The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers.

Socrates (469-399BC)

A famous quote attributed to the Greek philosopher more than 2400 years ago shows that the problems caused by generational gaps are not unique or isolated to certain generations. It has been an ongoing battle that each generation will inevitably face on both sides of the fence.

While the overall theme of the connection may be consistent, each generation grows up in a slightly different environment which causes the goal posts to shift every time. With this in mind it’s not too much of a stretch to say that this issue will remain long after my time on earth is done.

While slightly comforting to know that you are not the first or last to fight the generational gap, competitive sport throughout history has always been one of the great levellers. On the field, in the heat of battle, it does not matter how special a player feels or what background they come from. At the end of the day the player and the team will ultimately be judged on their performance. Through this performance you the coach will be judged so all you really want to know is how to connect best with your crop of players to get the best results.

My coaching career has seen me be a skills coach of an academy for the past 10 years dealing mainly with 17-24 year olds who want to become professional players. My longevity in the coaching role has seen me transform from coaching within my generation to now dealing with new bane of society... The Millennial. At the start of my coaching career my greatest asset, although I didn’t fully understand it at the time, was being within my generation. I could relate to the players and get my point across effortlessly. I could provide an environment for players where they felt at ease and through this comfort where able to focus on what really mattered. However as I aged I had to develop as a coach. My connection with a player was no longer a give in and instead something that I had to work at. But how should I tackle a problem that is apparently older than Jesus??

My first task was to know my audience. With that in mind I suppose its probably important to explain what a Millennial is.

The exact years can vary a little but most studies state that a Millennial is born anywhere from the mid 1980’s until the mid 2000’s. They have grown up in a time of unbridled
communication and information sharing. Relatively and for the most part they live in a stable time where they can feel safe and supported.

These things lead to them being more dependent on their family for longer. They have a need to promote themselves in a positive light on social media as their lives are so easily accessible. They are also greater connecting with the world and what is happening within it. The ease of access to information has lead to them being better educated.

If Socartes was around today he may say are entitled, narcissistic and lack resilience. Someone else might say they are just confident, feel special and on a quest to make a difference in the world.

My next step is to realise I can not change what era the Millenial have grown up in. I can only control the controllables from my point of view. With that in mind I make sure I am always;

1. Professional – the young kids of today seek professionalism.
   The modern athlete has never been most accessible through social media and every time a player is painted on a positive light the word professional comes up. They crave that environment, and the first time a lot of players get to be exposed to this type of thing is at school setting. For lots of players this sets the bar of expectations for the club career but sadly time, money and a few other factors limit what most clubs can do compared to schools.
   My first step to providing a professional environment is to be organised. I have a clear plan for this week, month and ultimately year for both the team and the player. I make sure that I meet with players on an individual basis regularly. I talk about short and long term goals of the players. I let them lead with what needs to happen for these to come into effect and offer suggestions. I find this helps them feel safe and valued. I am no longer just a coach but also someone with a vested interest in their path to success.
   I am also strict on things like punctuality and communication. Two things that all young people struggle with, no matter the generation, but are non-negotiable at the next level.

2. Be confident in your knowledgeable
   The sources in which a person can find knowledge today seems limitless. Every budding rugby player would have spent time searching YouTube videos for the best attacking plays ect and think they now know the best way to do things.
   So it’s important that you know why you do what you do. The positives and negatives in your style of play.
   Now rather than telling the player this is how its done, its important to engage the team in the process. Ask questions and let them tell you the answers to your plans. This enables buy in and again they feel valuable or special to the process.

3. Be approachable
   Players want to be inspired like they were when they watched their first YouTube “big hits clip”. They see you as someone who can help them. They don’t want to be
told what to do rather placed in an environment where they have the potential to learn. For this they need to feel comfortable with you and the group. Only problem is so much of their life is on social media the art of getting to know someone with in your team or training group is harder for these people and can often happen away from the field as they look through their teammates Bali 15’ album or relate to someone through the list of mutual friends they have seen online. Breaking down the barriers for not only yourself but the team is crucial. They have to feel comfortable that they can be heard without fear and trust without worry. Which leads to you been able to be...

4. Honest and consistent

It is often mentioned that this generation through parents, school and participation trophies have been lead to feel they are special and unique. That if they want something all they have to do is go out and get it. Unfortunately getting a wallaby’s jersey is not that easy. It takes hours of practice and being helped to improve when you skill is not at the required level.

As a coach with honesty to the millennial generation you can walk a tight rope. Be to frank and you risk losing the player when they no longer feel special or trust you as coach. Not frank enough and you do the player a disservice and don’t help their ultimate goal.

My philosophy is you always have to tell the truth and be consistent with it. As we all know the delivery is the key. Let the player see that the feedback is to help them achieve their goals not to criticise the skill.

Being consistent with this feedback gives the player a base to build off. The player themselves can feed off your consistency and develop his own.

The youth of today may still love luxury and have bad manners but all you have to worry about is connecting with the players to help them get the best out of themselves. As the coach I do everything I can to help set a professional environment for the player that allows them to feel safe, privileged and free to express themselves. One where they are in charge of their own future and I am nothing but a tool which can help them get there. You help set the standard and help navigate but it must be the players who steer the ship.

Cameron McIntosh