

M A N A G I N G *Millennials*

Learning how to work optimally with the newest generation of lawyers will drive success for forward-thinking law firms.

BY TOM GIMBEL



The newest generation of lawyers is entering the workplace armed with iPhones, laptops, and MP3 players, along with a unique attitude toward work. The partnership track has lost its luster for this new generation's members, who are content with good benefits, flexible schedules, and even lower pay for less billable hours. Though young people have always been seen as different from their elders, this generation, often referred to as the "millennials," is progressively different in significant ways, and this is causing challenges within many law firms.

With the emergence of millennials, law firms are employing four generations of attorneys and staff, and each generation has different ideas about how work should be done. The millennials, however, are causing the most confusion and concern. These tech-savvy, plugged-in

professionals have a much different vision of what life as an attorney should be and expect to spend more time with their kids than in the office.

This is a big concern for the almost 70 percent of law firm partners who are baby boomers. These professionals have already begun trickling out of the workplace, and they are concerned with their legacies. Many partners feel the new generation lacks the passion, drive, and discipline to follow in their footsteps. Yet, during the next several years, law firms will lose almost three-quarters of their partnerships, which means millennial hiring will abound.



SHORTCUT

By understanding who millennials are and how to manage this new generation of legal professionals, law firms can leverage their unique abilities and be more successful businesses over the long term.

Though many partners and senior partners are concerned about en masse hiring of millennials, not all of their concerns are warranted. Because millennials are so different from their predecessors, they tend to be highly misunderstood. Preceding generations often misinterpret their motivation as impatience and their enthusiasm as narcissism. But by seeking to understand millennials' motivations and their generational footprint, law firms can learn to leverage their abilities and groom them into top-notch employees

WHO ARE THE MILLENNIALS?

Millennials are people born after 1980. They share a generational personality that covets teamwork, self-worth, and technology. Among millennials' typical characteristics:

- **Connected:** Technology is a natural language for millennials, who grew up plugged into laptops and iPods. Their world is mobile and in the palms of their hands 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They rely on technology and feel more comfortable communicating through e-mail and text and instant messaging than in person.
- **Confident:** Millennials were raised by doting parents who instilled in them senses of purpose and self-worth. Parents told them they were "special," and culture catered to them with specialized services like Baby Gap, Nickelodeon, and *Sports Illustrated for Kids*. They have high levels of optimism and have been told repeatedly they will be successful.
- **Conventional:** Much like the baby boomers, millennials have strong relationships with their parents and place a high value on family. They are respectful and civic-minded. They often believe in conformity, and their fear of being deemed non-conformists leads them to participate in mainstream culture.
- **Team-Oriented:** From a young age, millennials have participated in team sports, group activities, and play groups. They value teamwork and eagerly seek the input of many. They're part of a

no-person-left-behind generation, and they're willing to fight for what is "fair."

- **Believers in Work/Life Balance:** Unlike members of preceding generations who anchor themselves in work, millennials favor more family time, less travel, and less personal pressure. They view life and work as two separate entities – and life comes before work. Millennials do not view it as work/life balance, but rather as life/work balance.

GROOMING THE NEXT GENERATION

Effectively grooming the next generation of attorneys is imperative to future success and retention of rising stars. If firms do not take the initiative to create cultures and devise management styles for millennials, they will miss out on a generation of workers who can be highly productive, loyal, and great relationship builders with clients.

Learning to manage millennials is comparable to learning to drive a new car. At first, it can be kind of tricky. The brakes may be sensitive, the steering a bit stiff, and the handling unpredictable. But once it's broken in and driven a few times, it has amazing performance.

Millennials are brimming with potential; they just need a little guidance and the right management style, which involves meeting their innate needs in an environment that fosters growth.

GIVE THEM MENTORS

In the legal profession, mentoring dates to the 13th century, when judges had to provide for the apprenticeships of lawyers. Today, mentoring remains an effective way of developing law firm business. Millennials crave attention in the forms of guidance, advice, and genuine interest. An informal mentoring program gives them the confidence to solve problems, the encouragement to contribute to the firm's success, and the guidance needed to grow as attorneys.

People want to work for people they care about. By providing millennials with mentors, bonds of mutual respect are formed between them and



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higher-level attorneys. Even though millennials are stereotyped as a generation of people who will not work late, they will in order to contribute to the successes of mentors who have formed relationships with them. Millennials value the genuine interest mentors take in them, and they will work harder for colleagues whom they appreciate and respect.

Mentoring can also benefit partners and senior partners through a program called reverse mentoring – when elder mentors not only teach younger mentors, but also learn from them. Millennials are highly skilled in new technology and social networking, which many baby boomers and Generation Xers sometimes find hard to understand.

GET THEM INVOLVED

Millennials know they have a lot to offer and are eager to share it. Forget menial tasks like fetching coffee; millennials want meaningful work. So, get them involved in as many projects as possible. Firms that are organized around client teams provide millennials with opportunities to engage in larger issues and work with more senior attorneys.

Millennials revel in opportunities to be involved, and such opportunities represent one of the best ways to build their loyalty and commitment. Allowing them to sample more challenging work shows them they have opportunities to grow. Keep them excited about things to come.

COMMUNICATE

Communication is the cornerstone of millennials. They tend to be over-communicators, which stems from their ties to ubiquitous technological tools. Keep them in the loop about upcoming and current projects, and provide rationales for the work they are doing and how it adds value. Clearly define assigned tasks, but be prepared for frequent questions that you should answer thoroughly.

Millennials thrive on constructive communication, particularly feedback. As a generation of driven perfectionists, millennials want to ensure their work

is done correctly, as well as receive praise. Praise and reassurance push millennials to work harder and produce better quality work. Small gestures such as a simple “thank you” can go a long way with millennials.

BE FLEXIBLE

Finding a good work/life balance can be hard for many attorneys, but for millennials, it is a must. Millennials were raised in a consumer economy and expect to influence the terms and conditions of their own careers. They believe employers should understand the importance of their personal lives and be flexible in allowing them to take care of personal issues during work hours.

Millennials are also firm believers in being evaluated on output rather than input. Raised with the flexibility technology affords them, millennials believe they should be granted flexible schedules because technology allows it. They want to be evaluated on their work product rather than when and where they do the work.

WORTH THE EFFORT

By understanding who millennials are and how to manage them, law firms can begin to make business sense out of this newest batch of talent. In the coming years, they will become more prevalent and imperative in the work world, and success will come only from understanding and leveraging their unique abilities.

Ultimately, millennials have the drive and ability to become the next wave of top-notch attorneys if groomed right by their predecessors.

about the author

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Facilitated Dialogues Among Multigenerational Work Teams

BY PHYLLIS WEISS HASEROT

Like many other businesses, law firms are feeling challenged by attitudinal and behavioral differences among the generations. While not yet having figured out the younger half of Generation X (those born from approximately 1970 to 1978), they have been struck by the next generational wave – Generation Y, also known as “millennials.” Members of this generation require a different style of management to get the most out of them, and dialogues among work teams are central to establishing the most effective approaches.

Dialogue is more important than ever because there is too little in-depth communication and feedback, formal or informal. The increasingly diverse team members need to understand each other’s needs, objectives, talents, and attitudes better. Retention is based primarily on relationships, and misunderstandings are costly.

Typical issues that arise among the generations are the desire for work-life flexibility, differing attitudes about teamwork, older professionals reporting to younger managers, and perceptions about work ethic. Of course, dialogues on issues other than generational ones are extremely valuable for building and retaining a high-performance culture. These might include project management, client contact preferences, staffing for assignments, and face-time issues.

Effective communication is critical to making anything work, but dialogues are a particular type of communication. Not only are they two-way, but also the balance of power is intended to be more evenly distributed than in a one-way or command-and-control type of communication.

Members of the younger generations have little respect for authority that is not earned by merit and personal relationships. Mere seniority and appointed position are not enough to earn loyalty. Generation Y (or “Why”) expects to be able to have input, and one of the keys to engagement is to listen to their ideas and consider them. They don’t expect all their ideas to be accepted, but they want the respect of being heard.

HOW CHANGE HAPPENS

Change occurs through open and continuing dialogue. One of the best ways is through facilitated dialogues among members of work teams. Whatever the tension-causing

issues are, it is vital to get the differing views “out on the table” in a non-threatening manner. An environment of respect with no fear of retribution lays a foundation for producing satisfying resolutions. Dialogues are best facilitated by a neutral party – a coaching-trained non-lawyer from either inside or outside the firm, or a person who has facilitator training and experience.

In some firms and for some issues, administrators might serve as facilitators, as they are likely to recognize issues among both staff and legal professional work teams and can recommend that the issues be addressed. Administrators can take the initiative in developing a process whereby work teams routinely conduct a dialogue at the beginning of each new project to set shared goals, clarify each team member’s role and expectations, and explain how results will be measured and recognized. They can pilot the process with a few teams, make modifications as needed, and gradually spread the process throughout the firm.

A SUCCESSFUL DIALOGUE

Consider these steps for conducting a successful dialogue.

- Gather as a group for a predetermined period of time with an agenda of issues.
- Articulate the desired outcomes and common goals.
- Agree to listen to each viewpoint respectfully.
- Allow opportunity for clarifications so each viewpoint is understood.
- Don’t dwell on the past, but rather focus on possible ways to achieve the desired outcomes. Brainstorm alternative approaches.
- Choose as a group a few approaches to try. Outline action steps and responsibilities.
- Agree on ways to track results, accountability, and change.
- Celebrate success and spread the word.

about the author



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