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# Are Big Law Associates Less Concerned With Diversity Than Their Partners?

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Young Big Law attorneys say they value diversity and inclusion less than partners, according to survey of Above The Law readers released this week. But is that really the case?

In **the survey**, conducted on the ATL website by legal recruiting firm Major, Lindsey & Africa, 39 percent of associates strongly agreed that diversity should be a priority for law firms, compared to 57 percent of partners. The firm polled more than 1,200 lawyers from 132 different law firms in the U.S., 77.45 percent of which were associates with one to five years of experience. The survey answers weren't broken down by race/ethnicity or gender, so it's hard to tell which associates said they cared more about diversity and which said they cared less.

Ru Bhatt, managing director of Major, Lindsey & Africa's Associate Practice Group, said some partners may be worried about the legal industry's diversity problem from a business perspective.

"Partners feel the pressure of clients demanding more diverse teams and see the positive impact of these teams, which amounts to an understanding of diversity's crucial role," said Bhatt.

"Associates, understandably so, are looking at it from a specific point of view, which is in terms of their own career, perhaps not necessarily putting the entire organization as a whole in perspective," he added.

But another explanation might be that younger attorneys don't rank diversity efforts as a priority because they take them as given, according to James Goodnow, equity partner at Fennemore Craig, P.C. and author of the forthcoming book *Motivating Millennials*. Outside of the legal industry, millennials in the United States are the most diverse generation in the workforce, he said.

"It's more just a part of life," Goodnow told Big Law Business.

"For [those respondents] who didn't rank it as high I don't think it means they don't care, I just think they approach it in a different way," he said.

Goodnow, who sits on Fennemore's diversity council, hasn't seen a major difference between older and younger attorneys' views on diversity at the firm. "I just think it may be a matter of expression," he said.

D.L. Morriss, Diversity & Inclusion Partner at Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP, also said the survey results likely reflect the fact that millennials grew up in a more diverse environment than senior partners did.

"For many of these associates, [diversity and inclusion] issues are basically second nature," he said. "Older partners, by contrast, began their career in much less diverse surroundings, and therefore are more likely to be self-conscious about [it]."

Worth noting, however, is that 60 percent of respondents across all age groups agreed with the statement that "law firm culture is inherently sexist." Only 5.84 percent of associates and 10 percent of partners said they "absolutely disagree."

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