

Recruiting and Motivating the Millennium (Y) Generation

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Not Your Father's Lawyer

Today's young lawyers are entering the profession with different values, attitudes, expectations and demands than the partners and recruiters who will hire them. Although generalizing about any group is a dangerous practice, I believe it can fairly be said that the Millennium Generation demands more – interesting work, fair treatment, continuous feedback – than previous generations – and are far more likely to vocalize their needs. It will take more than wining and dining – and boasting about billable hours – to attract the best of the new lawyers to your firm.

So how do you recruit lawyers of the Millennium (or Y) Generation? And how do you retain them? This is the question I was recently asked by a recruiting coordinator of a major law firm. My response, which follows, takes the form of a proposed speech that a managing partner might give to summer associates.

But first, here are my top ten answers to the question: What do Y Generation lawyers want?

1. They want to work for firms whose leaders do not take themselves too seriously.
2. They want to work in a comfortable atmosphere, one in which they can be themselves.
3. They want to work for firms where they have an essential contribution to the success of their firm and their clients.
4. They want to work for a firm that values – and practices – community service.
5. They want to work on teams and to make friends at a firm.
6. They want for their work to be interesting, and will get easily bored if unchallenged.
7. They want their firms to provide them with the most up-to-date technology to better perform their work.
8. They want and will seek constant and continuous feedback from their supervising attorneys.
9. They want to be treated fairly – as they define it – and will place a very high value on it.
10. They want – demand – sincerity from firm leaders.

Keep this last “want” firmly in mind as you examine my prototypical recruitment speech. The Millennium Generation is without tolerance for those who talk the talk but don't walk the walk. So I urge you to adapt this speech to your own corporate values and to not promise or promote any ideal or practices you do not intend to deliver.

Greetings, Summer Associates

“Welcome, welcome to our firm. We are very pleased you have chosen to spend part of your summer with us. We hope you will find the experience rewarding and, if you find our values are aligned with your own, we hope you will consider joining us as associates. From years of experience, I have learned that summer associates who are wined and dined during the summer, arrive for their first year with an unrealistic view of what it is like to be a young lawyer in a firm. In our firm we will spend less time entertaining you and spend more time getting to know you and giving you the opportunity to know our lawyers.

“I want to tell you about our firm. Specifically, I want to share with you our sense of purpose, our vision for the future, what we expect of our young lawyers and the important ways in which they contribute to our success. I also want you to know about our firm culture and core values. In the fall, you will be making an important career decision, and I want you to be as informed about our firm as possible. We know we can’t change our lawyers so we try very hard to determine if their values are aligned with ours.

‘Like most firms, we exist to serve our clients and support them in accomplishing their objectives. So, we exist to serve others. We also exist to serve each other. Each person at our firm, from the most senior partner to the most junior staff member, is important to our success. We do our very best to treat lawyers and staff the way we treat our clients. We recognize that we can successfully serve our clients only if our lawyers and staff feel that they are part of our team and that their contribution matters. We expect the highest quality work and extraordinary service from each of our lawyers and staff. We expect it because our clients demand it and deserve it and, frankly, it is great fun to work together to provide it. We also feel our purpose is to use the latest technology to both better serve and more economically serve our clients. Most of our clients use technology to be more effective and more efficient and they expect us to do the same.

“In addition to serving clients, we want to also serve our community. We have a very active pro-bono program. Not only do we feel this is important for the community, but we also feel it is important to give our young lawyers experiences they would not otherwise get as quickly. As a firm, we also contribute in other ways to the communities in which our offices are located and we encourage our lawyers to contribute as well.

“Where do we want to go and what do we want to become? We have a five year plan. It focuses in part on strategic growth. It is strategic in that we plan to expand for good reasons, based on better serving our existing and potential clients. So, when we look to open a new office in a different geographic area, it is because we can better serve our clients and potential clients. When we seek to add practice areas, we do so to provide a broader range of services. We clearly understand our core practices, the areas in which we feel we are very strong. We plan to focus on that foundation to build our national reputation. We know where we are less strong and, to the extent it is important to our clients that we become stronger in those areas, we will make every effort to do so.

We also want to focus on things we can control. We can’t control the economy, we can’t control the mergers of clients, we can’t control clients filing bankruptcy and going out of business. We feel we can control the selection of the right lawyers to join us, our efforts to train, develop and energize them about their careers, the level of service we offer our clients and how

effectively we use the technology that is available. We want to select lawyers who are motivated about serving clients; we want to provide each of them with the best opportunity to learn and develop their skills and to develop a successful career. My goal is for us to have a training and development program recognized as preeminent by our lawyers, law students like you and our clients. We want to provide extraordinary service to our clients. My goal is for each of our clients to believe our service is unmatched by any other law firm.

“I want to tell you how young lawyers contribute to our success and what you can do if you join us. First, we know that each of you is extremely bright and successful already. You have proven yourself in college and law school. While each of you shares many traits, each of you has unique talents. We want to seize on those, understand them and find ways to channel your talents into areas you will enjoy and that will benefit our clients and our firm. We recognize that your generation is by far the most technology proficient of any here at the firm. That means you can make immediate contributions to our success by helping us to better use technology. You will contribute to our success by constantly learning. The practice of law is ever-changing. The law itself is not changing as rapidly but the services we provide – and the way in which we provide them – are in continual flux.

What do we need from you? We need for you to stay on top of this change and realize that just because you have finished law school, you have not finished learning. We need for you to understand our clients and their industries. Surveys of clients reflect they are not satisfied that their lawyers, especially associates, know enough about their business or their industry. We are determined to be different and it starts with our young lawyers. We expect you to work as a team, both with our senior lawyers and with each other. We can't serve our clients if we are cowboys. We have to work very effectively together. We expect you to work hard, not to meet some billable hour quota but because you are serving our clients and learning and experiencing different aspects of law in the process. We expect you to treat all of our lawyers and staff with dignity and respect. In the past we had some lawyers who treated senior lawyers one way and the staff differently. That is not what we want. Our staff members are professionals. They make a very significant contribution. They are experienced and seasoned veterans. We expect you to treat them that way. We want you to have the fire in the belly to be the best you can be each day. We expect you to be “coachable.” What do I mean by that? We expect you to want to be coached and be willing to listen and gain something from each experience you have. Finally, you will contribute to our firm's success by having fun. While we all work very hard for our clients we also try to have fun. You need to have fun when you are working with us.

“What is our firm all about? What are our core values? While you are here this summer, I want you to feel comfortable asking our lawyers what they believe our core values are. If you get a lot of different answers, I will be very disappointed. I think any law firm should recognize it is like a three legged stool and each leg must be strong. The three legs are our clients, our own people and economics. As you likely gathered from what I said earlier, one of our primary core values is client service. We want our service to be extraordinary. We talk about client service at every meeting. We ask our clients how we can serve them better. We judge our lawyers in part by their client service. The second leg is our people. As I explained earlier, we want to recruit the best lawyers and staff and provide them the greatest opportunities to learn and have great experiences. We expect our senior lawyers to be mentors. We expect our young lawyers to take

responsibility for their careers and to have a plan. We judge our senior lawyers in part by how well they mentor junior lawyers and we judge our junior lawyers in part by their career plan and how well they execute it. The third leg is economics. We could have extraordinary client service and great people, but if we did it unprofitably all the people counting on us would not be able to stay with us. Each of our lawyers knows our economic success provides jobs and opportunities for all of us and feels a sense of responsibility to help us achieve that success. We work with each lawyer to set economic goals not based on hours but rather based on revenue and profitability.

Summer associates, we welcome you and hope you find your experience this summer both rewarding and a realistic view of what it would be like to work with us. I want you to know that if you have any questions during the summer we want you to ask them. I know our lawyers and recruiting staff will do their best to respond to each question you have. I also want you to measure our firm's commitment to what I have outlined above, not by my words, but rather by the actions you see on a day-to-day basis while you are with us. In deciding your future I want to encourage you to look inward and think about what is important to you. Think about your life and work priorities, what you want out of your career, what is important to you about relationships with your fellow workers, what kind of experiences you want to have as a lawyer and how you want to contribute to your community."

How and Why the Y Generation Will Respond:

Why will the above presentation help attract and retain today's brightest talent? Based on what the experts on this generation have written, I believe millennium law recruits have grown up differently than both the X generation and certainly my baby boom generation. They are the most affluent, busy, structured, technologically proficient, culturally diverse, collaborative, friend-reliant and easily bored generation ever. They have very high expectations of themselves and thus any group they join. It would be incredibly important for the firm to live the values the managing partner shares with the summer associates.

If any law firm leaders are skeptical about the importance of recruiting and motivating the millennium generation and what is important to them, they should review the Price Waterhouse Coopers web site aimed at recruiting the millennium generation: <http://www.pwcglobal.com/lookhere/>. It is fascinating, informative and interactive. I believe they have captured what is important to the millennium generation. On the web site, recruits may interactively answer a series of questions to help learn their priorities. The questions include:

- When interacting with people what is most important to you?
- What are the greatest priorities in your career?
- What makes a cool assignment cool?
- What are the most important things you want to learn?
- What things do you like to do outside of work?
- How would you like to impact your community?

Each question has a multiple choice and can be completed online. There are also pull down menus titled:

- Define your priorities
- Explore what matters
- Propel your career
- Meet great people
- Get cool assignments
- Learn every day
- Find work life
- Make a difference

For each of the items listed above there is a video clip of PWC accountants discussing their views. Any law firm would do well to model its recruiting and development programs after the Price Waterhouse web site. I do, however, caution law firms against using colloquialisms such as “cool.” On paper (or computer screen) such words don’t sound genuine.

Law firms will depend heavily in the future on the Millennium Generation and those who act swiftly will enjoy a tremendous opportunity to recruit and energize them. Few firms have given much thought to this important subject and, like everything else, whoever gets to the market first will likely leave many others in the dust.