

Millennials force law firms to shift their mindset

Alex Russell of Major, Lindsey & Africa discusses the impact Millennials have on the workplace

Millennials: They are a hot topic of any conversation that revolves around workplace dynamics and hiring trends. Their social-conscious world view and need for adulation and responsibility, combined with the fact that they are the largest workforce in the UK, has forced law firm management to change its way of thinking about attraction, retention and management.

A DIFFERENT PERSONALITY

Often called ‘echo boomers’, as they are the children of the baby boomer generation (those born between 1946 and 1964), Millennials are seen as confident and tolerant but also as having a sense of entitlement and narcissism.

The reason they are the way they are is partly because, in the 1970s, people wanted to improve children’s chances of success by instilling self-esteem. The problem is that when people try to boost self-esteem, they instead boost narcissism, explained Roy Baumeister, a psychology professor at Florida State University and editor of the book *Self-Esteem: The puzzle of low self-regard*, to *Time* magazine. All that self-esteem can lead to disappointment because the world does not see them as being as great as they believe they are. This, in turn, results in unmet expectations and low levels of satisfaction.

Millennials are also characterised by their adaptability to technology, their desire to do meaningful work and their need for constructive feedback. They crave the flexibility of a freelance job in a full-time setting while also expecting goals and milestones to be held accountable to. And they want to work somewhere that shares their values and has a purpose-driven mission beyond their day-to-day operations.

But do Millennial lawyers share this same sense of me that is defining Generation Y?

THE MILLENNIAL LAWYER

In an effort to greater understand how Millennial lawyers work, in 2017, our colleagues in the US ran a survey in conjunction with the US legal news website, *Above the Law*. More than 1,200 law firm associates from 132 law firms responded and provided insights into

the perspective of Millennial lawyers and what differentiates them from older colleagues. While it might be the case that Millennial lawyers in the US differ from those in the UK, chances are that due to globalisation and social media, Millennials worldwide are more similar to one another than to older generations within their nations.

The survey showed that Millennial lawyers value firm culture above anything else when it comes to their satisfaction in the workplace. So before they even interview for a firm, they absorb all the information they can about a firm and use it to influence their career decisions. Whether they talk to their friends, visit blogs and forums like *RollonFriday*, view LinkedIn or read websites to learn about the firm’s financial status, merger rumours, problematic partners and growing practice groups, all of that information informs their decisions before they make a commitment to anything. A firm’s culture, which is directly influenced by its reputation, becomes very transparent through these online and offline resources,

so, during the interview process, be prepared to address candidate’s concerns and questions related to this content.

Firm culture is followed closely by work/life balance, which is often a defining characteristic of a law firm’s culture and the top commitment Millennials expect from potential employers.

To associates, work/life balance means more than just being able to run errands at any given time of day or tend to a child or ailing parent. Instead it is seen as part of the firm culture; they expect a collegial, collaborative environment where there is a sense of community and co-workers know and trust each other. They want to be able to participate in monthly team lunches, happy hours or even game nights to get to know their teammates beyond the business scenario. By creating an environment where Millennials feel comfortable with their colleagues and like a valued member of the team, they become more willing to share creative ideas and devote their time and energy to each project. With that, however, they want the flexibility to work when and where they want. In Deloitte’s 2017 Millennials Survey, those employees in organisations that offer a high degree of flexibility in working arrangements rewarded their employers with higher levels of loyalty. When questioned, respondents stated that flexible working arrangements support greater productivity

What do you see yourself doing in ten years?

33.93% Partner at my current firm	0% Legal academia
9.71% Partner at another firm	6.25% Running my own firm or practice
18.75% In-house counsel	6.25% At a boutique or small firm
16.28% Government or non-profit	8.82% NOT practicing law

Ideally, how long would you like to work at your firm?

33.93% I want to make partner!	15.18% five to seven years	27.68% three to five years	23.21% one to two years
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and employee engagement, while enhancing their personal well-being, health and happiness.

Approximately 70% of the associates who responded to our survey described themselves as loyal to their firms. However, loyalty does not seem to equate to tenure, as the time the respondents planned to spend at their firms varied widely, with the majority planning to stay at their firms for less than five years.

Of course, the longer an associate lasts at a firm, the more likely they intend (or at least desire) to make partnership. Common thought has been that Millennial associates are no longer interested in making partner, but the *MLA/Above the Law* survey indicated otherwise.

RETENTION PLANNING

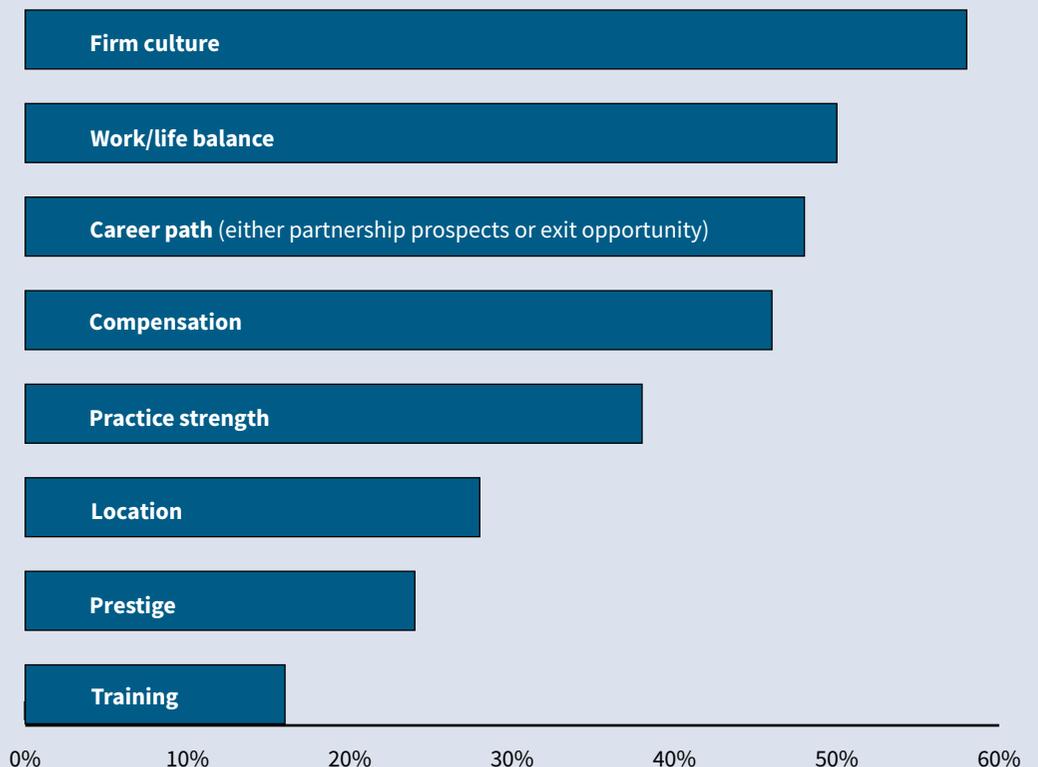
This desire to become partner is a positive sign for law firms, as the cost of losing Millennials is high— replacing a three or four year PQE associate ranges from £185,000 to £350,000. In addition to the actual monetary cost of replacing a departing employee, workload and stress levels increase and lower the engagement and productivity of the employees that remain.

So how can law firms integrate and retain Millennials? Appeal to their desire for responsibility and transparency and promote a culture of flexibility and open communication.

As mentioned earlier, Millennials care about their performance and about being a part of the team. If a law firm is addressing those needs, then they are more likely to win the loyalty of their Millennial associates.

- Begin by setting metrics and milestones and communicate them clearly and thoroughly—then check in often with feedback and reviews on how they are progressing and areas for improvement. Millennials want a clear, defined path to success, so by laying out the exact steps to reach their goal, they will feel like they are a part of the bigger picture with a future at the firm.
- Provide training, whether formal or informal, to show the firm is invested in their development and growth. Also institute a mentorship programme, pairing junior-level associates with more senior ones and even partners. This will give the younger lawyers access to more senior colleagues who they can go to for questions and guidance, while also further integrating them into the team now that they have someone more respected in their corner.

Please rank the three most important factors that would (or did) cause you to accept a firm's offer



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- Involve them in substantial projects and client meetings. This will provide them with exposure to work they will be doing in the future and give them an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and be more hands-on. Client contact makes the project more real and gives them a stronger sense of responsibility and belonging, as they feel they have more ownership on that matter or case.

Those who get it right will be rewarded with the top talent of this generation.

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CONCLUSION

Every generation presents its own challenges and, clearly, Millennials are no different. Millennial lawyers want to be active, involved members of a team, where they are valued and utilised to the fullest extent of their abilities and given opportunities to grow—but on their own schedules and in their own way.