



Talkin' 'Bout The

Don't believe the hype

By Christopher Dougherty

She could have handled this job request in one of many ways. She chose to fulfill it in a way ... marked by initiative, competence and a warm, personal touch.

Recently, I had one of those “senior moments.” I left my cellphone on the hood of my car while grabbing a few extra items before pulling out of the driveway. As I got underway, the wind gliding over my Honda Accord overcame the quickly diminishing coefficient of friction and my phone soon tumbled off to an untimely demise.

Not being able to bear an extra hour without this technological lifeline, I called our firm's information technology department for help. I was directed to Lauren, one of our IT specialists. Within 24 hours, Lauren had secured the old phone's data from hackers and had me up and running with a FedEx'd new device. Every byte of contact, email and



Millennial Generation

other data was back in hand. It was not just her speed in accomplishing all of this, it was Lauren's attention to detail that made an impression on me. Lauren called me seven times over a 24-hour period, advising me of the status of everything, including various insurance and Apple-Care options after perceptively appreciating that this might not be a one-time event for me.

Lauren's "service" struck a resonant chord with me. She is a "millennial." She could have handled this job request in one of many ways. She chose to fulfill it in a way that I would describe as old school, first-class, personal service — marked by initiative, competence and a warm, personal touch.





Who are the legal professionals and administrators of our future? They are the millennials.

Why do I mention this?

Our firm's management carefully balances the need to keep one eye fixed on day-to-day operations to ensure we provide our clients the best possible legal services. At the same time, we look beyond the horizon with the other eye. We chart a course to maintain first-in-class service over the next five, 10, 20 years and beyond.

Our longer-range thinking necessarily includes manpower management. When anticipating how to meet the needs of our clients in a rapidly changing legal industry over the next 15 to 20 years, we study which attorneys and staff are approaching retirement. We gauge what expertise, skill, client relations, community connections and other intangible resources should be preserved and devised to the next generations of lawyers and staff. Then we ask: Are the beneficiaries of those bequests ready to properly accept them? If Lauren is such a beneficiary, then I am confident about our future.

Who are the legal professionals and administrators of our future? They are the millennials. In case you missed it, in early 2015, they became the largest generation in the U.S. workforce. In two years, they will make up one-half of the global workforce. By 2025, they will constitute 75 percent of the workplace.

I dislike the label "millennial." Individuals shouldn't be lumped together under a label that is too easily slapped onto them. I don't share the negative perceptions often ascribed to them.

Everyone has heard the various criticisms of millennials. Here are a few:

- They are entitled.
- They are lazy.
- They are “trophy kids,” constantly in need of praise.
- They are addicted to technology.
- They don’t know boundaries between the personal and professional.
- They frequently job hop if employment does not fulfill their “passion.”
- They are the first ones to seek remote work opportunities.
- Their career goals are different from those of older generations.
- They don’t know how to communicate professionally.
- They can’t take constructive performance critiques.

I cannot debunk all of these criticisms here. I can only respond from my own experience.

CRITICISM

Millennials are entitled

DEBUNKED

The word “entitled” may be the most damning term used to describe millennials. Some boomers believe that millennials consider financial success and personal happiness as rights rather than rewards and that millennials are unwilling to sacrifice or endure hardship to obtain them.

We baby boomers have to own the fact that we pushed our children to get to the next level, get into good schools and afforded them with substantial opportunities.

They bring that background to the workplace. We can’t forget that they are the highest-educated generation in the world’s history. With that comes healthy self-confidence that is often mischaracterized as entitlement.

CRITICISM

Millennials are too obsessed with technology

DEBUNKED

Millennials display exceptional technology skills. They rely heavily on technology. We boomers forget, however, that millennials encounter unique challenges when they step into the workplace. At home, millennials rely on social networking, text messages, Snapchat and Instagram as preferred forms of communication. Email? No way. Talking on a cellphone is only a secondary backup.

When they walk into work, however, they step back in time. There, the customary means of communication may be face-to-face, telephone or email. The workplace phone is usually connected to a wire. This





means staying in one place for the duration of the call. These adaptations are ones we never had to make. Back in my day — and my parents' day — people communicated at home the same way they communicated at work — i.e., letters, telephones and face-to-face.

The legal profession may be one of the slowest to adapt to the lightning-quick changes in technology even though many firms' technology allows attorneys to work remotely at any hour of the day from anywhere. We can scan and e-mail court documents to clients on the go, and clients appreciate receiving that information promptly.

As we rethink the nature of the workplace, how do we preserve and pass along our culture of unselfish teamwork if everyone works remotely? We endeavor to strike the right balance and use technology as purposeful leverage.

CRITICISM

Millennials are lazy

DEBUNKED

This category might be the flip side to the label above.

Boomers and millennials define the workday differently. We boomers defined the workday as being physically present in the office. We measured commitment by how early one came in, how late one stayed, whether one worked on weekends, how much time one spent “on premises.”

Millennials, however, feel comfortable getting work done from virtually anywhere. When a younger worker isn't present in the office, an older co-worker might falsely assume that he or she is not working and improperly conclude that he or she is “lazy.” Millennials use technology to streamline organizational processes to make



[Their] self-confidence is often mischaracterized as entitlement.

their jobs easier. Millennials view it as a logical way to boost productivity. Not surprisingly, misperception about technology serves as a catalyst for intergenerational conflict in the workplace.

If a remote-work policy exists in an organization, it is true that the vast majority of millennials will avail themselves of it. Yet so does every other working generation. Most surveys disclose that boomers (95 percent) are actually more likely than millennials (93 percent) to use a remote-work policy when offered. Contrary to popular belief, younger workers aren't hoping that remote work supplants the physical office. In one significant study, millennial workers were still very much attached to the culture of the physical office. While millennials have been often portrayed as threatening traditional workplace culture, in reality, they are looking to evolve it. I am excited about that reality.

The workplace is evolving. Within employment law and Department of Labor constraints, firms are studying how best to fashion flextime options for attorneys, paraprofessionals and support staff. Our

technology should allow us to redesign the workday — one that permits attention to personal commitments without sacrificing client service and profitability.

CRITICISM

Millennials lack loyalty

DEBUNKED

Research has confirmed that the majority of millennials are interested in developing a long-term relationship with one employer. One study found that 44 percent of millennials want to stay in the same job for their career. Contrary to misconceptions, they don't want to “job-hop.”

While millennials agree that they are more likely than other generations to leave an organization for another opportunity, the driving reason for such movement is not a lack of loyalty. Rather, they are more likely to seek another job opportunity if their needs for support, appreciation and flexibility are not met. Surprisingly, boomers are more likely to leave if they feel they are

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not being paid fairly. Millennial survey responses indicate that 92 percent feel somewhat or very loyal to their current employer.

To me, this is more Leadership 101 than it is a generational divide. Loyalty doesn't differentiate among organizations or generations. Loyalty is a quality of genuine faithfulness — to one's organization, one's seniors, one's subordinates, one's peers. Loyalty must be earned and it takes time to build. It is built upon mutual care, respect and interest in the welfare of others. Loyalty is a two-way street. If developed properly, it can take strong root in a millennial as readily as in a boomer.

We have millennial attorneys in every practice department and every office at our firm that our founders would have been proud to work with. Their innovation, client-commitment, dedication and business-mindedness would have been as notable in the 1960s as it is in now. We have millennial attorneys displaying enviable initiative as they form new practice groups; seek advanced industry expertise by taking challenging coursework; work toward board certifications in litigation disciplines; unselfishly share their social media marketing skills with others



throughout the firm; give generously of their spare time to serve on boards for meaningful nonprofit organizations; help indigent persons in need of legal assistance; study for and take bar examinations in neighboring states to expand the firm's geographic coverage and many other efforts that make the label "lazy" laughable.

Rather than being dismissive of a generation because they dress, communicate and life-prioritize differently, we boomers have the responsibility to share a culture of respect, humility, loyalty, care and humor with them. More than anything else, those enduring values will position millennials to maintain and improve upon our industry's tradition of excellence. ♣

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