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SUCCESSFULLY MANAGING THE MULTI-GENERATIONAL LAW FIRM

by

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Successfully Managing the Multigenerational Law Firm

WHITE PAPER

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Today's law firm leaders often have many issues on their plate, the most important of which is to make sure their firm is productive and profitable. One of the keys to a healthy firm is a solid firm culture with happy and engaged employees. If an employee is not happy, then their work will suffer or they may even choose to leave for another firm – both of which put the law firm at risk of losing clients and, in turn, revenue.

Though this is not a new issue for law firm leaders, it has become more difficult now that there are four generations in the workforce – the first time in history that this has been the case. With potentially 50 years between the oldest and youngest employees at a law firm, leadership should be aware of the key generational differences and how they affect an employee's work style, preferred communication methods, and motivational drivers. This identification and recognition will help the firm implement a successful generationally resonant set of guidelines and policies so all employees feel valued and engaged.

WHAT ARE THE GENERATIONS?

A person's generation is based on the year they were born, and is used to describe the period of time in which a person's formative ideas/thoughts, beliefs, and communication preferences are solidified based on external world events and societal norms.

Traditionalists (born before 1946), are often referred to as the World War II generation. This group of people makes up less than 5% of the workforce, but can most often be found in positions such as founding partner, of counsel, and sometimes paralegal or administrative assistant.

Baby Boomers (1946-1964), make up roughly one-third of today's workforce. They typically hold positions of power in law firms including roles like managing partner, executive director, department chair, or senior paralegal. Baby boomers often equate success with long hours worked and company loyalty.

Generation X (1965-1980), makes up roughly one-third of today's law firm workforce. This generation is ready to take the leadership helm from their baby boomer counterparts and is planning to make some drastic changes to how law firms have operated in the past, including more flexible work schedules and recognition based on results vs. time invested.

Millennials (1981-2000), comprise approximately 30% of the workforce. Though this is the youngest generation currently working and most often holds entry level, junior, or support staff positions, don't count them out. If effectively managed, they can produce results at a faster rate than many of the other generations and typically they are driven to excel.

UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATIONS

Effectively managing multiple generations begins with understanding what motivates each generation, what their preferred communication methods are, and at which tasks each generation excels. The chart below illustrates these for each generation and can be a good tool to use when educating other leaders of your firm.

	MOTIVATIONS	PREFERRED COMMUNICATION METHOD	TYPES OF TASKS
Traditionalist	Stability, harmonious environment, clear direction	Personal notes, face-to-face interaction	Work which requires historical knowledge. Given their preference for clear direction, they prefer projects that are easily outlined and clearly defined.
Baby Boomer	Work/life balance, cooperation, understanding the bigger picture	Phone calls, face-to-face interaction	Tangible projects that will show immediate impact. Baby boomers want to make a difference, which also makes them great candidates for pro bono or human interest work.
Gen X	Creativity, autonomy, ideation, project variety	Voice mail, email	Matters where "out of the box" thinking is an asset. Given Gen X's communicative skills, they are good at building pipelines and finding prospective clients.
Millennial	Recognition, optimism, the ability to multitask	Instant messages, text messages	Projects with high visibility. They thrive when projects directly address their career goals. Some might need guidance on developing effective interpersonal skills.

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NOW WHAT?

Put your knowledge into action. Firm education and implementation is not as hard as you might think. The following steps can help guide you towards driving uptake and engagement across your firm.

1. Understand your office's generational composition. That means compiling a list of all employees and which generation they fall into. Take a look at where your percentages lie. This will not only help you understand how best to communicate with your employees, but it will also shine a light on generational gaps that you may want to focus on to increase firm diversity.
2. Educate all leaders in your firm on the generations and how best to work with them. It's not enough for just the managing partner, executive director, or CEO to understand the value – all practice area heads, team leads, and people managers must be engaged as well.
3. Facilitate regular open discussions about generational differences and how they affect employees' work and relationships. Just being open to a dialogue and providing an open forum for employees to converse can do wonders to create and maintain a healthy firm culture.
4. Continue learning yourself. There are many valuable resources (a few are listed below) available to help you increase your knowledge and deepen your understanding of generational mindsets.

- Murphy, Susan "*Leading a Multigenerational Workforce.*" AARP. 2007. Web, 2007. **aarp.org**
- CPD Interactive "*A Guide to Understanding Generational Differences*." West LegalEdcenter® On Demand Webinar. August 15, 2014 **westlegaledcenter.com/search/displaySearchResults.jsf**
- Furi-Perry, Ursula "*The Millennial Lawyer: Making the Most of Generational Differences in the Firm*." American Bar Association. December 7, 2013

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