

Rethinking Partnership: A Generation X-er Perspective by Marcia Pennington Shannon

Why would anyone want to become a partner?

While you are examining your partnership compensation system, it might be a good time to evaluate the whole idea of what it means to be a partner in your firm. How do you keep your associates and partners satisfied and loyal? There is a whole new generation of lawyers moving toward the ranks of partnership - Generation X (those lawyers born between 1963 and 1981). They're an altogether different group from the infamous Baby Boomers who precede them. To truly evaluate your firm's future, especially about partnership, understand the career motivations of these enormously valuable resources.

Most firm managers believe that if you throw enough money and bonuses at lawyers, they'll perform, be happy and strive for partnership. Of course, once they've gained partnership, the money and prestige will keep them motivated. After all, this is what attracted many of them to partnership. Generation X-ers like money, but this isn't what keeps them motivated. One attorney's experience describes the feelings of many Generation X-ers in the profession:

I worked hard and made partner at my previous firm. I thought I'd really made it. Yet after a couple of years, I was absolutely miserable. I thought to be a partner would make me feel like I was a real part of the team, but all I found was that, though we called ourselves partners, we were really isolated solo practitioners - there was no sense of collegiality. I left the firm and joined with other like-minded attorneys to create our own firm, where, yes, I make less money, but I believe that we are working together toward common goals. We are really building something here for which all of us can be proud.

So if it's not money that motivates these Generation X lawyers, what does? In *Managing Generation X*, author Bruce Tulgan identifies four factors that influence the career decisions of X-ers: belonging, learning, entrepreneurship and security. Are the factors incorporated in your firm's thinking about partnership and partnership track?

☞ *Belonging.* Are the lawyers in your firm made to feel part of the team and that the firm is a better place because of their contributions? Or are they made to feel that another lawyer could easily replace them? Belonging means being part of an organization where one can make a contribution.

☞ *Learning.* Does your firm promote an atmosphere of learning, sharing information and mentoring? Or is the professional development of your lawyers ignored? Consider if your firm creates an environment that encourages the individual to develop and learn. If lawyers aren't learning and intellectually challenged, they are going to leave.

☞ *Entrepreneurship.* Are the lawyers in your firm encouraged to use their creativity to find

solutions to clients' problems? Are they given the training to market the firm? Or are they hindered in their attempts to do so? Do they take on increasing responsibilities and leadership roles?

✍️ *Security.* Do the lawyers know what criteria are used to evaluate them as successful in the firm? Are they given meaningful feedback? Can they see the direct correlation between their efforts and achievements?

If a set of outdated values and standards drives partnership in your firm, time to rethink it. And, don't worry about change. The Millennial Generation promises to add even more challenges to the traditional workplace!

Printed in the ABA's *Law Practice Management*, April 2000 issue.