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Shine Despite The Myths About Your Generation

By [Dawn Wagenaar](#) on November 21, 2008 @ 2:41 pm in [November 2008](#) | [Comments Disabled](#)

I read an article recently that took a humorous look at how to manage different types of lawyers who are millennials, also known as Generation Y. Some were dubbed high achievers destined for the White House and global restructuring while others were described as more interested in their firm's Internet access than actual work.

Are you a high achiever or a slacker? To get on the fast track with your career, you should know a few things about how your more senior colleagues view you and how you can shine despite the many millennial myths.

Myth #1: Millennials Are Capricious

Even Generation Xers shake their heads at the young associate who quits a job unexpectedly without another opportunity lined up. While you may be more cautious, your generation has the reputation for making whimsical decisions, and for not being reliable in the long run.

Senior partners are less likely to invest a lot of time or money in your development if they believe that you'll be leaving in six months or a year to "follow your bliss." This attitude, however, inadvertently creates a higher churn rate of young associates.

To bust this myth, take opportunities to talk about your role in the practice and what you hope to achieve. Create your own 90-day (or three-year) personal development plan and let the bosses know that you are serious about contributing to the firm. This will send a message of stability that your peers probably aren't duplicating.

Myth #2: Millennials Expect Instant Rewards

Just because you're referred to as Generation Y doesn't mean that you expect bonuses and promotions and trips to exotic destinations at every turn...or do you?

Yes, my young associates, I know that you appreciate rewards for a job well done, but no one is applauding anymore just because you showed up. Be prepared, prompt and ready to contribute to the conversation.

There still isn't a law firm I know that offers a partnership in less than five years; for many it's much longer. Even if you're not interested in this, you still need to prove yourself—especially in that first year—and sometimes the work is less than stimulating. If you can perform your job enthusiastically and watch for more challenging assignments while providing excellent feedback and suggestions, the partners may throw you a bone if not a cookie.

Myth #3: Millennials Are Allergic To Long Hours

"How do we promote these people when they don't seem interested or want to put in the necessary time?" asks the senior partner who has sacrificed and sweated for the firm. At the same time, the young associate is asking, "If I get all my work done in 9 hours instead of 12, why can't I go play basketball after work?"

There is a pervasive belief that trickles even into work/life balance crusaders from Generation X: long hours equal advancement. Communicating a strong work ethic is important if you want to get noticed.

As I mentioned in an earlier article, get in the habit of checking and following up on email, texts or your Facebook friends first thing in the morning, around noon, and then at night. By scheduling it, you will improve productivity—and also appear to be hard at work! In reality, you are focused on important tasks during the day and handling correspondence efficiently, which is a great career habit.

Keep in mind that the dynamics of law firm culture will change as younger partners gain power. You might still work long hours, but where and how you put them in could change and they won't be the only determining factors in your success.

Myth #4: Millennials Need Coddling

Partners and marketing directors alike have complained to me that young associates need too much handling and lack initiative. Raised by the most hands-on, involved parents to date, they tend to look to others for reassurance and feedback before they make decisions.

This isn't necessarily a bad trait, but a little initiative and imagination can go a long way with management. Be an order taker, but also look for ways to add value to the firm that others may not have suggested. Not all of your ideas may fly, but you'll establish yourself as an independent thinker capable of more than what's served to you.

The fast career track requires commitment, a willingness to work in the trenches at times, focus and an agile mind—excellent advice for professionals at any age or level.

Now go bust some myths!

About the Author(s):

Dawn Wagenaar - Dawn Wagenaar is a principal with Ingenuity Marketing Group which provides marketing, training and public relations for attorneys and other professional services firms nationwide. Dawn has spoken at both regional and national LMA functions on marketing strategies.

Article printed from The Complete Lawyer: <http://www.thecompletelawyer.com>

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