

RESISTANCE

Millennial Lawyers Are
Invading and Are Ready To Eat Your
Lunch—With a Latte

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IS FUTILE

Many books and articles about millennials start with this warning: By 2030, millennials will take over 75 percent of the work force. They're coming, and if you don't learn to manage them, they'll leave. And your law firm or business will suffer a slow, painful demise.

This warning makes you think the world is bracing for an alien invasion of jeans-wearing, smart-phone-wielding selfie takers. As a millennial lawyer myself, I'm here to tell you that's not true—at least not entirely.

In my experience, nothing brings lawyers together like some good old millennial bashing.



MILLENNIAL LAWYERS

As millennial lawyers start to fill the law firm ranks, it can be a bonding activity for more experienced lawyers to reminisce about the golden-age of the practice when lawyers worked hard and didn't whine about not having bouncy-ball chairs or a pingpong table in the law library.

Although there are kernels of truth in some millennial stereotypes, most are flat wrong. And the myths perpetuated in the legal world are limiting—not only to millennial attorneys, but also to your law firm or practice.

I recently had the opportunity to team up with best-selling author and millennial keynote speaker Ryan Avery to write *Motivating Millennials*, a book aimed at busting many of the pervasive myths about millennial workers. (Yes, millennials write books.) Portions of the book—modified slightly for a legal audience—are below.

NOT ALL MILLENNIALS WANT TO MAKE PARTNER

This may come as a shock to you, big-firm

boomers. But it's true. The coveted brass ring of partnership may be less valuable to some millennials than the participation trophies you gave us when we were kids.

Between the boomer heyday and today, the ties that bind employer and employee have gradually loosened and come apart. Today, lawyers don't hesitate to change jobs or move to another city for a better opportunity. In some law firms, this tendency may label such lawyers as ones who are not serious about their careers, thereby making them expendable. But consider this: Millennials grew up seeing our parents, relatives and family friends get laid off across every sector of the economy despite years of dedicated service. We heard them lament the loss of pensions and health insurance. The message that came across to us was loud and clear: Nothing is guaranteed.

We also experienced it firsthand as we launched our own careers during the Great



Recession's massive layoffs. Many millennial lawyers have stories of interviewing with powerhouse law firms like Heller Ehrman and Dewey & LeBoeuf that imploded within weeks of interviews or offers. We earned law school diplomas in what we thought was a hot industry. But in reality, demand for legal services has stagnated across the country.

Because many millennials coming out of law school don't consider the legal pyramid

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as stable and safe as it once was, you see a trend of new lawyers building a career that isn't just tied to one firm, one big client—or one primary goal of making partner. Why spill blood to reach partner status when the prize on the other side isn't what it once was or, some fear, might not exist at all? As a result, many millennial attorneys are subordinating work to personal lives and won't hesitate to jump to another firm, an in-house legal position or government job that will free them from the perceived golden shackles. This means law firms are going to have to work harder than ever to keep millennial talent.

MONEY'S NOT ENOUGH

Scroll through recent articles and books on how to retain lawyers or employees and you'll see a lot of attention devoted to traditional "carrots": Lawyers "should be rewarded with raises, annual bonuses, and immediate cash payments to motivate high performance," some experts write. Or conventional wisdom was to "provide a com-

petitive benefits package including health insurance, life insurance, and a 401(k) plan."

Millennials need to pay bills like everyone else—particularly young lawyers who have staggering student debt. But remember that what keeps us working at a firm and going the extra mile every day is not just the paycheck. Six in 10 millennials say their current employer's "sense of purpose" is part of the reason they chose to work there, according to a 2015 Deloitte survey. If millennials are emotionally invested in a company's mission and believe we're directly contributing to that mission, we're in. We'll be excited to work for the firm or business, and we'll give it our all.

But it's not just millennials who have a different motivational model. Economists and scientists say that, because of the changing nature of work, the motivational model based primarily on money is outdated. In the modern American marketplace, almost everyone needs to be motivated by a mission and their own inner drive.

In his 2011 book *Drive*, Daniel H. Pink describes the tectonic shift shaking the bed-

rock of motivation theory. During much of the 1900s, the thinking went something like this: "Work consists mainly of simple, not particularly interesting tasks. The only way to get people to do them is to incentivize them properly and monitor them carefully."

That quote is from management consultant Frederick Winslow Taylor, and for many decades, he was right. Blue-collar jobs and parts of white-collar jobs were formulaic and routine. In the legal space, think of what many now refer to as "commoditized" legal work: document review, rote contracts, and filing basic corporate formation documents. The work is monotonous, and most lawyers were motivated to perform these tasks primarily for financial compensation. This jibed with the post-Recession mindset of the generation: Work is for a paycheck, not for fulfillment.

Then something shifted. In the business world, many of those formulaic jobs were replaced by technology or sent overseas. And in the legal industry, companies like LegalZoom, virtual law firms, artificial intelligence software, and the exploding area of



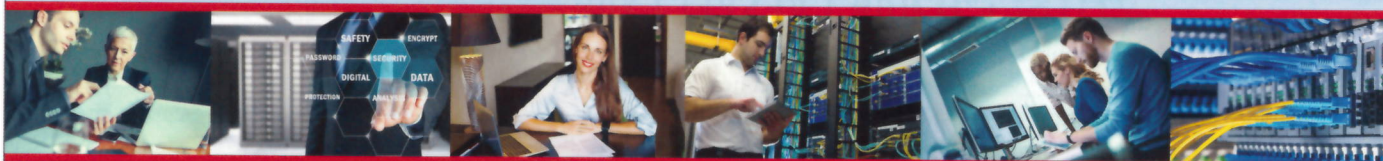
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MILLENNIAL LAWYERS

overseas-shipped legal services are chipping away at the simple bread-and-butter tasks that once gave lawyers countless hours to bill. Now, the vast majority of remaining law firm legal work is complex—often requiring high-level decision-making and creative problem-solving. Almost 70 percent of the U.S. job growth occurs in professions that require this kind of complex thinking, according to a study from consulting firm McKinsey & Co.

To perform these jobs well, you can't be motivated purely by traditional carrots and sticks. Numerous studies demonstrate that focusing on financial compensation actually thwarts creative problem-solving—whereas passion, purpose, and striving for personal accomplishment stimulates creative thinking.

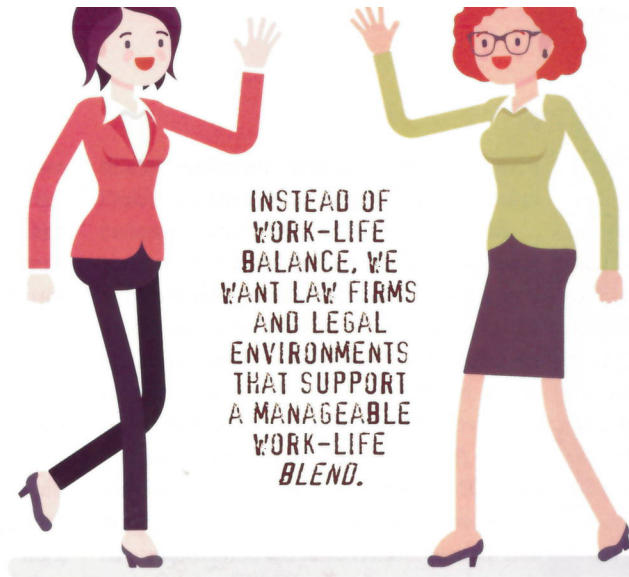
In other words, those \$180,000 major-market associate starting salaries won't help retention unless the firms innovate in other ways.

WE DON'T WANT WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Yes, you read that correctly. Everything you've heard about millennials wanting large blocks of dedicated time off to surf in Costa Rica and hang-glide off the cliffs of the Swiss Alps is wrong. Allow me to explain.

Baby boomers grew up in a time when “don't take the office home with you” was the prevailing wisdom. And it made sense for a number of reasons. When you've worked in a hierarchical environment building work and home empires, you want to construct those empires based on separate sets of values. When you seek a paycheck from work and fulfillment from your free time, you want to keep those aspects of your life separate. Plus, in the pre-laptop era, “taking the office home” meant lugging a heavy briefcase full of papers and files. That vision of work-life balance sliced up the day like a pie: a sliver of family time in the morning, then a large wedge of work during the rest of the day, and then another helping of family time in the evening.

Technology has obliterated those separations. Email and smartphone calls have increasingly encroached on personal time to the extent that we are all finding it challeng-



ing to navigate this fast-changing world. But millennials approach it from a different perspective.

Millennials are digital natives who are used to being constantly connected to our friends, coworkers, bosses, families, teachers, and an entire virtual world. In our circular minds, our work and our personal life are as interconnected as the World Wide Web. We seek fulfillment and enjoyment from both, so we don't need to divide them in our schedules.

In fact, we *want* to take the office home: 75 percent of us would like to work remotely some or all the time, according to the 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey. We prefer a flexible schedule that allows us to hit the gym in the middle of the day and stay late at the office, or to complete a project in a cafe. Maybe take a Tuesday to hike and instead work on a Saturday. We think the focus should be on accomplishing work goals, not filling up hours in a rigid schedule. Even when traveling, there are many millennials who would prefer to blend work into their trips so they don't feel like they have to rush home before they have to declare email bankruptcy from all of the unread messages.

Instead of work-life balance, we want law firms and legal environments that support a manageable work-life *blend*.

BEING CASUAL DOESN'T MEAN WE DON'T RESPECT YOU

Let's play word association. If you're a boomer and you hear the word “communication,” you'll probably conjure a face-to-face conversation or a phone call. If you're a millennial, you might imagine texting, Slack, Facebook, FaceTime or an informal chat

over a latte.

Obviously, each generation views communication differently. Among Americans younger than 50, texting has become the most frequently used form of communication, according to a 2014 Gallup poll. Most people older than 50 prefer phone calls. If the poll had asked about in-person conversations, those would no doubt rank even higher. Boomers and Gen Xers focus on the method of communication and rue the lost

art of conversation. Millennials focus on the act of communication and feel it can take lots of effective forms.

But our generations also have a lot in common. We're all overwhelmed by the multitude of communication forms we use in our work life. Even for digital natives, it's exhausting to text, Facebook, Instagram, Tweet, IM, FaceTime, email, call and have in-person meetings.

We're all struggling to acquire the skills necessary to master each medium. A few decades ago, if you wanted to boost your communication game, you might have gone to a CLE packed with tips on improving your interpersonal and conversational skills. Now, you have to learn email and texting etiquette, Instagram effectiveness, Facebook Live skills, LinkedIn presentation, Twitter versus Snapchat audience optimization—and the five other things that were invented while you were learning those. A law firm partner can no longer simply tell associate attorneys to improve their communication skills. Which one of the dozens do they mean?

We also all waste a lot of energy navigating generation gaps and personal preferences. To ask someone a question, we have to consider several options: Do they prefer email, or text, or a phone call? Is Facebook much less professional than email, even though the messages end up in the same inbox? Will using an exclamation point make me sound immature, or will not using it make me sound like a zombie? Why am I sending this epic email instead of walking down the hall to talk? Did I just hit “reply all”?

Millennials also typically communicate in a more casual manner than people from previous generations, which often gets misinterpreted as disrespectful or unprofessional. San Francisco-based tech attorney Patricia

Wyrod says she's learned to appreciate this communication style for what it is. Millennials "really actually value being warm, friendly, kicked back, laid back," she says. "Previous generations considered talking that way as low-power styles of communication," Wyrod adds. But by embracing the vernacular, Wyrod explains that it not only made the millennials feel more comfortable, but it also "made me feel that it's okay to be who I am."

In the end, it comes down to understanding each other if we want to succeed in a supportive environment that inspires us all. We all want our lives and our work to have purpose, and the basis for that is communication, whether casual or formal, in-person or virtual.

SO WHAT DO MILLENNIALS WANT?

So now that we debunked some of the myths about millennials, the next question is: What do we want? In a word: voice.

In law firms around the country, young associates are expected to watch what they

say and "pay their dues." And at times this is for good reason. Most first-year associates aren't going to broker a major deal between two Fortune 500 companies. Motivated by a desire to have their voices heard, associates slowly step up the law firm ladder. Once they arrive on the top rung of partnership, they often find that power doesn't bring freedom but rather a whole new set of constraints and responsibilities. Having spent so long climbing their way up, they still feel pressure to censor what they say and not rock the boat. In this way, the traditional hierarchical law firm environment encourages staid, risk-averse thinking.

Today's world is changing faster than ever. This means firms need to hear all the voices at the table—right now. There can be a whole lot of resistance to that notion, especially in the legal world where innovation and new ways of thinking have historically gone to die. But by ignoring large swaths of millennial workers, law firms are setting themselves up to adapt to the rapidly changing world about as fast as the Titanic was able to steer around icebergs.

While growing up, many millennials were encouraged to speak up at the dinner table, share opinions, and teach their parents about technology. In the workplace, millennials desire a similar seat at the table. We grew up witnessing the explosion of Facebook, Twitter, and other tech giants—all sparked and fueled by an employee-driven entrepreneurial spirit. We may not all be in Silicon Valley, but we want to influence our law firms in this way, too.

CONCLUSION

The hoodie-wearing millennial invasion is here—and we're eyeing your lunch. But we're not looking to devour all of it, but instead to have some input on how to make it and every other lunch better for you and everyone else. So stop being afraid, pick up your iPhone, send a tweet and give up your favorite pastime of millennial bashing. Because if you don't, your competitor law firms will.

And rest assured that for those firms, your lunch will just be the appetizer. Your clients and business will be the main course. **AZ**

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