

# Bridging the generational gap

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October 2007

Everyone knows there's disconnect between junior associates and senior partners. Juniors find the seniors to be too demanding and the seniors think the juniors are lazy.

OK, let's examine this for a moment. Are the junior associates really lazy? Or do they simply have a different approach to their life and career? While some would argue they demand too much flexibility, others would suggest this is just the result of a generational shift. The priorities of new lawyers have changed.

On the flip side, are senior partners too rigid? Or do they just not understand the new crop of lawyers and all of the demands that are placed on them?

There is a gap indeed; and if left unattended, it could have unintended consequences for the legal industry.

## Unintended consequences

One of the largest challenges facing law firms today is talent retention. Associates are dropping out at a rapid rate. Part of the problem is the current labour shortage - an associate could walk out the front door this morning and have a new job this afternoon. For law firms, this translates into taking better care in choosing who they hire and how they support their lawyers in creating a career that works for them and the firm. It can be done.

## Back when...

When some of today's senior partners were working their way through their careers, they would get home often very late at night and dinner was ready, slippers were at the door, drink was in hand - you get the picture. They were also working longer hours, not worrying about business development and not expected to help with raising their children. They were often working on weekends and practically never home.

## The new reality

Today's new lawyer lives in an entirely different culture. It involves balance. If they have children, they are expected to and enjoy being involved in raising them. Their spouse likely works well. Add fitness, volunteer work, hobbies and other responsibilities, and life gets busy real fast.

## What next?

What I think is missing is a dialogue between these generations. After all, what is it that the partners want? They just want the associate to produce, to become a profit making business unit. Do they really care how this is done? Do they even care if an associate has a life; just as long as they are adding to the success of the firm? Perhaps some flexibility is required in the way associates are compensated and rewarded. It may be time to shift emphasis away from amount of hours worked and focus instead on the profitability of the associate's practice.

Would juniors think that partners are too demanding if they were cut some slack? And if junior or intermediate associates could be shown how to build a profitable practice without losing their life balance, do you think



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that would be of interest to them?

I have good news. You all can have your cake and eat it too. Senior partners simply want the associates to operate as a profitable business unit while junior associates want to be able to balance the needs of the firm with their lifestyle choices. You can achieve both if you are strategic and targeted in your approach.

How? Start with a plan. I work with lawyers everyday who fear entering into business development training because they think that I am there to turn them into a robot for the firm. I'm not. I work with them to help them first clarify what they want, and then help them to get it.

When building a practice, it's very important to understand that you are in control. You can target the types of clients you want to work with, and the type of work that interests you. You can go after the higher paying clients and high profile cases. And, you can actually have fun doing it, while maintaining your life balance. How do I know this? I have several clients who have learned to do this day in and day out.

People are the strongest assets a service business has. Firms would be well advised to anticipate the needs of this new generation of lawyers and start a new dialogue with them.

This article first appeared in the October 5, 2007 issue of The Lawyer's Weekly.

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