

Litigation Across Time and Generations: The Millennial Perspective

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The term “Millennial” is often seen as a dirty word. In the legal field, and in many people’s minds, it can evoke images of lazy, entitled, casually dressed young lawyers who speak too freely and demand flexible schedules to be able to spend more time taking selfies with their pets. As an attorney who falls squarely within this generation, I and others like me, bristle at the misconceptions which seem unfairly hoisted upon us. However, all stereotypes come from somewhere. The following seeks to explore the stereotypes which are often attributed to Millennials in the workplace versus the reality behind those typecasts from the perspective of a young lawyer. I also offer some ideas on how to reconcile these generational differences to achieve a more harmonious legal office for all attorneys.

The Stereotype:

Millennials are noncommittal and disloyal. They hop from job to job without regard for the investment made in them by their current employer.

The Reality:

We are a generation striving for a best fit when it comes to work. We also have more student loan debt than any generation before us, and, therefore, we are compelled to seek out opportunities for higher pay and career advancement when they arrive. We also feel a sense of similar disloyalty from employers as pensions have disappeared and at-will employment provides little protection for the employee. We dislike autocratic leadership styles and desire transparency in the workplace, especially as it applies to compensation.

The Compromise:

Millennials do not only seek financial security in choosing employment. Therefore, retaining talent does not always mean paying higher salaries. We also value adaptable paid time off policies and opportunities for pro bono projects or community outreach. We are the most racially diverse generation and we expect our employers to value true diversity and not just pay lip service to it. We also want our employers to have a core mission. Therefore, meaningful inclusion programs and companywide community involvement will help foster a sense of place and help keep young attorneys engaged in their jobs. Such programs will benefit Millennial attorneys by driving home the mission they seek and benefit the organization by promoting visibility and goodwill.

The Stereotype:

Millennials lack interpersonal skills and are addicted to their phones. They would prefer to use technology to communicate with attorneys, clients and others.

The Reality:

We are the most facile with technology as we are a generation raised on computers. We can use technology to help us multitask and perform necessary job functions faster and more efficiently. We can communicate quickly across platforms which provides recipients with an answer in less time. However, we haven't yet had the time in our careers to build the types of relationships that garner trustworthiness and business.

The Compromise:

Invest time in meaningful mentoring programs. Millennials crave feedback and employers interested in our personal and professional growth. One-on-one meetings allow younger attorneys to gain the benefit of experience from older attorneys and may help a younger generation of tech focused lawyers to develop the soft skills needed for success as a lawyer. In turn, older attorneys can share their insight into their practice and the importance of building rapport and relationships as well as the good will and positive reputation which is required for success in the legal industry.

The Stereotype:

Millennials have no work ethic. They expect to be able to leave the office at 4:30 and to work remotely whenever they please.

The Reality:

We are a generation that values a true work life balance. We do not believe that attorneys must be tied to their desks 80 hours a week to be successful. We are able to use technology to our benefit to telecommute from anywhere around the world.

We are also the generation that is most likely to be married to another person who also has a professional full-time career. Therefore, we share parenting and household duties with our spouses and value a flexible schedule to be able to accomplish these tasks. We also value robust maternity/paternity leave policies.

The Compromise:

Fortunately, the legal field lends itself perfectly to remote work. Therefore, flexibility regarding working hours is feasible and will help retain young attorney talent as long as there is clear communication regarding the parameters of such telecommuting arrangements. This will

ensure that employers know that their associates are actually working when not in the office, while employees have the benefit of not being tied to their desks. Firms will ultimately be rewarded by hiring the most self-motivated individuals which will lead to employers needing to spend less time managing employees. This will benefit both the younger attorneys who will gain not only more freedom, but a sense of self-worth and pride regarding their ability to manage their own caseloads. Additionally, such work arrangements allow younger attorneys to feel as though they are being treated as a true professional. Ultimately everyone wants autonomy.