



Millennials: The Good, the Surprising, and the Important

Full disclosure: prior to my election as Secretary of the OCBA and as I began my journey to becoming President, I had not considered the growing influence of Millennials in the practice of law. I knew I wasn't one, having been born in that twilight between Generation X (the "ignored generation," according to *Time* magazine's contributor, M.J. Stephey) and the Baby Boomers. Rather, as most researchers and commentators agree, the Millennial generation consists of those born between 1980 and 1997 to 2000, meaning Millennials will still be filtering through law schools and into the practice of law for the next several years.

Millennials have been burdened with comments such as they don't understand "paying their dues" or they want "work-life balance." Imagine! Just when it seems to non-Millennials that this generation will be the destruction of everything held sacred, it is good to remember a famous quote:

Our youth now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for their elders and love chatter in place of exercise; they no longer rise when elders enter the room; they contradict their parents, chatter before company; gobble up their food and tyrannize their teachers.

This was no recent comment about Millennials. This was Socrates speaking over 2,500 years ago. Yes, every generation has had similar remarks about the generation(s) coming up behind them. I know my grandparents believed that about my generation, and I'm sure that their grandparents believed the same about them. Transcending this type of ageist judgment boils down to communication, understanding, and bridging the gap between generations.

When I attended the ABA's National Conference of Bar Presidents in New York City, several of the topics were devoted to Millennials, and how they are not joining voluntary bar associations because they do not see an immediate benefit. This surprised me as I had not seen this reluctance in the OCBA. There were several Millennials in attendance to discuss these issues, many from Ivy League schools, some of whom literally looked me in the eye and said: "We are unabashedly needy, we need constant and continuous praise on our performance, we need to feel we are relevant, and we need it now!" My mouth dropped open in disbelief. It was then I learned that several bar associations throughout the country have instituted task forces solely for the purpose of determining how to better relate, attract, and understand these elusive "Millennials." For example, the Kansas City Metropolitan Bar Association instituted Task Force M, which has three goals: focus on understanding and serving Millennials, connect generations, and provide value on this topic to law firms and the legal community. While the OCBA does not have a task force dedicated to Millennials, a review of what we already provide to our Millennial members and the legal community-at-large demonstrates that we are on track as to this issue.

Millennials are here to stay and they are going to be leading the practice of law and other professions for a long time to come. The really good news is that there is a lot to learn from this influential demographic. There are approximately 83 million Millennials in the United

States alone. One book I found of interest is *Chasing Relevance, 6 Steps to Understand, Engage, and Maximize Millennial Leaders in the Workplace* by Daniel Negroni (San Diego 2016) ("*Chasing Relevance*"). The book points out that Millennials already constitute 36% of the workforce, and they will be nearly 75% of employees and the most significant group of consumers by 2025. They already control \$660 billion in spending, and 90% of parents receive input from Millennials when making purchasing decisions. They are indeed a force to be reckoned with.

Dan Negroni's book also identifies that employers' primary disconnect with Millennials is they see Millennials as lacking initiative, having a sense of entitlement, being emotional, having unrealistic advancement goals, being impatient, being unable to remain engaged, having a poor work ethic, and failing to take responsibility. The Millennials, on the other hand, feel that the disconnect between them and their employers is unavailability of the employer, lack of timely responses, lack of positive feedback, lack of training, lack of communication, ineffective business planning, and lack of trust. How do you ever bridge these disconnects?

According to *Chasing Relevance*, there are three steps we can take to bridge this divide: (1) break through generational stereotypes, (2) understand and value different work styles, and (3) focus on and assume positive intent. In the end, employers should attempt to focus on individually challenging and providing individual growth opportunities for Millennials in their employ, paving the road by ensuring Millennials have what they need to be successful, engaging in continuous and regular open feedback (lose the "back in my day" phrase), and recognizing and celebrating in creative ways the successes along the way. Millennials should meet employers half way by embracing these opportunities.

The OCBA has taken strides in this regard. We have a very active Young Lawyers Division (YLD) with over 600 members, as well as a thriving Masters Division with over 1,100 members who have practiced law twenty-five years or more. These two influential groups have been working and planning events together to bridge any generational divide. One of these events is the Trivia Night at a local tavern—always a crowd favorite! We also have a very vibrant Mentoring Committee matching our new attorneys with more experienced attorneys. Another event to be planned by the OCBA Diversity Committee will be a workshop for diverse members in conjunction with our Masters Division to showcase how to get the most of your mentor/mentee relationship, and how to succeed.

Please let me know if you have any suggestions for how, as a vibrant bar association, we may together harmonize generational differences to help advance the practice of law and the enjoyment of this career and life we all cherish.



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