



MINDING THE GAP:  
**DO TODAY'S  
ASSOCIATES DEFY  
GENERATIONAL  
STEREOTYPES?**

**ABOVE  
THE LAW**

 **MAJOR, LINDSEY & AFRICA**

Members of the millennial generation already make up the largest portion of the U.S. workforce. Their unique working style often leaves older generations scratching their heads, as millennials take a nontraditional approach to daily tasks. They are the first generation strongly tied to technology and more influenced by social media than mainstream media outlets. Understanding how millennials work and what they want in order to achieve a positive work/life balance is a priority for the business world.

In partnership with our friends at Major, Lindsey & Africa, we dug deeper into the dynamics of this apparent cultural change as it pertains to law firms. During the first quarter of 2017, we surveyed the Above the Law audience to capture the perspective of the youngest cohort of lawyers. What differentiates them from both their generational peers and their older colleagues?

**READ ON FOR OUR FINDINGS >>**



# SURVEY RESPONDENTS

**1,200+**  
respondents from  
132 law firms

**77.45%**  
junior or mid-level  
associates

Mid-level Associate . . . . .	<b>42.98%</b>
(3-5 YEARS PRACTICING)	
Junior Associate . . . . .	<b>34.47%</b>
(1-2 YEARS)	
Senior Associate . . . . .	<b>13.62%</b>
(6+ YEARS)	
Equity Partner . . . . .	<b>1.70%</b>
Of Counsel . . . . .	<b>1.68%</b>
Non-equity Partner . . . . .	<b>1.30%</b>
Other . . . . .	<b>4.26%</b>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



- › **PARTNERSHIP** remains the most common long-term career goal for associates.
- › However, one-third of junior associates plan to **LEAVE THEIR FIRMS IN TWO YEARS OR LESS**.
- › **FIRM CULTURE** is the most important variable in the decision whether to accept a potential employer's offer, far ahead of "compensation" or "prestige."
- › **WORK/LIFE BALANCE** is the most important aspect of firm culture.
- › Significant numbers of millennial attorneys tend to value **DIVERSITY** and **INCLUSION** either very highly or hardly at all.
- › Millennials see **LITTLE NEED** for clients' values to **ALIGN WITH THEIR OWN**.
- › For the vast majority, a **FIRM'S BRAND** was either **NOT A FACTOR** or a **SECONDARY CONSIDERATION** in the choice of their firm.
- › More respondents describe their firms as "OPAQUE" than "OPEN AND CLEAR" regarding associate career paths.
- › Approximately **70 PERCENT** of millennials describe themselves as **LOYAL** to their firms.
- › The proportions of respondents who feel their workloads have increased (33.26%) in the wake of the recent salary raises and those who don't (32.26%) are **NEARLY IDENTICAL**.
- › Of those who feel their workloads have increased after the salary raise, a majority (57%) **FEEL THE INCREASE IS WARRANTED BY THE RAISE**.
- › 60% of all respondents agree that "U.S. LAW FIRM CULTURE IS INHERENTLY SEXIST."



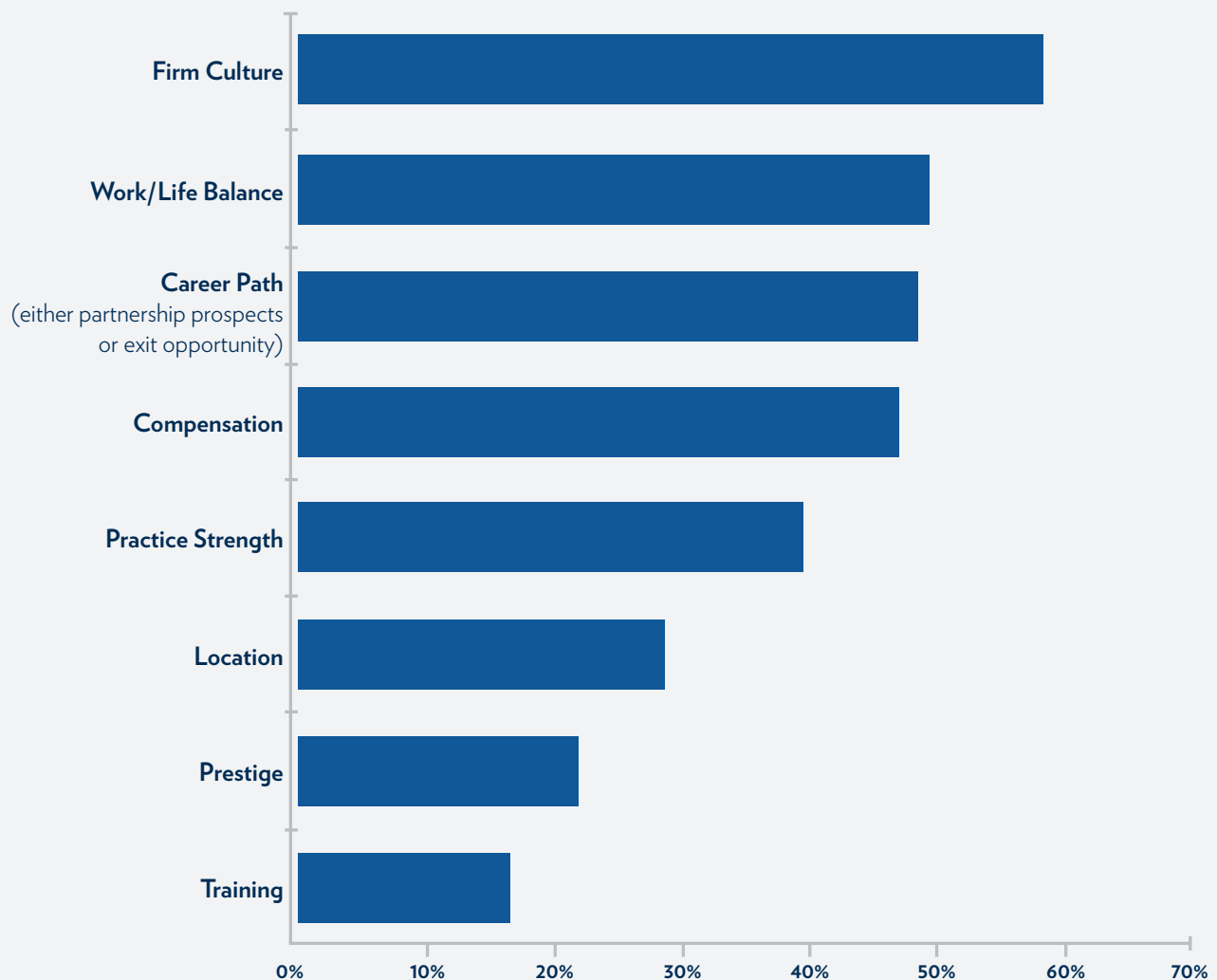
# PRIORITIES

## FIRM CULTURE

Millennials reputedly value their employer’s “culture” to an unprecedented degree, and our survey findings reinforce that stereotype.

- › “Firm culture” was deemed by our respondents as the most important variable in the decision whether to accept a potential employer’s offer.
- › The (obviously related) “work/life balance” was runner-up among the choices.
- › “Compensation” was in the middle of the pack, and “training” brought up the rear.

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



# PRIORITIES

## CULTURAL VALUES

Digging deeper into “culture,” our survey respondents cited “commitment to fostering work/life balance for employees” as the most important of the cultural “commitments” undertaken by firms.

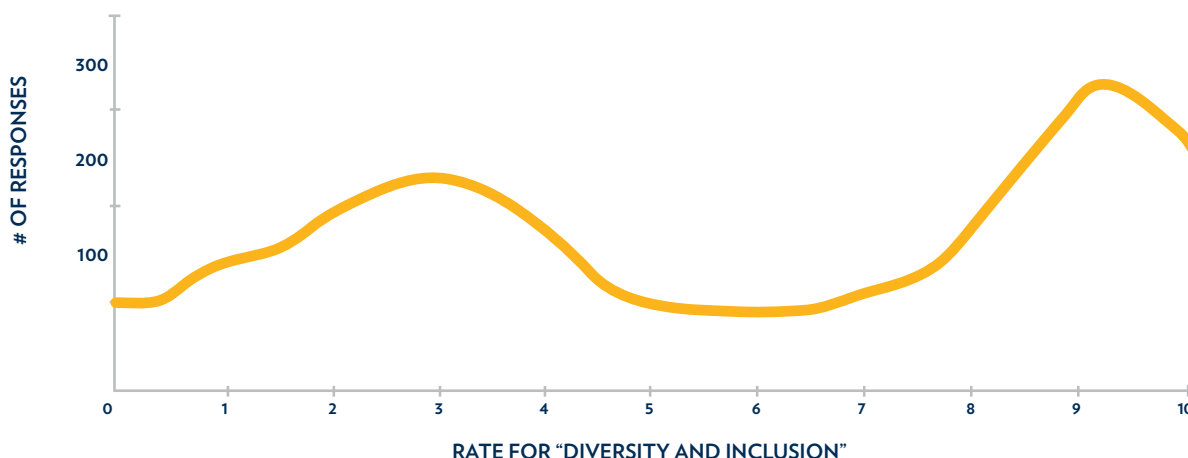
### How important are the following to you in evaluating a potential employer?

	MEAN	VARIANCE
Commitment to diverse and inclusive workforce	6.05	<b>8.88</b>
Commitment to corporate social responsibility	5.37	7.89
Commitment to progressive family-friendly policies	5.37	7.35
Commitment to fostering work/life balance for employees	<b>7.73</b>	5.38

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the overall ratings aligned with the breadth of the subject. The more employees directly affected within the firm, the more “important” as an analyzing variable.

To wit: “work/life balance” (i.e. all employees) > “family friendly” (employees with children) > “diverse and inclusive” (diverse employees) > “social responsibility” (society as a whole).

Respondent views on firms’ “commitment to a diverse and inclusive workforce” displayed an interesting pattern. While diversity received a relatively low mean rating for importance, the statistical “variance,” or spread of responses, was by far the broadest of our choices. This suggests that significant proportions of millennial attorneys tend to value diversity and inclusion either very highly or hardly at all, with ratings exhibiting a b-modal distribution:



# PRIORITIES

## CLIENT VALUES

We asked our respondents, “How important is it that your firm’s clients’ values align with your own? Please assign a value from zero (irrelevant) to 10 (absolutely crucial).”

THE AVERAGE SCORE WAS **4.82**



The millennial attorney’s desire for a cultural “fit” with their employers does not extend to a significant analogous demand regarding clients.

## FIRM BRAND

Obviously, brand marketers are fixated on millennials, the country’s largest (80 million+) demographic. But is the obsession mutual? At least in the case of millennial law firm attorneys concerning potential employers, the answer seems to be “not so much.”

- › For the vast majority of respondents, a firm’s external perception was either not a factor or a secondary consideration in the choice of their firm.
- › Moreover, our survey feedback on whether a change in a firm’s brand would prompt an associate’s departure was inconclusive, although the number of respondents dismissing that possibility outnumbered those who “would” or “might” leave their firms in such an eventuality.
- › On the other hand, a significant majority feel their firms’ brands are “well-defined.”

**Did you choose your firm because of its brand?**  
(i.e., the external perception of the firm)

**25.88%**

It was not a factor

**47.81%**

It was a secondary consideration

**26.32%**

It was a primary consideration

# PRIORITIES

To what degree do you agree with this statement?  
My firm's brand is well defined.

**26.99%**  
Strongly Agree

**42.92%**  
Agree

**18.58%**  
Neither Agree  
nor Disagree

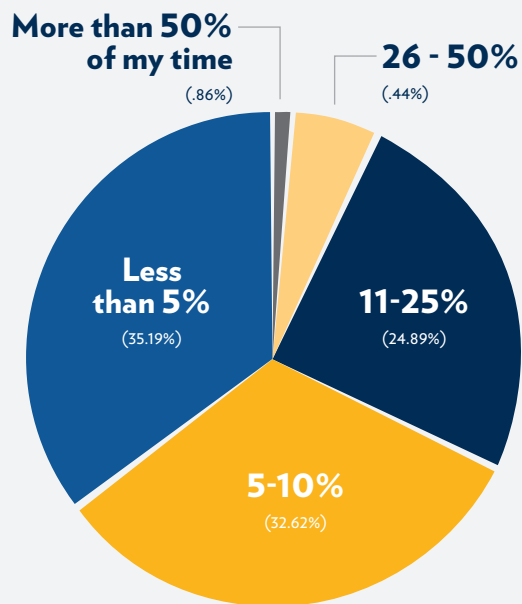
**9.29%**  
Disagree

**2.21%**  
Strongly  
Disagree

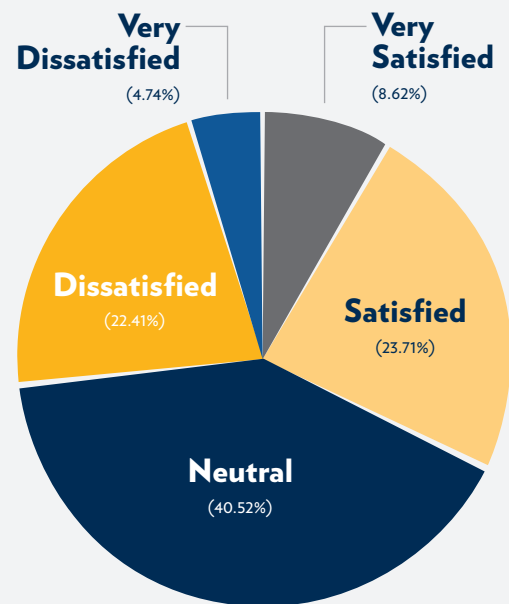
## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

- Two-thirds of our survey respondents reported they spend 10 percent or less of their time on business development.
- However a substantial majority reported they were either satisfied or neutral regarding the amount of time spent on business development, and roughly a quarter expressed dissatisfaction.

Approximately how much time do you spend on business development?



How satisfied are you with the amount of time you spend on business development?



# CAREER GOALS

## LENGTH OF TIME SPENT AT FIRM

Associate views on “ideal” tenure at their firms vary widely and, contrary to widespread perception, the goal of achieving partnership is alive and well for a plurality of young associates.

- › Approximately one-quarter of associates intend to work at their firms for two years or less.
- › A majority plan to work at their firms for five years or less.
- › One-third want to make partner.

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

**33.93%**  
I want to make partner!

**15.18%**  
5-7 years

**27.68%**  
3-5 years

**23.21%**  
1-2 years

- › Fully one-third of junior associates plan to leave their firms in two years or less.
- › The longer an associate lasts at a firm, the more likely she intends (or at least desires) to make partnership:

	1-2 YEARS	3-5 YEARS	5-7 YEARS	PARTNERSHIP
JUNIORS	<b>33.33%</b>	41.18%	7.84%	17.65%
MID-LEVELS	17.78%	22.22%	15.56%	<b>44.44%</b>

- › Sixty percent of senior associates (with more than five years of practice) hope to make partner.



# CAREER GOALS

## LOYALTY

- › Approximately 70 percent of millennials describe themselves as “loyal” to their employers.
- › Less than one-fifth consider “loyalty” irrelevant in the context of law firms.

### How loyal are you to your firm?

**23.01%**

Highly loyal

**46.90%**

Moderately loyal

**13.27%**

Neither Loyal  
nor Disloyal

**16.81%**

“Loyalty” is irrelevant  
in a law firm context

- › The most “loyal” cohort was mid-levels, with 75 percent self-describing as either moderately or highly loyal.
- › Only 13 percent of mid-levels described loyalty as “irrelevant,” compared with 25 percent of senior associates.

## FUTURE PLANS

- › Partnership is the most common long-term goal for associates.
- › Aspiring to government/non-profit positions was nearly as popular as in-house counsel.
- › Not one of our respondents told us they wanted to become a law professor.
- › The most commonly cited non-legal career goal was “real estate” (including “real estate private equity” and “real estate investment”).

### What do you see yourself doing in 10 years?

**33.93%** Partner at my current firm

**9.71%** Partner at another firm

**18.75%** In-house counsel

**16.28%** Government or non-profit

**0%** Legal academia

**6.25%** Running my own firm or practice

**6.25%** At a boutique or small firm

**8.82%** NOT practicing law

# CAREER GOALS

On the whole, millennial attorneys appear to be a confident and optimistic group:

## How confident are you that you will achieve your goal in 10 years?

**22.02%**

Very Confident

**44.12%**

Confident

**31.19%**

Unsure

**3.67%**

Doubtful

**1.00%**

Very Doubtful

## GOING IN-HOUSE?

### Why are you interested in going in-house?

Multiple selection permitted:  
percentage totals >100%

**85.71%**

Better work/life  
balance

**38.10%**

As an alternative to  
law firm practice

**14.29%**

Financial  
opportunity

**57.14%**

Opportunity to  
become a business  
decision maker

## TRANSPARENCY REGARDING ASSOCIATE CAREER PATHS

- A majority believe their employers are “selectively” transparent.
- More respondents describe their firms as “opaque” than “open and clear.”
- However, nearly 80 percent consider transparency to be (at least) “important.”

### How would you describe your firm's level of transparency regarding associate career paths? (including feedback on whether an associate is on track for partnership)

**16.35%**

Opaque

**16.35%**

Minimal  
transparency

**52.88%**

Selective  
transparency

**14.42%**

Open and clear in  
sharing information

# CAREER GOALS

How important to you is your firm's transparency regarding associate career paths?

**7.77%**

Unimportant

**14.56%**

Somewhat  
Important

**29.13%**

Important

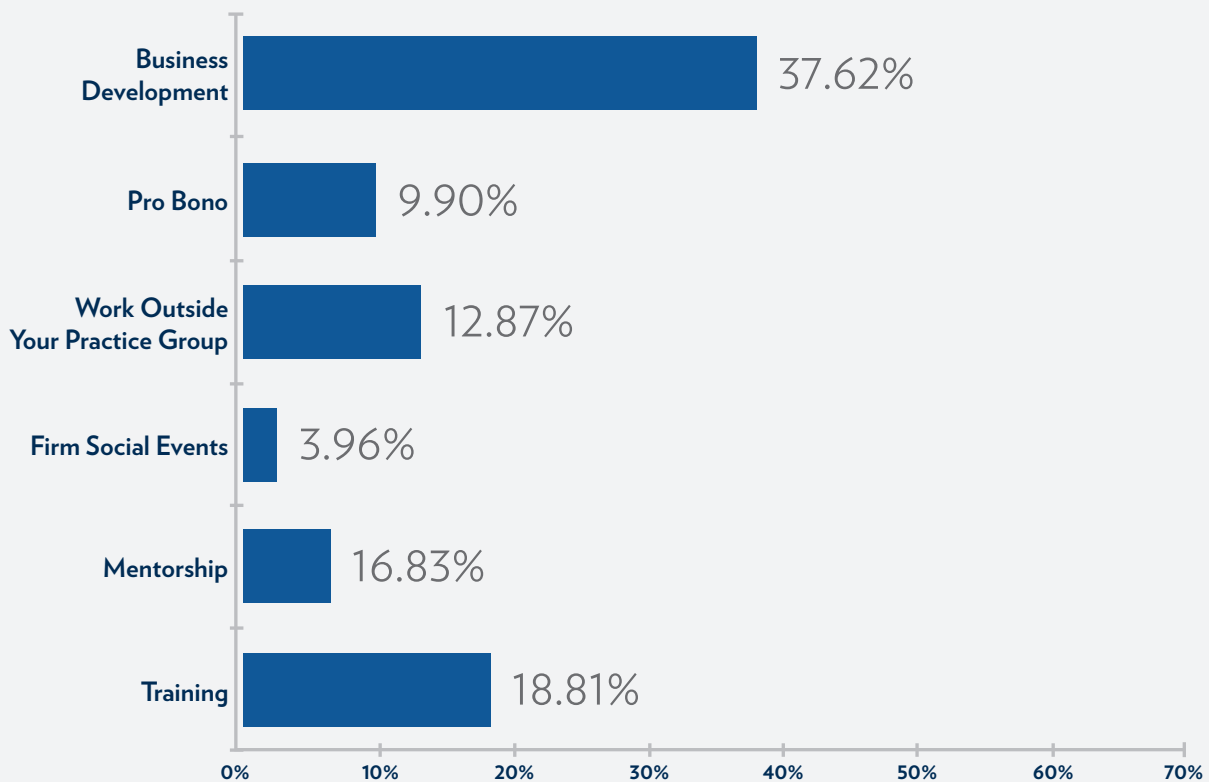
**30.10%**

Very  
Important

**18.45%**

Crucial

## WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SPEND MORE TIME DOING?



The stated inclinations to spend more time on business development is somewhat surprising as only a quarter of respondents (see above) expressed dissatisfaction with their current level of business development activity.

# “MONEYLAW” AFTERMATH

## IMPACT ON ASSOCIATE WORKLOADS

Have associate workloads increased along with their paychecks? If so, do the associates feel the higher demands on them are warranted? Survey says: “it’s unclear.”

- › The proportion of respondents who feel their workloads have increased (33.26%) and those who don’t (32.26%) are nearly identical (if we exclude the “probably not”).
- › Of those who feel their workloads have increased, a majority (57%) feel the increase is warranted by the raise.

### Do you feel your firm requires more from you after the recent salary raises?

**12.10%**

Yes, Definitely

**20.97%**

Yes, Somewhat

**11.90%**

Not Sure

**11.29%**

Probably Not

**33.26%**

No

**10.48%**

My Firm Did Not Raise Salaries

### REPRESENTATIVE RESPONDENT COMMENTS:

I don’t think the workload has changed because of the raises. Firms with a strong culture will not change the culture just because of the raises. The raises were a much necessary adjustment for the increased cost of living in NYC after almost 10 years, and the firms who followed in other markets just did not understand that. To the extent a firm is demanding more work from their associates because of the raises, then they could not afford it to begin with and should not have approved the raises.

Not much, honestly. We already have a two-tiered compensation structure, where people who bill lower are paid less, so for most people receiving the new higher salary, they were already working 2000+, so I haven’t sensed any increased pressure.

Not at all. Compensation is market-driven. You can’t game it for profit. By the same token, if a firm could work its associates harder without any kind of downside, it would already have done so before the raises. Firms don’t raise hours because of compensation and they don’t raise compensation because of hours. They always extract as many hours and pay as little as the market will bear.

The market-wide changes (which the firm has largely ignored) have frustrated the associates who remain; many left. What’s worse: the departure of so many associates has increased the workloads of those who stuck around and had faith that the firm would do something. More hours, same pay.

Outrageous rate increase. Less work coming from partners who want to use cheap young associates. Working harder to get work I’d gotten with no problems before.

There’s been an extension to the partner track. This change in policy could be a coincidence, but it’s clear that the salary raise has narrowed the path for partner promotion.

After salaries were raised, we started hearing talk about a 2,100 billable hour requirement. It has intensified in the last month, where associates are now being told that those not on track to bill 2,100 hours (excluding pro bono hours) will be scrutinized and potentially dismissed.

I’m personally not working harder but I’m less likely to leave.

I think the partners probably expect more billable hours but we wouldn’t know that because it’s not like they have outright said it. But I think that will become more apparent once bonuses are announced.

# ALTERNATIVES

## ALTERNATIVES

When asked to choose between a lockstep bonus system and one where associates “eat what you bill,” the preference was for the latter by an 8.42 percent margin:

### Which would you prefer?

**45.79%**

All associates who reach a certain billable hours threshold receive an equal, lockstep bonus

**54.21%**

Associates who exceed the billable hours requirement receive proportionately larger bonuses

### Would you consider a job where you worked less and were paid less?

**66.06%**  
YES

**33.94%**  
NO

### How much of a difference would it make if the job were non-partner track?

**13%**

A Great Deal

**25%**

A Lot

**21%**

A Moderate Amount

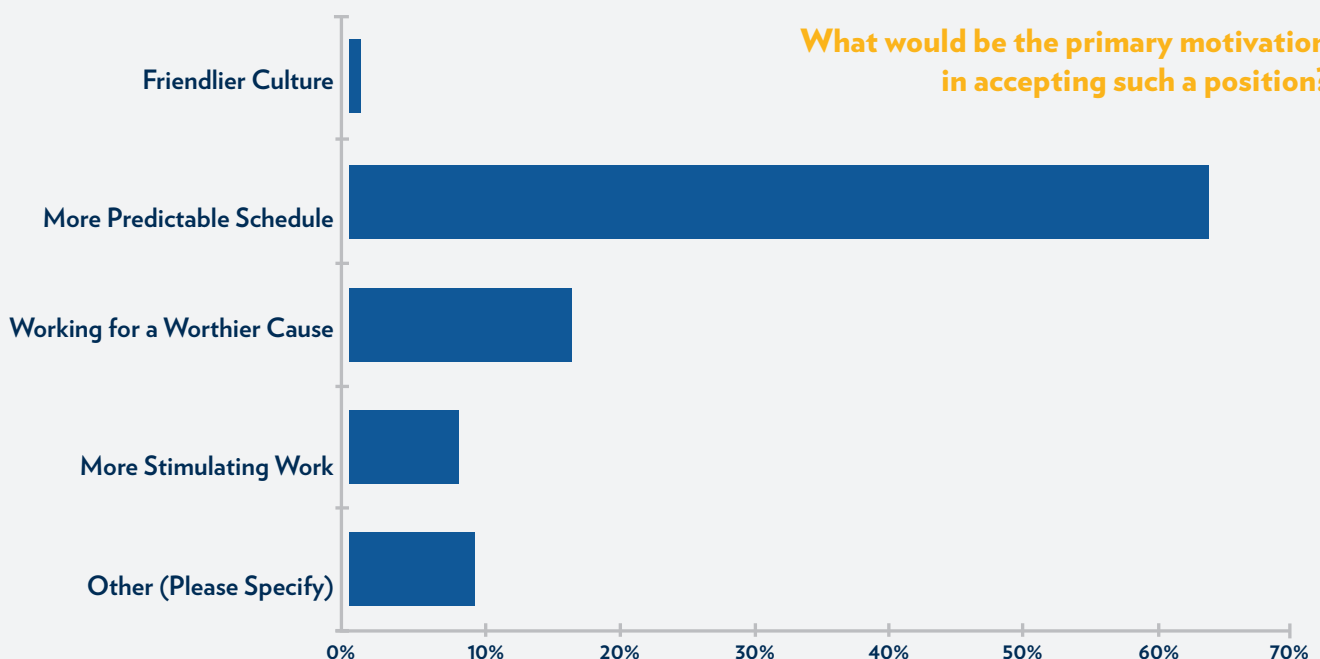
**18%**

A Little

**23%**

None At All

### What would be the primary motivation in accepting such a position?



# GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

## FIRM CULTURE

How much different **really** are the attitudes of the current crop of younger law firm associates from their older colleagues? This was the only component of our survey that actively sought out law firm attorneys at all levels, including partners, as respondents. We presented 10 statements or assertions regarding law firms, and respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed.

Among the divergences we found:

- › Associates strongly agree the recent salary raises were “fair” at triple the rate of partners.
- › Partners strongly believe that increased associate workloads are justified by the raises at more than quadruple the rate of associates.
- › A higher proportion of partners than associates believe that law firm partnership is less desirable than it was a generation ago.
- › More partners (82.5%) than associates (72.08%) agree that a diverse workforce should be a priority for law firms.
- › Slightly more partners than associates agree that “the law firm business model is fundamentally broken.”

Following are all of the statements and the response outcomes, with some notable contrasts in **dark blue**:

### Compensation increases at many law firms are a fair reflection of associate contributions to firm profitability.

	ABSOLUTELY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
ALL	8.76%	19.59%	13.40%	37.11%	21.13%
ASSOCIATES	6.49%	15.58%	14.29%	<b>38.96%</b>	<b>24.68%</b>
PARTNERS	17.5%	35%	11%	<b>29%</b>	<b>7.5%</b>

### Increased associate workloads are justified by the recent salary increases.

	ABSOLUTELY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
ALL	25.26%	24.74%	18.04%	23.20%	8.76%
ASSOCIATES	29.87%	29.22%	14.94%	<b>20.78%</b>	<b>5.19%</b>
PARTNERS	5.5%	9.5%	30.25%	<b>32.25%</b>	<b>22.5%</b>



# GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

**Law firms should strive for maximum transparency with regard to compensation.**

	ABSOLUTELY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
ALL	1.55%	3.63%	9.33%	30.05%	55.44%
ASSOCIATES	1.95%	2.6%	9.09%	<b>27.92%</b>	<b>58.44%</b>
PARTNERS	1.6%	6.08%	10.26%	<b>38.46%</b>	<b>43.59%</b>

**Law firm partnership is much less desirable than it was a generation ago.**

	ABSOLUTELY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
ALL	5.19%	11.86%	19.59%	34.54%	28.87%
ASSOCIATES	5.19%	11.69%	22.73%	33.77%	<b>26.62%</b>
PARTNERS	4%	8.5%	7.5%	37.5%	<b>37.5%</b>

**The partners at my firm genuinely care about associate professional development.**

	ABSOLUTELY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
ALL	7.22%	21.13%	20.1%	32.47%	19.07%
ASSOCIATES	7.79%	20.78%	19.48%	33.77%	18.18%
PARTNERS	5%	22.5%	22.5%	27.5%	22.5%

**A diverse and inclusive workforce should be a priority for law firms.**

	ABSOLUTELY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
ALL	4.12%	11.86%	9.79%	30.93%	43.30%
ASSOCIATES	3.90%	12.99%	11.04%	32.47%	<b>39.61%</b>
PARTNERS	5%	11.5%	4%	23%	<b>57.5%</b>

# GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

## U.S. law firm culture is inherently sexist.

	ABSOLUTELY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
ALL	6.7%	17.01%	15.98%	26.8%	33.51%
ASSOCIATES	5.84%	18.18%	16.23%	25.97%	33.77%
PARTNERS	10%	12.5%	15%	30%	32.5%

## Diminished associate loyalty to firms is an inevitable consequence of fundamental changes in the law firm business model.

	ABSOLUTELY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
ALL	2.08%	8.85%	13.02%	45.31%	30.73%
ASSOCIATES	0.66%	8.55%	12.5%	46.71%	31.58%
PARTNERS	7.5%	10%	15%	40%	27.5%

## The law firm business model is fundamentally broken.

	ABSOLUTELY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
ALL	3.61%	20.1%	22.16%	34.54%	19.59%
ASSOCIATES	3.25%	18.83%	24.68%	33.77%	19.48%
PARTNERS	5%	25%	12.5%	37.5%	20%

## Some form of non-attorney ownership of U.S. law firms would benefit the legal profession.

	ABSOLUTELY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
ALL	31.79%	20%	24.62%	14.78%	8.72%
ASSOCIATES	30.32%	18.71%	26.45%	15.48%	9.03%
PARTNERS	37.5%	25%	17.5%	12.5%	7.5%

## ABOUT MAJOR, LINDSEY & AFRICA

Major, Lindsey & Africa is the largest legal search firm with 26 offices globally. It has earned recognition for its track record of successful general counsel, corporate counsel, partner, associate and law firm management placements. The firm also provides law firms and companies with highly specialized legal professionals on project, interim and temporary-to-permanent hire basis. The firm considers every search a diversity search and has been committed to diversity in the law since its inception. Major, Lindsey & Africa is an [Allegis Group](#) company, the global leader in talent solutions.

To learn more visit [www.mlaglobal.com](http://www.mlaglobal.com).

THIS SURVEY IS THE BRAINCHILD OF MICHELLE FIVEL AND RU BHATT OF MAJOR, LINDSEY & AFRICA.



**MICHELLE FIVEL** is a Partner in the firm's New York and Los Angeles offices. After practicing at Skadden and Jones Day, Michelle has a successful 10-year track record placing associates and partners in top-tier international, national, regional and boutique law firms. She is regularly called upon by law firms to provide advice regarding the lateral market. Michelle can be reached at [mfivel@mlaglobal.com](mailto:mfivel@mlaglobal.com).



**RU BHATT** is a Managing Director in the Associate Practice Group in New York. He specializes in placing attorneys of all levels in top-tier national, international, regional and boutique law firms. He has also placed attorneys in prominent in-house positions at companies and financial institutions. Ru distinguishes himself by taking pride in acting as an advisor and strong advocate for his candidates by helping them identify opportunities that are consistent with their diverse career goals. Ru can be reached at [rbhatt@mlaglobal.com](mailto:rbhatt@mlaglobal.com).