

## The Millennials are Here to Stay... But Will They Be Staying at Your Law Firm?

by Jennifer Colwell, MBA, CLM

Millennials today are between the ages of 23 and 38 years old. In today's current market, they are the largest sector of the nation's workforce at 38 percent, but by year 2025 that rate will increase to 75 percent.

In the past 13 years, I have seen numerous associates and law clerks come and go. After my law firm's most recent associate departure after only one year, I went on a mission to find out how we can do better in our hiring of this incredibly bright group of professionals. Not to mention, the older segment of this generation are entering positions to hire us as their company's law firm. I am going to generalize the millennial generation in this article, but please keep in mind that of course there are many exceptions. I also want to apologize to the millennials for labeling them as such. (They hate being labeled and appreciate any opportunity for autonomy in the workplace.)

### ***CHARACTERISTICS OF MILLENNIALS***

- ***Can do attitude!***
- ***Generation "nice"***
- ***Positive personal/self image***
- ***Work hard, play hard***
- ***Empowered***

Millennials have earned reputations as job hoppers. The younger members of this group grew up thinking in 140-character limits and send 10 billion videos a day through Snapchat. They think fast, they type fast, and all things considered, for them staying somewhere three to four years as opposed to three to four months is a *long* time! Right out of the gate, we have to accept that what they want is not necessarily what we think they should want. The millennials are truly a different generation with different values and goals – centered on purpose, feedback and work life balance.

No matter the firm size, almost every firm administrator that I have ever spoken with struggles with hiring and retaining millennials. Gallup held an amazing summit in May 2016 about how millennials want to work and live.

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Finally! It has only taken us 15 years to get a manual on what these people really want, just as Generation Edge has started to enter the workforce. Yep, things are only going to get more complicated from this day forward. Today, however, we are going to stay on topic and discuss millennial lawyers and let Gallup begin focusing on what constitutes Generation Edge, whom we will be hiring as clerks in about two more years.

If you are having a difficult time recruiting millennials, there may be factors you need to consider. Certainly, a shortage of recent law school graduates in the past 10 years is not one of them. Let's say you have a job opening and have posted it through online websites, the bar association, and/or local law school career service offices. These are all good options. More than likely, there will be hundreds of people who view your open position. Why? Because according to Gallup, 71 percent of millennials today are disengaged or actively disengaged with their current job. Carefully scrutinize anyone under the age of 36 employed by your firm and you will come to the conclusion that three out of four of your employees are not only dissatisfied, but they are also looking for a new job.

Potential candidates review your ad because they are currently disenchanted with their law firm, so they begin researching your firm. But they don't just go to your website. The millennials are prolific, well-versed online researchers, not to mention lawyers. They are going to look at every attorney's profile on your firm's website, LinkedIn, and reviews of the firm on every five-star rating site on the internet. They will then send a blast via one or all five of their preferred social media platforms to their other lawyer friends, asking them what they have heard about the firm and the lawyers employed there. They are going to judge your firm by the appearance of your website and attorney profiles wherever they appear on the Internet. If they don't like what they hear, they won't even apply. As a firm you now have two groups of customers – your clients **and** recruits.

Furthermore, what millennials are researching and what makes them take your position over another offer is **not money**. According to Gallup's research, the top five things millennials look for when applying (and staying) for jobs are:

1. Opportunities to learn and grow (look for feedback frequently and want to be challenged);
2. Quality of the supervising attorney(s) they will most closely be working with (seek leadership and structure, but expect respect to their ideas);
3. Quality of management (how well the firm is run – used to loving, doting parents);
4. Interest in the type of work they are doing on behalf of the firm (are they getting an opportunity to practice in multiple areas of the law); and
5. Opportunities for advancement and vision of their career in the firm (more complicated cases, experiences in other areas of law, more control over files, etc.).

One of the biggest misconceptions about millennials is the fact that they want to wear jeans and work in a casual environment. Not true! In fact, mega firms that have coffee shops as part of their infrastructure in an effort to attract millennials often find that desired recruits are still choosing to work across the street at Starbucks.

Millennials like to work in teams and have friends at work. In smaller firms, this can be particularly challenging because they may be the only millennial in the office. Take them to bar association events and other networking events that you attend to introduce them to the community. It will help them find friends and support sources while helping grow your business.

I also cannot omit that it is more important to millennials than previous generations to be truly connected to the purpose of the organization and whether the organization is supporting the greater good. This is a generation that really wants to "change the world." Nonprofit causes are important to them, as is your firm's purpose to the community.

**Consider the following actionable items for law firms to increase associate applicants:**

1. Make sure your website is reflective of modern times. Your website should incorporate design elements that attract millennial associates.
2. Make sure your office environment is reflective of what is referenced on the firm's website. Likewise, fresh and more modern open offices with lots of glass are more appealing to millennials than mahogany and granite.
3. Make sure every lawyer in your firm has a good LinkedIn profile. This means it is complete beyond your current employment and your picture is a recent professional photograph. No exceptions. Your LinkedIn profile should be your online résumé on steroids. You need to connect with people and actively use LinkedIn. If you don't know how to use it, there are a plethora of YouTube videos on the subject to help you learn.
4. Millennials tend to overshare their lives with the world and they expect others to do the same. If you enjoy writing as most lawyers do, consider blogging. Blogging is a form of open, honest conversations with readers, and the topics discussed may often be about the law but not always. Your readers (i.e., potential clients and applicants) will feel like they "know" you before they ever meet you. Be personable. Be transparent. Be yourself. Blogging can be particularly helpful for more introverted lawyers who express themselves in writing versus verbal communications with others.
5. Consider your firm's lawyers' reputations. Their ability to successfully interact with others on a professional and personal level is paramount compared to the quality of their legal work. Young associates probably do not know how to judge a work product and neither do the majority of clients.

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Remember, millennials are asking every one of their friends who has ever worked for your firm what the work environment was like.

6. Post online such as Indeed, CareerLink, LinkedIn, the state bar, and the local bar associations. Make a decision to personally speak with the nearby law school career services department for connections to alumni and recent graduates.
7. Sell your community and your connectedness to it. Explain how your lawyers and the law firm itself contribute to the community through your website.

Upon completion of Gallup's research, they found what millennials are searching for is not that different from older generations. However, as it relates to employment, two key differences are that 1) millennials will wait for the job they want to ensure the potential position will meet all of their career expectations and 2) millennials vote with their feet – if the job isn't meeting their expectations, they will find one that does.

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#### About the Author



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