

Managing

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Making Room for Dreams at Work

Dreams and work? How can those two possibly go together? Most of us were told that we needed to give up dreaming when we became professionals. Usually, accepting “reality” is taken as a sign of maturity—you know, giving up childish fantasies and doing what work demands of us.

We all know that law is one of the most demanding among professions. So how do dreamers openly express their dreams in the context of their firms? Many partners might answer, “They don’t. Work is about work, and lawyers should focus their energy on becoming better lawyers.” But those partners soon may find they have compelling reasons to change their tune on that front.

Watch Out! The Millennials Are Here

Legal employers became aware of the impact of generational differences when they began seeing the clash between Generation X and the baby boomers. There was much fuss about perceived Gen-X attributes such as entitlement, pessimism and lack of loyalty. Although many of those

characteristics turned out to be more hype than fact, the idea of managing generational differences in the workplace took hold. Today, Generation X is safely ensconced in firm partnership and management positions.

But coming right on its heels is Generation Y, or “Generation Next,” as some call it. This very large group of

future professionals—at 70 million strong—is an entirely new breed of employee, according to researchers. Lynne C. Lancaster and David Stillman’s book *When Generations Collide* (HarperCollins, 2002) gives us a preview of what employers will face as they try to motivate, satisfy and retain members of the next generation of lawyers. This “Millennial Generation,” so dubbed by Lancaster and Stillman, consists of individuals born between 1981 and 1999. They were summer associates in 2003 and will make up much of the first-year associate ranks this coming fall—and for many falls thereafter.

Where does dreaming come into the picture? When we look at what the Millennials say motivates them and how they describe their hopes for their careers.

This is a generation formed by soccer moms and lessons in everything from ballet to tai kwon do, surrounded by instant communication from every possible form of media, and exposed to a seamless global culture. These are people looking for more than just a career. They want to be able to express their dreams at work!

They don’t want to be tied to one specialty or even one career, believing they have multitasked to success growing up and seeing absolutely no reason to stop now. For law firms that have doggedly worked to push lawyers into ever smaller niches, it may be time to look at your workplace through the eyes of your next wave of employees.

Action Plan

- Recognize that individuals who can combine their passions with their work are more creative, productive and loyal to their organizations.
- Consider ways in which your firm can shape its environment to make room for dreams at work.
- Talk with employees about their avocations and how the firm can support individuals in “bringing” avocations to the office. This will be a new idea to most, so offer examples to employees. For instance, the yoga enthusiast might offer to hold a class and the music lover might organize concert outings.
- Learn more from these resources:
 - When Generations Collide* by Lynne C. Lancaster and David Stillman. HarperCollins, 2002.
 - Keeping Good Lawyers* by M. Diane Vogt and Lori-Ann Rickard. ABA, 2000.
 - You Don't Have to Go Home from Work Exhausted!* by Ann McGee-Cooper. Bantam, 1992.
 - Living Your Life Out Loud* by Salli Rasberry and Padi Selwyn. Pocket Books, 1995.



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Avocations in the Workplace

It may seem an impossible task—taking a very demanding job and shaping it to the needs of young lawyers seeking opportunities to express multiple talents in their professional lives. But by doing so, legal employers may find ways to make their work environments more satisfying for *all* their employees—regardless of which generational group people fall into.

The field of career development tells us that all of us have both vocations and avocations.

■ Our vocations are the careers we choose, based on our talents, the practical realities of our lives and the influences of parents and others.

■ Our avocations have lives of their own and could easily be characterized as our dreams or passions. We don't control our avocations—they express themselves in our lives over time.

Practicing law is a vocation, but loving art is an avocation. Wanting to help the disadvantaged is an avocation, but working as a staff counsel is a vocation.

The legal employers that will be most successful at motivating, satisfying and retaining members of the Millennial Generation will be those that create opportunities for lawyers to express their avocations, or their dreams, within their vocations.

Take, for example, the lawyer who wants to serve the community. By developing pro bono work assignments to provide opportunities for those whose avocations include helping others, a firm gives its lawyers a chance to combine their work and passions. Sponsoring community outreach activities offers outlets for those who want to teach or organize events. For lawyers with a strong artistic bend, celebrating avocational achievements through in-house book signings or art shows draws attention to the diversity of talent in the

organization and signals the firm's support for these efforts. Developing positions for lawyers interested in both practicing and managing the firm's finances, strategic direction or professional development has become increasingly popular and is a perfect example of allowing lawyers to express multiple talents.

There are endless varieties of ways to nurture lawyers' dreams if you are creative enough.

The Impact on the Work Environment

It is impossible to assess the positive impact such actions might have on lawyers in the Millennial Generation. But given what we know about dissatisfaction among the current generation of lawyers, the effort may be worth it.

All of us can benefit from keeping our dreams alive, and so much the better if we can express those dreams at work. Too often, tired and stressed from the press of business, we give up our dreams, only to find a nagging sense of dissatisfaction that may lead to feeling the only answer is to quit. Finding creative approaches to structuring career opportunities that allow lawyers to celebrate their vocation while expressing their personal avocations can only result in a more welcoming workplace for the next generation of lawyers—and, in fact, for all of us!

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