

47% of millennials in our online survey said that their work performance affects their self-esteem 'a lot'. It is also of significant note that when asked how millennials would rate their self-esteem generally, 55% of men said 'high' or 'very high', whereas only 29% of women did.

On top of this, 58% chose 'fear of failure' as one of the top three things most likely to negatively impact their leadership.

**47%** of millennials in our online survey said their work performance affects their self-esteem 'a lot'.

## What are the things that are most likely to negatively impact your leadership? Please choose up to 3 most relevant.



The tensions were summarised helpfully in one answer to the question 'Where does your identity as a leader come from?':

'my stock answer as a Christian leader should be identity in Christ, but often...I am quite reliant on how other people see me and what other people think of me as a leader.'

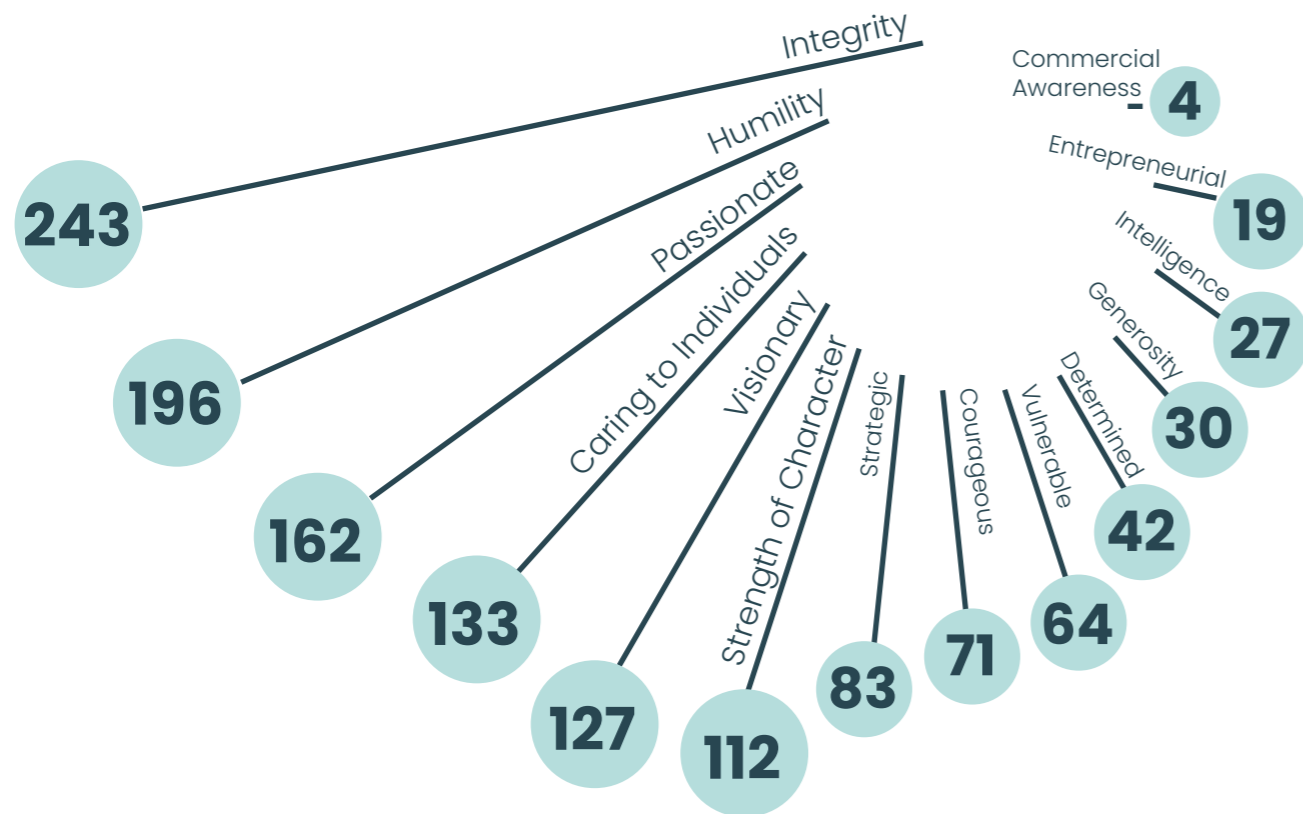


Linked extremely closely to identity, the importance of integrity was continually highlighted throughout the research with participants viewing the best leaders as those who have integrity and can be trusted. Also, the worst leaders were described as those lacking in these qualities. There was real frustration with older leaders who publicly come across as having it all together, yet in private their work and actions do not match up. This was voiced by millennials exclaiming,

**'the worst characteristics of a leader that I've known: dishonest, lack of integrity.'**

Millennial leaders are wanting to see leaders whose words and actions align and who have an appropriate vulnerability within leadership. The online survey demonstrated this with 55% of millennials selecting 'integrity' as one of the top three qualities in the most effective leaders, and 44% selecting 'humility'.

**Which of these characteristics have you observed in the most effective leaders? Please select the 3 most relevant.**



Similarly authenticity was seen as an essential characteristic for millennial leaders to possess themselves, as they desire to be the same person in every context, whether that is work, church, or home. The closer the match between how millennial leaders express themselves at work and how they express themselves in other contexts, 'the better I enjoy my job' as one millennial explained.

There is a transparency and consistency being desired and striven for, with one millennial leader stating, 'I like to think there is a real consistency in who I am.'

Millennial leaders spoke of social groups often being the same inside and outside of work, meaning that a lack of authenticity cannot be hidden. In one interview a millennial leader shared, 'It won't be enough to just be a good...teacher, you'll need to actually love your wife, you'll need to actually give your money away - not just talk about it.'

The online survey similarly found that 81% of millennials said there was a 'strong' or 'very strong' match between the person they are in work and outside of work.

Millennials are leading from these fundamental foundations, seeking to create authentic workplaces where people work with openness and integrity to create a culture of trust. This is highlighted by millennials as a significant contribution to society:

**'we can really bring authenticity and integrity.'**

Alongside these contributions, there is recognition that social media and the global access that the Internet allows can present a significant challenge to living with integrity.

However, 92% of millennial leaders said they would feel 'comfortable' or 'very comfortable' if their

colleagues could see all of their social media activity from the last three years. They are aware that their lives are open to scrutiny, and there are more chances of any hint of duplicity being observed.

In a world where their opinions are visible to all and open for challenge, millennial leaders also expressed the pressure associated with standing up for opinions that are unpopular and the challenge that brings to being authentic.

Identity is clearly something that needs addressing in this changing landscape that millennials are leading in. The theory of identity seems to be known, but the realities of living this out seem much more complex.

**81%** of millennials said there was a 'strong' or 'very strong' match between the person they are in work and outside of work.

**Analysis**

**For Us, Relationship is Everything**

It is striking across all of the research findings that millennial leaders put an extremely high value on relationships, and are very relational in their approach.

They are extremely conscious of what people think about them, especially the opinions of those they are leading, and co-leading with. They assert that their sense of identity is derived from God, yet there is a different reality underneath. Many are struggling with anxiety about how high their popularity and acceptance ratings are and their self-esteem is deeply impacted by their performance at work.

It appears that the very thing that is attractive to millennial leaders - integrity - is also the biggest challenge to live out in reality.

**Millennial leaders need assistance and coaching to work through approval, performance, self-esteem and fear issues that are impacting identity.**

**Analysis**

**Tension is Our Norm**

Within the research many polarities are apparent, complex and intriguing. Millennial leaders are dealing with tensions while they seek to work out their identity. They are clearly being driven by a strong desire for authenticity and integrity, yet they are faced with their whole lives being on display through social media. This appears to be creating inner stress in coping with the struggle of needing to live lives of integrity, whilst being affected by fear of failure and the need for approval.

Potentially this fear of failure is more prevalent because the financial cost of failure is higher for millennials. They are experiencing tough environmental factors that may not have been fully recognised and taken into account, such as difficulty getting onto the property ladder, and paying off large student loans. Furthermore, since millennials are so relational in nature, failure in the area of authenticity could also lead to the loss of important relationships.

# Culture

Millennial leaders are creating their own, very different, workplace cultures which are relational and purposeful with high levels of feedback, encouragement and vision.



## Relational

Once again, the relational approach of the millennial generation is starkly clear in this element of the research with 94% in the online survey stating that the quality of relationships in the workplace is 'important' or 'extremely important' to them.

Teamwork and collaboration are very much a priority within this and seen as a major contribution:

'One of the best things about millennials is collaboration and the way in which we work in teams. I think that's a really good way of leading... a really positive contribution.'

In the survey, 94% said that teamwork in the workplace was 'extremely important' or 'important' and 90% said the same about collaboration between teams.

Millennials regularly shared that they 'need strong relationships' and saw the best leaders as those genuinely interested in the people they are leading. The best workplace was described by one millennial leader as her current workplace because:

'there is a really great sense of community, a real transparency amongst people, a real belief and passion in what we do...there's security in those relationships.'

## Shared Vision and Purpose

Another characteristic in the culture developed by the best leaders was shared vision. This was present in the best workplaces where there is little distraction from less important things. In an interview, a millennial leader stated, '(the) best leaders I have known are able to communicate vision and direction in a way that catches people's imagination and hearts and minds.' Another millennial told us,

'People want to be working here, people want to work together and there's a real sense of family. There is a real shared vision for where we are going and what we want to get done.'

This was reiterated in the online survey with **65%** selecting 'visionary' or 'passionate' as one of the top three most important characteristics of effective leaders.



### Jay's Story

Jay started his business career whilst still at school by starting a successful web hosting business.

Following university, Jay now works for a technology company. It's a young company, with many millennials in leadership who undertake critical projects with government clients.

Jay described the culture in his company: 'I work for a large technology company and the advantage of tech companies is that by nature they are very flat organisationally.

'They don't have a lot of hierarchy, which is great for most reasons. So it means that the best idea always wins, and people are fairly collaborative. We also tend to have a lot of very, very smart people so that sometimes is challenging but generally it's a really nice environment to work in.

'I don't respond well to being told what to do, and most people I work with don't either, so it has to be a shared, growing vision of: "this is how we could do something better." Most people I work with day to day in our company would probably be millennials. We are a relatively young firm.

'The culture that works here is being really open and transparent with what we are thinking and getting everyone's views and working together.

'I spend most of my time though working with government which tends to be the opposite. They tend to be very hierarchical, and so bringing people with you is much harder there and I find managing people externally and trying to bring them with you to be a huge challenge.

'The culture internally vs the culture with government customers when most of them are 20 years older than me is very different and you have to act very differently. You can't collaborate so much. It just doesn't work.'



A vital part of the workplace culture that millennial leaders are creating and desiring is having their value and purpose lived out at work. In the online survey, 78% of millennial leaders selected 'having a sense of purpose' as the first or second most important thing at work out of eight options.

One millennial leader frustratedly shared: 'I just want to go somewhere where their ethos is matching mine.' Another millennial leader told us:

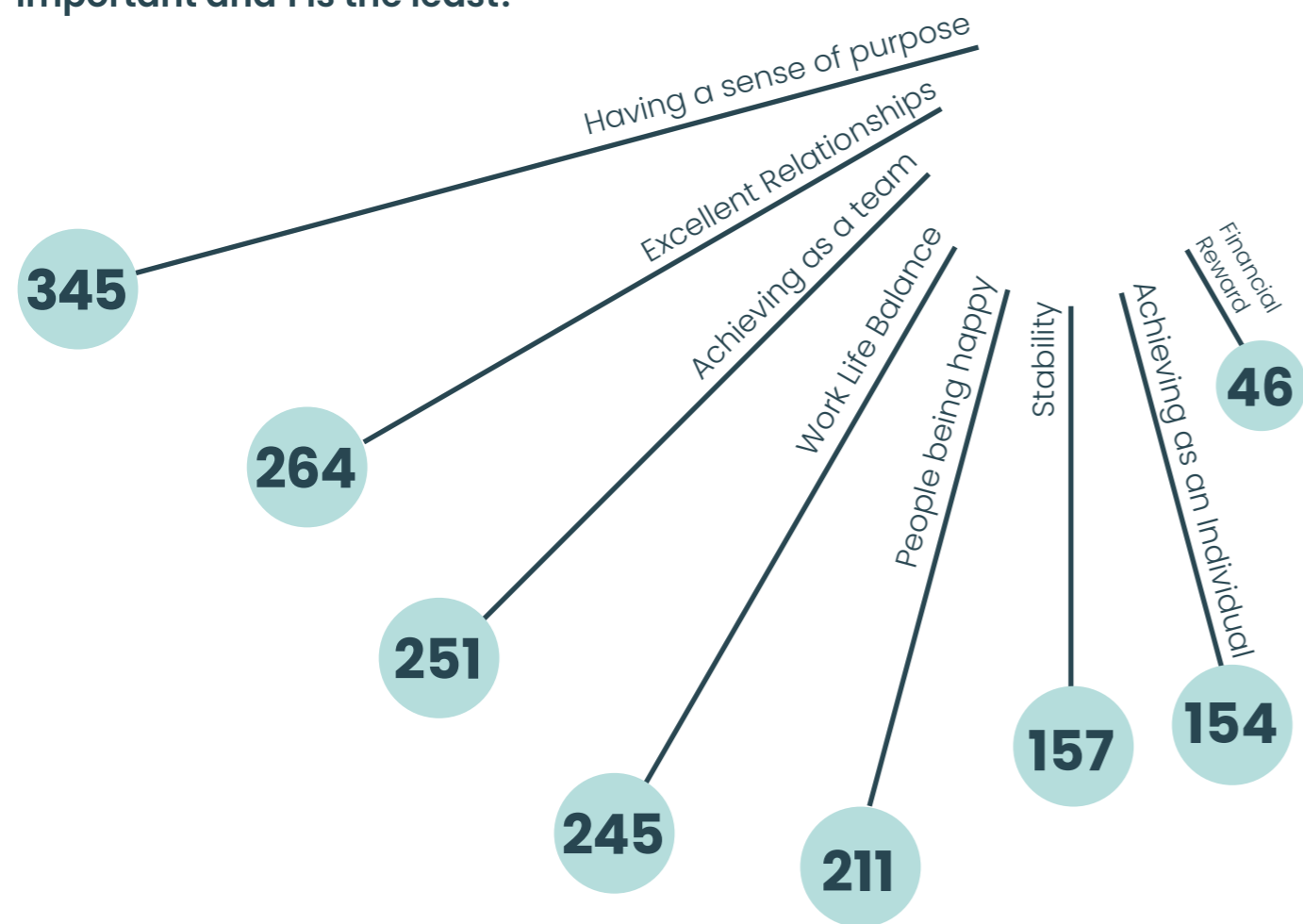
'I feel that my whole life is worship to God so to work for an organisation that I know doesn't match up within that would be out of the question.'

86% in the online survey stated that it was extremely important or important for their individual and organisational purpose to match. One millennial leader described it in an interview as:

'I think it is essential because if you commit yourself to an organisation, you are tied to their vision...I have to find a way to align myself with the organisation.'

**78%** of millennial leaders selected 'having a sense of purpose' as the first or second most important thing at work out of eight options.

**How important are the following to you at your work where 8 is the most important and 1 is the least?**



## Feedback and Encouragement

Within this relational and purposeful culture, millennial leaders are very keen on feedback being instantaneous, regular, and easy to access: 'I need to be given feedback on what I am doing'. To the majority of millennials a once-a-year appraisal

is outdated because this does not allow for rapid and continual development and growth: 'Work operates an annual review policy which personally doesn't sit too well with me. I much prefer more regular updates. If you save that up

for an annual review, on the one hand you're waiting to deal with problems which might have happened ten months ago...in which case the problems may have become bigger than they were in the first place.'

Within this feedback culture, encouragement is highly valued and millennials told us:

**'I need to know I am doing a good job.'**

## Risk Taking

Millennials had a mixed view on whether they were creating cultures where people can take risks and whether they themselves are risk takers. Millennial leaders are confident to step out and try new things when there is a good support network. They are therefore seeking places where it is safe to take risks and fail.

**'You need a good team around. You need a team to support you. Equally you need a team that's going to appropriately challenge you. You need people above you as well, who are equally supporting what you're doing and equally have that ability to challenge what you're doing. That sort of high challenge, but high support.'**

In the interviews, the best leaders were described as 'encouragers' and 'empowerers of others', and the role of a leader was often described, 'as being about encouraging people and being a role model.'

Millennial leaders also stated: 'I think leadership for me is positively influencing those around you.'

Another millennial leader told us, 'it is just having a bit of rope to try things out and sometimes fail. For me, it just gives me permission to fail and try new things and to sometimes do things that seem like they will never work, but sometimes it feels like innovation that changes things ... just having permission to fail sometimes would be a key in helping anyone thrive...and also knowing that if you do fail, you're still accepted, you're still loved. You are still valued as a person, and no one is going to come down on you like a ton of bricks because you did something wrong.'

Millennials know what they want from a work culture and are already leading and creating these cultures. A culture that has relationships at the centre, which drives forward a shared vision and purpose, alongside regular feedback, all in a space of high support and high challenge.

### Analysis

#### For Us, Relationship is Everything

Relationship is at the heart of the culture millennial leaders are creating. It provides the foundation for how work should be conducted, feedback should be given and interactions should be handled. It is so important that it can be the difference between a 'best' and a 'worst' workplace and is used to recharge when leadership is tough.

**Organisations should prioritise the understanding of the quality and closeness of relationships in their organisation as a key barometer of the attractiveness to millennials to lead and work there.**

### Analysis

#### Tension is Our Norm

One clear tension in the culture was the desire to be led in a way that does not make millennials feel abandoned and without direction, yet also in a way that they do not feel micromanaged and stifled because 'the worst leaders are micromanagers'. In the interviews, one millennial leader explained that:

'no one gets inspired by just being told what to do, so I think it's about being given autonomy and showing value.'

Another millennial expanded: 'if you're not that closely line managed, you can feel not as closely appreciated, but mostly I loved not being micromanaged.'

Furthermore, the emphasis on wanting value and purpose in work could lead to millennials feeling like they are failing and unfulfilled if they do not find a job that completely matches their individual purpose, and to become easily frustrated in jobs where their individual and organisational purposes do not completely match.

# Leadership Development

Attitudes to leadership development was a key theme in the research with learning from and being supported by others one-to-one being cited as highly significant. This is not only achieved in a formal manner, but also during casual meetings with people who have been through similar experiences. In the online survey, 80% of millennial leaders said that 'observing the leadership style of others' is one of the top three things that has had the most influence on how they lead.



Alongside this, mentorship was one of the most desired forms of leadership development, with many citing very positive experiences of it, and believing it is 'probably the best' form of development, and 'one of the best ways to solidify character'. The consistency of journeying together, the individualised and relational nature, and the focused development that comes through mentoring make it attractive to millennials for leadership development.

Interviewees stated:

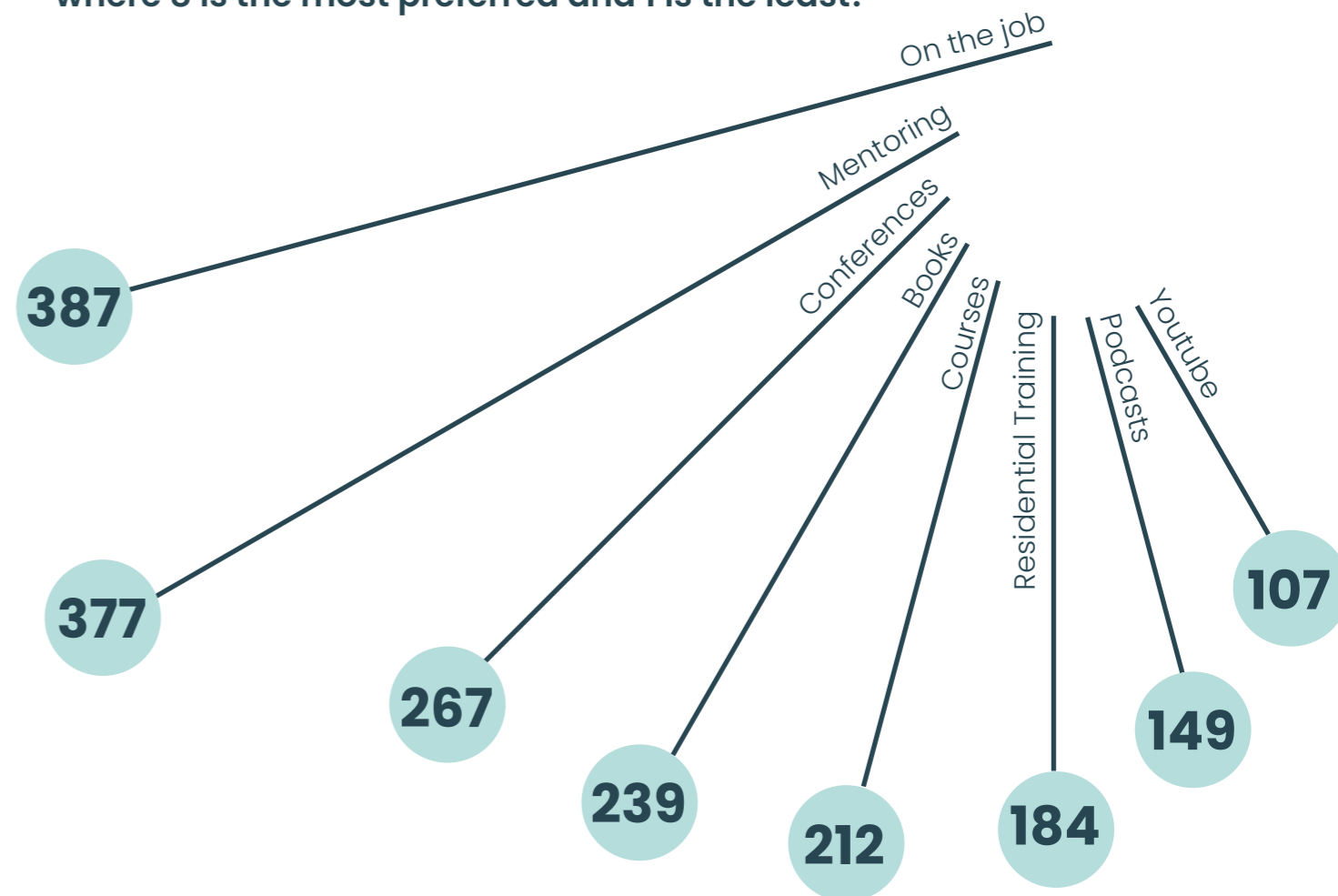
'mentoring is the most helpful thing because it's context driven. It's very specific to what's going on.'

'I've always had mentors...that's something I pride myself on.'

85% of millennial leaders selected mentoring in their top three preferred leadership development methods, with 88% selecting learning on the job. The graph shows the number of people who selected each category as being in their top three.

A combination of relational mentoring and learning, while actually doing, seems to be very valuable.

**How do you prefer to learn about leadership where 8 is the most preferred and 1 is the least?**



The preferred delivery of mentoring is face-to-face, with 83% selecting this option, however there was also an understanding that online mentoring can be helpful as long as there are still elements of face-to-face.

With 87% of surveyed millennial leaders actually having had a mentor, 57% rated the mentoring experience as very effective whilst 40% had an experience of medium effectiveness.

Millennial leaders who have had mentors were also asked what type of mentoring relationship it was. The most frequently selected was 'discipler' (36%). 'Discipler' is defined as a person who enables others to develop the 'basic habits of the Christian life dealing with hearing from God and talking with God; operating in a fellowship of Christians; learning to minister in terms of giftedness; learning to get input from God.'



25% selected 'coach' which is defined as someone who aims to develop in others 'skills of all kinds, depending on the expertise of the coach.'

Millennial leaders not only desire mentoring and coaching for themselves, but are consciously, and in a very focused way, developing others and empowering them. Often this was with the intention of leading them to a place where the mentee can replace them in their job, creating a sense of sustainability.

When asked what the best thing about leading was, the answer was almost always centred on developing

others. For example,

*'I think what I love most is seeing other people develop. I love that side of my work. Leading others to be more confident. [To] be the best they can be.'*

In fact, leadership was defined by interviewees as 'taking others with you on a journey and growing them to take on leadership for themselves.'

**59%** of surveyed millennial leaders stated that they spend 11% or more of their time directly developing others, often through personal mentoring and 'doing life together.'

### How much of your time as a leader do you spend developing others?



The best places to work were attributed to the presence of cultures that develop others, whereas the worst placed little or no value on developing and growing individuals outside of a narrow job

specification. Millennial leaders explained that they not only love to develop others, but have a strong desire to be developed themselves, whatever job they are in. For example:

*'the best place I've worked is when I worked for my church. Simply because they are very, very good at giving you a go, so throwing you in the deep end, - have a shot at this, this and this to see what you enjoy and what you're passionate about - and I think that's where you learn...develop as a leader and a person.'*

### Analysis

#### For Us, Relationship Is Everything

Relationship is everything and vital to recognise when designing leadership development. Millennials are thriving in situations where leadership development is personal. The opportunity to come really close, to be allowed to observe and contribute to the daily struggles that leaders face is highly prized.

**With access to information the norm for millennials, it appears to be wisdom and experience that is most sought after. Everything else can be 'Googled', and courses, conferences, books and podcasts can be replaced, replicated and consumed. However, the value of one-to-one time with a practitioner who is prepared to open up their lives and their leadership is gold dust to a millennial.**

The personal relationships that are formed are critical and the one-to-one context allows for very personalised and focused development, as there is space and time to apply learning to a specific context. It also creates a consistency of relationship and a safe space in which trust can be built and where millennial leaders can grow, develop and take risks.

It is interesting to relate this to the desire for personalised feedback too. With a desire for regular feedback, a one-to-one mentor relationship enables that to happen in a consistent and reflective way. With 80% of surveyed millennials selecting that 'observing the leadership style of others' is one of the top three things that has most influenced how they lead, it echoes how many millennials told us that they had casual mentor relationships. Millennial leaders are also intentionally observing the leadership skills and character of other leaders they admire, seeking to imitate them and are receiving significant value in that process even when they may never have met or interacted personally.

The level of satisfaction in the quality of the mentoring being provided appears to be mixed, with 57% of millennial leaders finding the mentoring experience to be very effective and 43% finding it of only medium effectiveness or less. There is clearly some way to go in teaching and modelling effective mentoring approaches and interventions.

### Analysis

#### Tension is Our Norm

Millennials are also experiencing tensions within leadership development. Mentoring is seen as a strongly preferable method of leadership development, and millennials were very keen on developing, empowering and mentoring others.

However, to mentor someone implies that the mentor feels they have something to offer. One millennial leader explained: 'something I'm still going through is seeking the confidence that I am able to make a difference and I am making a difference.'

**So there is an existing tension where millennials are wanting to empower, develop and mentor, however they are also lacking in confidence and self-esteem, which could hold them back from making the most of this opportunity.**

# Opportunities and Challenges

There were three significant opportunities and challenges that were mentioned consistently by millennial leaders as they self-reflected. These were: work-life balance, managing conflict and technology.



## Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance was a topic that millennials had a variety of opinions on. Some saw a very clear distinction between work and life and wanted to make sure that work did not encroach on their opportunity to 'live' and have time to do other things aside from work. This view was expressed by one millennial leader as keeping to work-life boundaries 'very clearly' and trying to 'keep as much to...9-5 as possible'.

Others saw indistinct boundaries between work and life and were struggling to set boundaries. This was especially true in jobs within churches and Christian agencies because of the vague lines between work, personal ministry and friendships. There is often an expectation that leaders will receive and respond to work emails and messages at home outside of normal work hours. One millennial leader shared, 'I need to get a better work-life balance...when you're in an environment like a church, there are a lot of blurred lines between friendship and work and life. I still probably haven't quite nailed it yet.'

However, some millennial leaders dismissed the idea of work-life boundaries altogether, preferring to see a whole-life balance where there is purpose in what you are doing at work and at home which then all blends into one. These millennials are choosing to balance their time in the most productive way for them.

One told us they see it as 'more of a blend I think, than a split'. Another explained it by saying:

'often people talk about trying to get a really good balance in life...so I agree that my exercise will affect my sleep, my sleep will affect what time I get up in the morning, what time I get up in the morning will affect my Bible reading patterns and that will affect more things. My health will determine how good a leader I am and how good a speaker I am.'

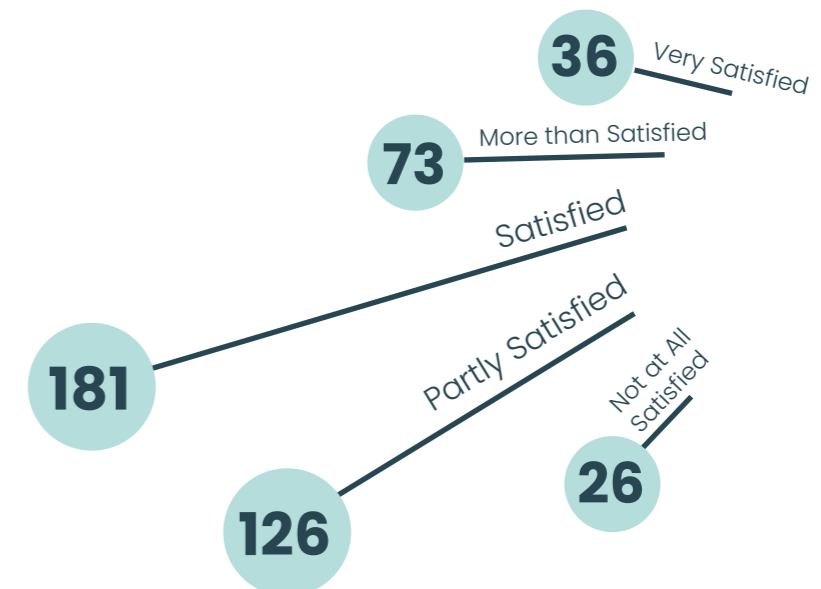
Another interviewee has:

'always found work-life balance quite a hard issue to grapple with for the reason that I think if you are really passionate about what you do and why you are doing it then that will overflow [into all areas of life].'

The online survey also found that only 8% selected that they were 'very satisfied' with their current work-life balance with 34% either 'partly' or 'not at all' satisfied.

When those who were less than satisfied with their work-life balance were asked what the biggest issue was, 'blurred boundaries' was the biggest contributor at 39%.

## How satisfied are you with your own work-life balance at the moment?





## Conflict Management

Another challenge millennial leaders voiced, which did not feature at all in the literature review, but was one of the biggest problems stated, is conflict management. In the interviews, one millennial concluded,

**'I think that's one of the weaknesses of the millennial generation.'**

53% of millennial leaders in the survey said they only feel equipped to a medium or lesser level to deal with conflict and 69% have received no training in managing conflict at all. One interviewee shared:

**'I always admire leaders who can have those difficult conversations, (not necessarily with me, that would be horrible!) That's one thing I would love to learn to do well.'**

Conflicts are occurring most frequently over work approach, culture, ethos, and values. However, conflicts with older people who millennials are leading were considered the hardest conflicts to deal with.

'The most difficult things I've found are having to go to more experienced staff, who are all older than me, and having to sit down and say "this is not working".'

Another explained, 'you're seen as young. Sometimes that can have an impact on how people communicate with you. I think that's probably one of the most challenging things.'

This was again highlighted when a millennial leader shared his dilemma:

**'I was with someone who was deliberately malicious...and destructive...I brought someone with me and said "can you understand this is a real issue?"...He pulled the trump card "I'm 68 and you're 22". In those situations, what can you say?'**

**53%** of millennial leaders in the survey said they only feel equipped to a 'medium' or 'lesser level' to deal with conflict.

## Technology

Technology was pinpointed as both a challenge and an opportunity. Social media, emails and texts are seen as a challenge due to the immediacy and pressure they can cause, and how they may make millennial leaders seem to be more impersonal if they spend more time interacting with people on social media than the people they are present with.

However, technology more widely is also seen as a huge opportunity to enable greater leadership influence because 'it feels like the potential leadership reach is much bigger' through the Internet, video, webinars and broadcasting.

When asked about the contributions that millennials can make to leadership, one said: 'We are the most technologically advanced generation.'

### Analysis

#### For Us, Relationship Is Everything

When analysing the opportunities and challenges the research identified, this relational thread is present also. Conflict management was cited as one of the greatest difficulties in leading. This high level of anxiety over conflicts could be because relationships are held in such a high regard that there is a great deal to lose if a conflict turns a relationship sour. Furthermore, a concern over whether emails, social media and texts are too impersonal and being overused in a leadership context was expressed – highlighting the value of real interaction to build relationships. Clearly, relationships are everything.

### Analysis

#### Tension is Our Norm

The opportunities and challenges presented by millennials have underlying tensions too. For example, with technology there is a love/hate relationship, yet millennials are known as 'digital natives'.

Furthermore, when exploring millennials wanting whole-life balance as opposed to work and life boundaries, they complain of blurred boundaries and working too much. This implies a mindset of having set boundaries between work and life, not a sense of whole-life balance.

When it comes to conflict management, this desire for whole-life balance can have detrimental effects, because a conflict situation is less likely to be confined just to work, but could spill over into each part of a millennial's life and become overwhelming – especially if social groups are overlapping.

### Analysis

#### Wholeness and Resilience Bring Us Sustainability

Millennial leaders reported understanding the need for balance and space to be able to lead to their full ability, and the importance of building resilience into their lives by developing rhythms that work. Of course, resilience encompasses so much more than balance and rhythms in life, but when speaking with millennial leaders, resilience and whole-life balance were very much linked in their minds.

Millennials are trying to get a 'really good balance in life', understanding that exercise affects sleep which affects productivity. Work-life balance was closely linked to this idea of whole-life balance and creating resilience, with millennial leaders explaining they put aside rest days and control their own diaries to ensure space and balance.

'I control my diary, so I work really hard at saying no. I'm particularly working hard at that at the moment because I moved house recently, so staying local is really important in the early stages of building new community.'

Others described planning rhythms within their life to create a sense of whole-life balance, explaining, 'I always take a rest day. Two days off a week. Always a retreat day every month. That's in the diary for the whole year before everything else is.'

Another interviewee gave further insight into whole-life balance. He asks himself reflective questions such as 'How much time am I seeing my wife this last week? How much sleep have I got? Have I been committed to my hockey team? Do I feel like I've been able to be at church stuff ... honouring commitments there?'

The theory is there, as millennial leaders describe behaviours and rhythms in their life to build balance and resilience, yet they expressed a struggle with implementing this theory.

One millennial expressed the challenge: 'It's something that I've acknowledged – lots of my peers have needed counselling over recent years just because of the challenge of keeping going. So when you ask "how do you cope?", I don't think I do fully. When I am leading other community leaders in the church and they are just saying, "Look, I'm tired, burnt out, life is hard," and I'm feeling the same, and I'm like "OK, what is really going on here? What is Jesus calling us to? Is he leading me to be the superhero who always has the answers, or can I lead alongside them a little bit, but sharing the challenges that they are sharing and finding hope and joy in that?" But it looks different to when I was 20, and I didn't have dependents and I slept for eight hours!'

Learning from experience, another millennial leader explained the need to draw healthy boundaries to achieve a satisfying whole-life balance: 'Sometimes you just need to stop. There's always more you can do, and learning what you can do and when you should say no can be challenging, and how do you draw the boundaries when you've got to lead loads of other people?'

Millennials are taking up positions of leadership in an 'always-on' world. They are building resilience to cope and to enable their influence to increase through their leadership. It is a journey, but one millennials are tackling with an understanding of the importance of resilience and balance.

With increasing awareness of mental health issues amongst this age group (Fries, 2017), the signs from the research are that millennial leaders are taking the issue of wholeness and wellbeing extremely seriously, and that this is impacting the way they think and act at work, and the cultures they are seeking to create.



#### Ruth's Story

**'When I took on my first leadership role I worked way too long...I had to say to my manager: "It's really really impacting my life outside of work and it's not acceptable."**

'We were carrying vacancies, and I carried too much of the load of it. And after that I learnt that I'm never going to get myself into that place again because it was horrible, and a few friends were saying to me "this is not good" ... So since then I've been quite ruthless about my time. I know that helped me get work in perspective really, and I'm involved at work in our wellbeing group that we have to try

and tackle some of these issues around work-life balance, resilience and saying no...When I started my most recent job I said to my manager..."I'm really ruthless about my work. I will go to the gym at lunch sometimes, this is the time I get in; I work from home one day a week. I will always leave by 5:30."

'I've set myself really strong boundaries and I think that's really important as well when you're a leader for other people to see you setting the boundaries... I'm quite conscious that I can let work become the priority in my life. I definitely have that tendency to put my value in my work. I value myself based on my work and that's something I am really aware of and so I need to try and force myself not to get into that space by saying to myself "it's ok to go home, just leave, the world is not going to fall apart."

# Spirituality

The research explored the spirituality of millennial leaders, which gave insight into their relationship with Jesus and their relationship to the church and the Bible.

There is a real desire to glorify God through their leadership, and to make decisions out of a deep relationship with God:

‘ultimately everything I do I want it to be for God and for his glory.’

Many have set personal daily rhythms to spend time with Jesus, and they increase that time when leadership is tough and they need to recharge. One millennial shared, ‘I need my Jesus time’. Another explained that they use their faith to help them with difficulties in leading, such as hard conversations: ‘I pray before I have those conversations. I find where my strength really comes from because no matter what anybody says to me the situation doesn’t really get better unless I remind myself of the [Bible] verses that encourage me.’

The local church has played a significant part in the leadership development of millennial leaders through internships, mentoring and teaching.

‘when I was growing up they gave me opportunities to lead. I think that’s been really helpful to me in my development as a leader.’

The online survey results showed that 66% marked church as being in the top three of the most influential factors on their identity as a leader from a list of eight.

The Bible is used by the majority of millennial leaders within their everyday leadership. For example, when managing conflict situations, and using Bible verses to give focus and vision in the workplace and leadership.

In an interview, one millennial leader explained to us that she has written some Bible verses about the fruit of the Spirit in her work planner to remind her to consider whether her leadership is reflecting those fruits.

When asked online what is most helpful in applying the Bible to leadership, mentoring was ranked by far the highest at 36%, with other approaches such as Bible Studies (11%), Books (10%), Podcasts (8%) and Sermon Series (7%) ranking much lower. 10% of millennial leaders said that they hadn’t found anything that works.

The results on the authority of the Bible were that only 50% of survey respondents selected the Bible as being the highest authority in their life and 39% said that whilst it was a high authority, it is not the ultimate authority.

Moreover, millennial leaders voiced the serious challenge in holding to the authority of the Bible because of the hostile culture, and the culture that

encourages everyone to have their own truths. One interviewee stated:

‘Being courageous in holding to the Bible in the next generation will be crucial’ as it is being ‘undermined everywhere’.

When asked about the most difficult area of life to relate the Bible and its teachings to, ‘family and friends’ was selected as the biggest struggle by 52% of participants.

Through the interviews and survey questions there was a desire expressed for a safe place where millennial leaders can be free to express their struggles and ask questions relating to the Bible’s teachings and how to apply them in the workplace.

## Analysis

### For Us, Relationship Is Everything

The subject of millennial leaders’ spirituality also demonstrates the relational thread. The church is praised as a valuable support network providing mentors, leadership opportunities, and relationships to recharge through.

In addition, mentors – a relational method – were seen as the best way to get help to apply the Bible to leadership, and more significant than podcasts, YouTube, sermons, small groups and books.

Finally, the issue of struggling with relating the Bible to family and friends could potentially be because relationships are valued so highly that the cost of ‘messing up’ or offending people, for example with biblical passages on moral issues, is seen as extremely high. It may also explain why many millennial leaders did not state the Bible as their ultimate authority because if it could upset those around them, then they may not want to stick firmly to its messages.

## Analysis

### Tension is Our Norm

Despite the majority of millennials stating that they use the Bible within their everyday leadership, there is a large proportion who selected that they do not believe that the Bible is the ultimate authority in their life, showcasing another tension.

Another tension of holding to what the Bible says exists because of wanting to live out the values of the Bible, but also not wanting conflict and not wanting to go against others’ opinions because of the high need for approval. The worry of offending others or needing approval does not sit comfortably when taking the Bible as the highest authority.

50% of survey respondents selected the Bible as being the highest authority in their life.





# Implications and Recommendations

This research brings significant themes to light surrounding Christian millennial leaders and their leadership development that can be of widespread benefit. Therefore, it is imperative that we reflect on what is next in light of these findings.

To do so, Forge Leadership met with church leaders, millennials and non-millennials in the UK, in a series of focus groups to reflect on and wrestle with the research, and to help in the formation of recommendations in

applying these research findings. We have split the recommendations into specific audiences for ease of application. Many of them arise naturally out of the analysis of this research.

## Recommendations for millennial leaders

1. **Be aware of the tensions surrounding identity and take time to self-reflect.**

Take time to reflect on your own identity as a leader and how you can settle the underlying tensions within your own life in order to lead in the most effective way from a healthy identity.

Becoming more self-aware in these areas can be one of the biggest gifts you can give to the people you are leading.

2. **Look for a mentor.**  
Make it a high priority to seek out a mentor who can walk through leadership with you, in a focused and contextualised way.
3. **Put yourself in environments of high challenge and high support.**  
When you are looking for a job, seek out environments that offer high challenge, but

also offer high support. Put a high emphasis on identifying workplaces that will enable you to take risks and fail, and that provide supportive leaders who will journey with you, support you, and help you to recharge when leadership is tough.

4. **Develop healthy conflict management skills.**  
Practice the concepts of grace, forgiveness and healthy conflict management. Understand, reflect and learn about rhythms that work for you. Reflect on whole-life balance and work it in a way that refreshes you.
5. **Take leadership opportunities whenever they are offered, even if you don't feel equipped to do so.**

Take any chances to learn on the job because they will serve as catalysts to leadership development for you.



## Recommendations for Organisations

- 1. Take time to get to know millennials. It is a nuanced picture so learn the reality behind the headlines.**  
Take time to get to really know millennials and how they are leading. What do they struggle with? What are their contributions? How can they be best supported? Millennial leaders are individuals and the picture is far more nuanced than the previous stereotypes reveal.
- 2. Learn how to mentor well and enable a culture of mentoring for millennials.**

Build a culture where mentorship is the norm, and make it straightforward for each millennial leader to access a mentor.

Teach effective mentoring skills across the organisation to improve the level of success of

mentoring interventions. Emphasise the two-way nature of mentoring, enabling learning across generations.

In addition, ensure that leadership courses and development programmes encompass an element of one-to-one mentoring within them.

- 3. Train millennials to deal with conflict in a healthy manner.**  
Develop specific training interventions and coaching for millennial leaders on how to deal with conflict and bring about conflict resolution in a healthy manner.
- 4. Support cultures and environments of self-care and living balanced lives in order that millennials may flourish as leaders.**  
Work towards establishing a culture where a sense of whole-life balance is encouraged and where employees' holistic wellbeing is valued.

To increase productivity and enable flourishing, balance, space to learn, and time to recharge, a relational leadership culture should be developed and modelled in organisations.

Teaching and modelling this, and encouraging policies and cultures which endorse this, will be beneficial to millennials. Ensuring self-care and a balanced lifestyle means millennial leaders will be at their most productive, and they will then create environments that are conducive to those they lead to develop and perform to their best.

- 5. Give millennials real leadership opportunities to develop and lead change.**

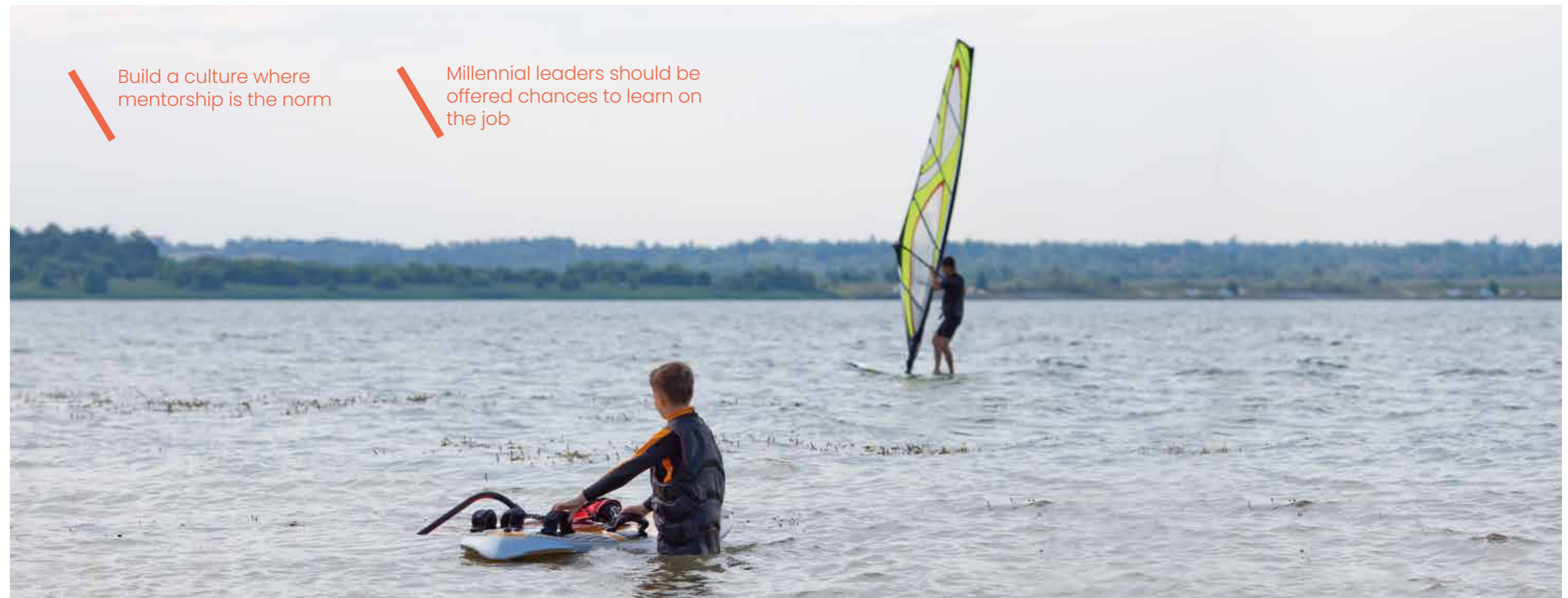
Millennial leaders should be offered chances to learn on the job with real, not just token, responsibility in order to learn,

develop and grow while actually leading.

Giving regular, focused feedback will be appreciated and allow millennial leaders to have the confidence to keep learning and developing.

- 6. Create environments of high support and high challenge for millennials.**  
Enable them to take risks within safe spaces where they will be supported in their leadership development regardless of the outcome.
- 7. Create safe places in which issues around resilience, mental health and whole-life balance can be explored.**

Create safe spaces in small groups where questions are welcomed and vulnerability is encouraged and where millennials can take time to reflect on issues of resilience, mental health and whole-life balance.



Build a culture where mentorship is the norm

Millennial leaders should be offered chances to learn on the job



## Recommendations for churches

1. **Give young people more opportunities to lead that will help to prepare them for leadership in the workplace.**

The research found that the church has been hugely significant in the development of millennial leaders through giving practical leadership opportunities, often stretching millennials beyond what they felt ready for.

Because a safe space was created where it was ok to risk and fail, these were extremely impactful for learning and development.

This was true whether the leaders ended up leading in churches or in charities, the public or private sector. There is a huge opportunity for churches to be even more intentional in increasing those opportunities, and being more specific in recognising the value they are bringing.

In focus groups around the research results, church leaders mentioned the need to ensure that opportunities are offered to all young people and not just the louder, more confident and obvious candidates for leadership.

2. **Focus on teaching how to handle relationships and conflict well.**  
Teach practical steps that enable millennials to identify conflict, address it directly and transform the situation whilst maintaining a relational approach is key. Teaching will need to address forgiveness, grace and self-esteem/identity within this context.
3. **Identify mentors and develop them.**  
Develop training and support for members of your congregation in learning how to mentor effectively. The benefits are the preparation of a new generation of leaders who are equipped to lead and influence across all sectors of society and who have a strong support network within the local congregation.

One church leader included in the discussions explained that the challenge for older leaders in mentoring is to be less guarded and more vulnerable, explaining that if a mentor relationship is just once a week then it is easy to give an hour of good

advice, but the real challenge is to welcome millennials into our lives. This means that integrity - the alignment of words and action - can be better observed, teaching can be rooted in practice, character issues can be addressed, and accountability provided. Mentoring was recognised as important by church leaders in providing space for millennials to reflect, grow and develop.

4. **Provide help to leaders so that they understand their identity as a child of God.**

Provide time, space and biblical teaching to allow millennial leaders to reflect and grow in understanding their identity in Christ.

Church leaders in focus groups pointed out the current difficulty of an older generation of leaders who speak about the theory of identity in Christ yet have often put a lot of energy into work and secured their value and identity in that.

Millennial leaders are more self-aware about their identity issues, but need space and time to go deeper into this, and support to grapple with the fear of failure and the need for approval that are so prevalent amongst their generation. Church leaders expressed an understanding that it is very difficult to lead when living with high anxiety about being popular and approved of.

5. **Invite millennials into a culture of high support and high challenge that hones and develops integrity and alignment of words and action.** Create environments of high support and high challenge where millennial leaders can take risks, experiment, fail, pick themselves up again, be encouraged, and develop and grow.

The proximity to leaders' lives being encouraged within these cultures means they are highly attractive to millennials because they can observe other leaders up close, ensure their own words and actions align in a highly practical way, and be part of a supportive team.

One church leader talked of creating 'huddles' for leaders across all sectors of society that met fortnightly, enabling them to tackle real life issues in a supportive environment.

6. **Increase communication and support between the local church and Christians in the private and public sectors.**  
Identify those millennial leaders within your congregation who are already in leadership in other contexts and then create appropriate support networks that are safe and allow tackling of real issues.

Creating wider channels of communication is important, especially as leadership development through church has been so significant in the development of many millennial leaders, and churches have a much greater opportunity to not only develop and support leaders for churches, but many more leaders for the private and public sectors.

7. **Create safe places in which issues around resilience, mental health and whole-life balance can be explored.**

Create groups for millennial leaders where questions are welcomed and vulnerability encouraged, and where they can be supported to reflect on issues of resilience, mental health and whole-life balance.

The training of leaders within your congregations to create these safe spaces is an excellent first step





## Megan's Story

In 2015 whilst on a year's ministry retreat in California, Megan felt the call to play a role in helping women who are survivors

of trafficking, by pursuing a future of building networks of 'women supporting women', and 'businesses supporting women.'

Megan describes what happened next:

'I got the courage to make a change and to enter the biggest leadership transition of my life so far, which was to leave my corporate job. And when I resigned I had nothing to go to. I knew I just had

to do something about this cause which I felt so deeply about. That's when I unexpectedly was offered a role to lead a fledgling anti-trafficking charity, which really was the start of fulfilling the deep sense of purpose I felt in helping vulnerable women. I had decided that I was going to be intentional in the impact I wanted to have. I think that the idea of being intentional is so important, particularly in the current culture of busyness and overload. Having an intention then following it through in any given circumstance makes someone a leader. I think it's the heart of leadership, to know what is for you to do, and then do it.'

This deep sense of vision and purpose helped Megan to fully realise her dream and flourish.

Use #millennialleadership to join the conversation

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**Millennial  
Leadership**

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