

# A BOOMING FORCE IN LAW: THE MILLENNIAL LAWYER

A research study by Cubicle Fugitive

## INTRODUCTION

Countless studies have documented that millennials are increasingly becoming the dominant force in the workplace with some projecting they will rise to become around 50% of workers by 2020.<sup>1</sup> With the U.S. Census projecting that millennials will “overtake Boomers in population in 2019 as their numbers swell to 73 million and Boomers decline to 72 million”, this generation’s wants, needs and influence can no longer be ignored.<sup>2</sup>

While researchers have studied this cohort for over a decade, not much research has focused on millennial lawyers.

In the first quarter of 2018, Cubicle Fugitive reached out to hundreds of law firms across North America and asked their lawyers to participate in a study. The purpose was to provide perspective on the much-maligned millennial group and to better understand what these lawyers wanted from their firms, their mentors and their marketing teams.

Millennial lawyers are not only taking over in sheer numbers; they are increasingly becoming leaders at their firms. The results of this study provide valuable insight, feedback and advice from millennial lawyers to their law firms and fellow young lawyers on what they want and need to learn, grow, and eventually lead their law firms in an increasingly competitive and ever-evolving legal market.

**Morgan MacLeod**  
Owner, Cubicle Fugitive Inc.

**MILLENNIALS  
ARE LOOKING  
FOR “FIRM FIT”  
AS MUCH AS  
FIRMS ARE.**

87% of millennial lawyers believe access to interesting, rewarding and worthwhile work is the most important characteristic they want in a firm and 71% are looking for a firm with values that match their own.

With 39% of millennials looking to stay at their current firm for less than 10 years, how can we attract and retain the best talent?

<sup>1</sup> Stringfellow Otey, Brittany. “Buffering Burnout: Preparing the Online Generation for the Occupational Hazards of the Legal Profession”. January, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Fry, Richard. “Millennials projected to overtake Baby Boomers as America’s largest generation”. Pew Research Center, March 1, 2018.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Millennials are surprisingly loyal.

While many stereotypes exist about millennials, one that has stuck is that they don't show much loyalty and are very willing to job hop. However in our survey, 61% of our millennial respondents said they are looking to stay with their current firm and become a partner. Other studies also confirm that the loyalty stereotype is a myth; according to the Pew Research Center, "millennial workers, those ages 18 to 35, are just as likely to stick with their employers as their older counterparts in Generation X were when they were young adults".<sup>3</sup>

### Law firms should provide greater mentorship, support and guidance.

Millennial lawyers want help from their firms and mentors to "become strategic and profitable partners" at their firms. Responses to several open-ended survey questions show that millennial lawyers want greater transparency and insight into the business of a law firm, more mentorship on the practice of law, and more honest feedback on how they are doing. We also learned that they might not ask for help out of fear of seeming ignorant. This leads us to recommend that law firms should take the initiative in providing these supports.

### Poor communication leads to unclear expectations.

The results made it clear that there is a severe lack of communication about expectation. This begins at law school; several respondents claimed that becoming a lawyer wasn't all they had thought or hoped it could be. Once these millennials join law firms, they often struggle to understand what is expected of them from their partners and from clients. This is highlighted by questions about what work should or should not be billed and how much of their own business they are expected to generate. We recommend that law firms strive to provide clearer expectations to young associates and teach them how to seek out clear expectations from their internal and external clients and stakeholders.

### Millennial lawyers want support developing their business.

Acknowledging that billable hours are important, millennial lawyers want more time, budget, training, support and leeway when it comes to marketing, engaging with prospects, and building business.

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<sup>3</sup> Fry, Richard. "Millennials aren't job-hopping any faster than Generation X did". Pew Research Center, April 19, 2017.

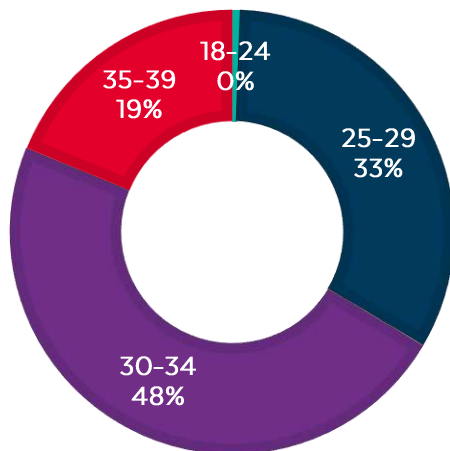
## MILLENNIAL LAWYER SURVEY: BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The survey was sent out to Cubicle Fugitive's clients and contacts in the legal profession, as well as through the Legal Marketing Association's Shared Interest Groups and social media. The survey garnered 195 responses, 170 from members of the millennial generation. While there is no definitive age range, many classify people born between 1981 and 1996 as millennials.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this study, we have looked at lawyers aged between 18-40 in 2018.

Respondents to our survey include lawyers from across North America with 42% coming from Canada (the majority residing in Ontario) and 55% from the United States (distributed across 22 states).

Most respondents fell into the core "working" millennial groupings of individuals aged 25-29 and

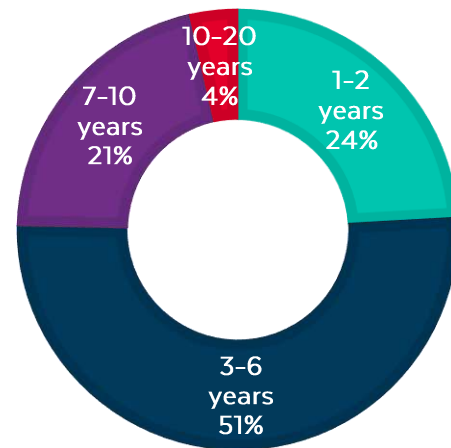
**Figure 1 - How old are you?**



30-34, with the majority of them coming from small to mid-sized law firms.

A strong majority of the respondents (76%) have been practising law for 3+ years with 51% of those in the 3-6 year range. Not surprisingly, almost 91% of these respondents currently hold the title of "associate" with 4% having attained the title "partner". The remaining respondents identified as either a "managing partner" or "of counsel".

**Figure 2 - How many years have you been practising law?<sup>5</sup>**



While the survey was distributed to law firms of all sizes, 96% of respondents come from firms with less than 500 lawyers. This could be indicative of the representative sample of firms that were exposed to the survey or the level of engagement of millennial lawyers at large firms.

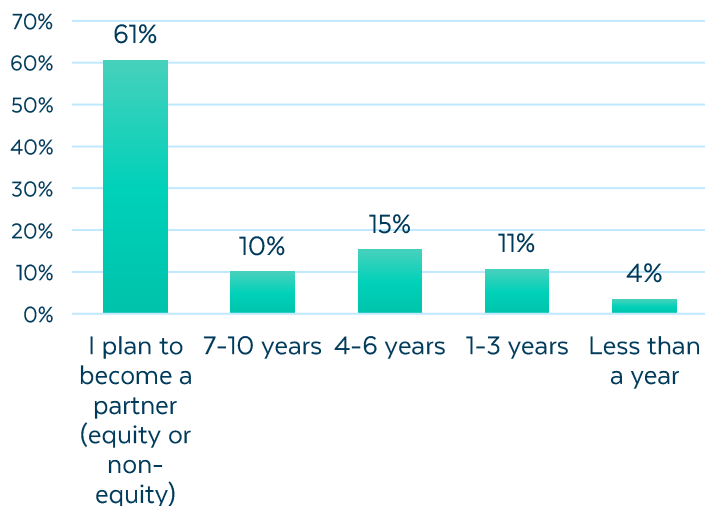
<sup>4</sup> Fry, Richard. "Millennials are the largest generation in the U.S. labor force". Pew Research Center, April 11, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> No respondents self-identified as having practiced law 20+ years.

The survey attracted lawyers from many practice areas including but not limited to business law, employment and real estate law, health law, human rights and aboriginal law. The only areas that are not explicitly covered by our study are lawyers working in traffic law, immigration law, and white-collar crime law. We will look to address this sampling error in subsequent studies. Overwhelmingly, respondents cited their role as including some form of civil or corporate litigation.

A main goal of this study was to fully understand the motivations of millennials in the workplace. While IBM demystified the myth about millennials being “more likely to jump ship if a job doesn’t fulfill their passions,”<sup>6</sup> we wanted to see if we could identify what law firm characteristics lead to higher loyalty and lawyer retention.

**Table 4 – How long do you see yourself working at your current law firm?**



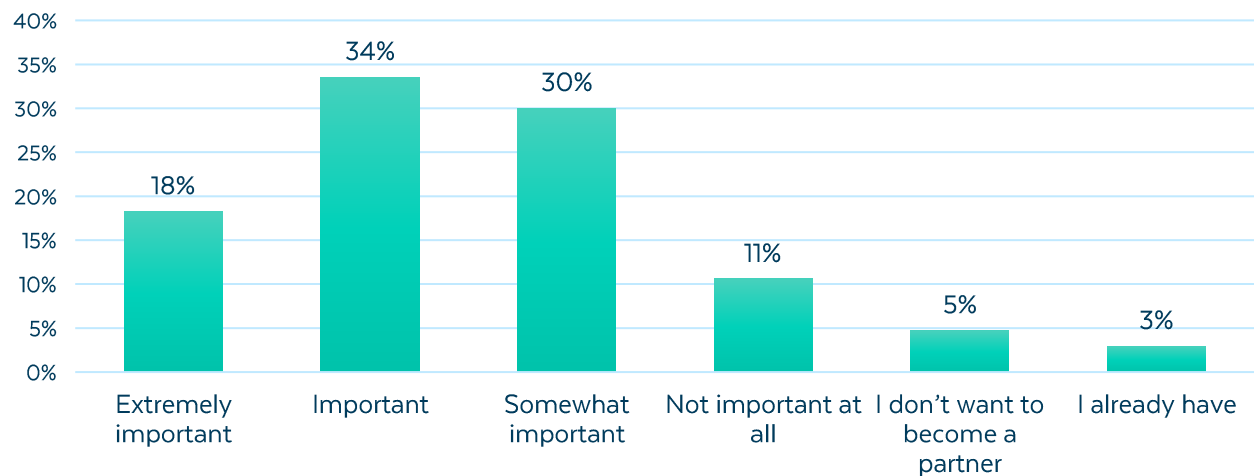
## TOP 10 PRACTICE AREAS OF RESPONDENTS

1. Civil Litigation
2. Litigation (all forms)
3. Business and Corporate Commercial Law
4. Employment and Labour | Labor Law
5. Real Estate Law
6. Insurance Litigation
7. Wills, Trusts and Estates Law
8. Personal Injury Law
9. Corporate Governance Law
10. Environmental Law | Municipal law | Mergers and Acquisitions (all tied)

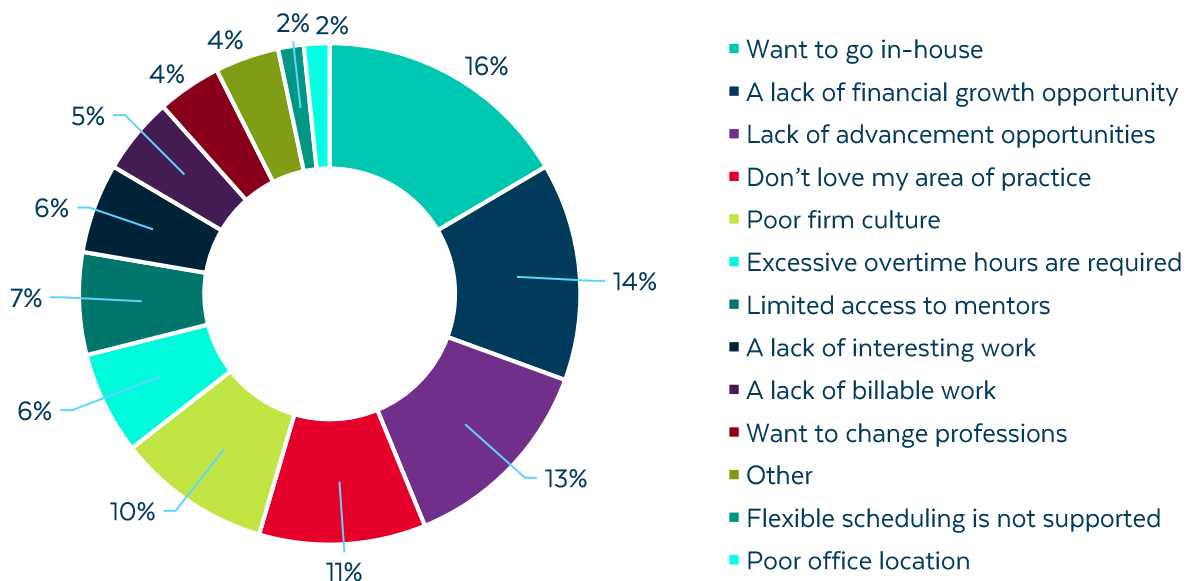
While the “golden ticket” allure of a partnership might not be as important as it once was (only 18% indicated it is “extremely important”), 61% of survey respondents plan to stay and become partners at their firms.

<sup>6</sup> IBM Institute for Business Value. “Myths, exaggerations and uncomfortable truths: The real story behind Millennials in the workplace”. 2015. In the study, they noted that “There’s some evidence that Millennials are more itinerant than other generations: 27% have already worked for five or six different employers. However, this is likely a reflection of today’s economic conditions. Seventy-five percent of Millennial respondents said they’ve held their current positions for three years or more, suggesting that they are no more inclined than older colleagues to gallivant from one job to the next.”

**Table 5 - How important is becoming a partner (equity or non-equity) to you?**



**Table 6 - If you answered that you see yourself working at your current law firm for less than three years, why are you considering leaving?**



When asked why they wanted to leave, most noted they wanted to go in-house, didn't see a future with their particular firm, or no longer liked their area of practice. However one in ten were willing to leave their firm because of poor firm culture.

## THE EARLY YEARS

It's not a new complaint – law schools don't teach you the practise of law. However, that doesn't make it any easier for the tens of thousands of lawyers who graduate every year.<sup>7</sup> Overwhelmingly, our millennial lawyer respondents commented that they want more practical experience on how to provide legal services. Essentially, they feel they are not doing what they thought they would be doing and do not think they have had the proper oversight or mentorship to become competent and effective lawyers.

“Like any first-year lawyer, the biggest challenge is finding your way. There's [so] much that you have to know that isn't taught in order to be effective”

### What was your biggest challenge during your first year of practice?<sup>8</sup>

Much of a young lawyer's anxiety and stress comes from learning to become a lawyer. While law schools teach the theory of law, most survey respondents believe that they were ill prepared to actually practise the law. They found it challenging to understand and meet the expectations from both internal mentors and external clients, and didn't have the confidence necessary to make important judgement calls.

The main challenges outlined by respondents, are:

1. The time requirements for learning the practice of law
2. The lack of mentorship, support, guidance or oversight at their firm
3. The constant challenge of trying to balance their workload [and personal life]
4. Adjusting to the culture and politics of the firm [and “dealing with difficult lawyers who made you feel stupid”]
5. Learning time management skills and how to identify and prioritize the right work
6. Meeting [internal and external] expectations and determining what is expected of them
7. Handling the anxiety and stress of private practice and gaining the confidence to do the job well
8. Trying to find clients, develop referral sources and generate work of their own

<sup>7</sup> Jacoby, Jeff. “US legal bubble can't pop soon enough”. The Boston Globe, May 09, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> This was an open-ended question and responses were tagged and organized by themes. These have been summarized and listed in descending order of most common responses.

## When you first became a lawyer, what surprised you about your role?<sup>9</sup>

We wanted to see if we could dig a little deeper into not just the challenges facing millennial lawyers, but the gap between their expectations and the reality of their role. While several of the same “challenges” appeared across different survey questions, it became clear that becoming a lawyer wasn’t all they had thought or hoped it could be. The areas that most surprised our millennial lawyers were:

1. **The learning curve.** Overwhelmingly, respondents were surprised at how ill-equipped they were for the business aspects of private practice and how little law school had prepared them for their new role. This included the gap between how little they knew and what they were expected to know, how much continuing education is expected of them, and the amount of non-lawyer work involved in private practice. This feedback is important not only for law schools but also student and articling advisors and mentors who can help better prepare young lawyers to excel in their jobs.
2. **The actual work they would be doing.** Respondents were surprised by the monotony and lack of variety in their work. This included the amount of writing and paperwork involved, the range of knowledge and experience that was expected (and that much of it comprises “non-legal” advice), the various roles they would need to play, and the “people skills” that are required in private practice.
3. **The billable hour requirements and the time commitments to meet these.** This probably comes as no surprise to most

lawyers, but millennials are daunted by the billable hour expectations presented to them and how much time is required to meet them. Many noted that they struggled with time management, juggling competing demands, clients’ expectations of what work should be free vs. billed, and their firm’s perceived emphasis on billable hours over quality work. This last statement is the most troubling and we recommend firms provide more clarity for their young lawyers.

“Figuring out what I was doing, what people wanted, what I didn’t know – just literally, learning how things went”

4. **How much clients respect and trust them – immediately.** Millennial lawyers were often surprised by how much their clients valued their opinions and trusted their decisions, regardless of how much they really knew.

<sup>9</sup> This was an open-ended question and responses were tagged and organized by themes. These have been summarized and listed in descending order of most common responses.



5. **The immediate responsibility and autonomy.** From comments about how lonely being a young lawyer can be to how much independence they have “without significant oversight”, respondents were surprised by the lack of training, direction and mentorship they received considering the significant responsibilities tasked to them.
6. **The stress and pressure of their jobs.** The pressure and level of responsibility of the lawyer’s role has been well-documented in the last few years as rates of depression and anxiety skyrocket in the legal profession.<sup>10,11</sup> Respondents commented about the “weight of responsibility” they felt from how much they needed to know and how much was at stake with each matter. While identifying there is a problem is the first step, more needs to be done about mental health issues in the legal profession.
7. **The sheer amount of administrative tasks that are part of their role.** Young lawyers were astonished by how much of their work was administrative and how their lives could be simplified by adopting solid time management skills and hiring good support staff. According to Clio’s 2017 Legal Trends Report, 48% of a lawyer’s time is spent on office administration, generating and sending bills, configuring technology, and trying to collect payments from clients (e.g., not practising law).<sup>12</sup>
8. **The emotional component of practising law.** Over the years, many lawyers have commented about how their job is not simply about providing legal advice, but often taking on the role of a counselor, therapist and advisor when dealing with clients for both business and personal areas of practice. Millennial lawyers were surprised at how multi-faceted their role was and how important “people skills” are to their everyday interactions with clients. Emotional intelligence is required in equal measure to deal with client concerns as it is to navigate various personalities within a law firm.
9. **The amount of networking and marketing time required.** Young lawyers did not anticipate the amount of business development, networking, and marketing time that would be expected of them. According to the same Clio study mentioned above, lawyers spend 33% of their time on business development related activities, which leaves very little time for garnering billable hours. It is easy to see, and the survey data supports it, that many millennial lawyers find the early years of practising law to be daunting and overwhelming.

<sup>10</sup> Stringfellow Otey, Brittany. “Buffering Burnout: Preparing the Online Generation for the Occupational Hazards of the Legal Profession”. January, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Fish, Daniel. “The mental-health crisis in law”. Precedent Magazine, March 6, 2018,

<sup>12</sup> Clio. “Legal Trends Report 2017”.

## When you first became a lawyer, what surprised you about the firm and working with other lawyers?<sup>13</sup>

Few of these answers will be shocking to those who work with lawyers regularly, however we recommend paying closer attention to requests for more clarity in what is expected of them.

1. **How fit matters.** The top three answers to this question revolved around the interpersonal dynamics (good and bad) at the respondents' law firm. Most were surprised by how varied the personalities were in their firm; how important building strong personal relationships with their peers and mentors would actually be; how "acrimonious some opposing counsel" could be; the conflicts and politics that exist within firms; and the dynamics between partners and associates, litigators and transaction lawyers. Some also commented that "business is personal" and how it's crucial to find an alignment of values when considering which firm to work for.
2. **The politics of a law firm are real (tied for second).** Young lawyers noted that they were amazed by how political their firms are and how much "drama" exists in a professional setting.
3. **How collaborative and collegial their firm was (tied for second).** In equal measure, millennials commented that they were pleasantly surprised at how supportive partners are and that their firms are collegial, friendly and collaborative.
4. **The billable hour conundrum.** This included everything from the level of competition within firms for billable hours, the expectations from clients about billable hours vs. value, the demands on lawyers' time and lack of control over priorities, and the unfortunate perception that young lawyers are perceived as "profit makers, not people".
5. **The competitiveness within a firm.** While more respondents reported that their firms were collaborative and collegial, almost one in ten respondents were surprised at the amount of internal competition, in-fighting and possessiveness over clients.
6. **Lack of clarity of what was expected of them.** Generally, young lawyers want more transparency and guidance from their partners on expectations, noting that there is often a difference between what was communicated and what was really expected of them. Most wanted more feedback, communication and transparency from their firms.
7. **How traditional and hierarchical their firms still are.** From comments about how in "a hierarchical structure...you're made to feel inferior" and "women are still not accepted into the practice of law as a business" to a "disrespect of employees", it appears that some firms still have a ways to

<sup>13</sup> This was an open-ended question and responses were tagged and organized by themes. These have been summarized and listed in descending order of most common responses.

go in their evolutionary process. Millennial lawyers were also concerned about their firm's lack of openness to vacation scheduling, maternity/paternity leave, open communications, and embracing technological advancements.

8. **The independence of practising law.** As Dr. Larry Richard publicised, lawyers are notoriously autonomous.<sup>14</sup> While many

lawyers covet their independence, many others feel lonely and isolated.

9. **Unprofessionalism in the profession.** millennials were disappointed in their mentors. Specifically, they were shocked that some lawyers displayed detrimental traits such as unprofessional behaviour, bad tempers, poor skillsets, lack of ethical guidelines, or an inadequate business sense.

## What advice would you give your first-year self?

This question provided some of the survey's most revealing answers:

**“Always get to know the clients directly”.**

**Spend your time being a great lawyer for your clients:** “always make sure your work is client-ready (even if in draft)”, “approach each task with a strategy that allows you to add value to the case” and “don't be embarrassed to spend as much time as necessary on your written product”.

**“Learn as much as you can, about everything you can.”**

**You don't know what you don't know:** “ask more questions”, “try to spend more time reading articles about your industry and about business development (I still wish I did more of this, but finding time is the hard part)”, “focus on being the best lawyer – business will come later”, “you are brilliant, you need experience”, “be confident”, “be patient”, and “be yourself”.

**“You'll never know it all. And the ones around you that tell you that they do, are lying.”**

<sup>14</sup> Slater, Laura and Richard, Larry, J.D., PH.D. “Leadership in Law Firms: An Expert Guide”. Ark Group.

“Put yourself out there; it may not seem like it’s paying off at first, but it’s a long-game plan.”

**Concentrate on building your network from the very beginning:** “do lots of lunches”, “get active in the firm and in firm activities to meet clients and new people”, “get involved with public speaking and community events as much as possible”, “get out to more functions, meet people in the industry”, “learn what every lawyer does on your hall so you can cross-sell more effectively”, “start marketing early – you don’t need to wait until you’re an expert in your field to get clients”, and “write a lot of articles and send them out to past and present clients via email”.

“Do not take it personal – nine times out of ten it is not you.”

**Take everything in stride:** “don’t be so hard on yourself” and “don’t take things so seriously”.

“Find a good mentor and it will pay dividends for the rest of your career.”

**Start identifying your advocates:** “take control of your practice”, and “don’t try to be like anyone else – find and do what works for you”.

“Stick-with-it. Day by day. It really does get so much better.”

**Hang in there:** “one step at a time”, “soldier on, it gets better”, “relax, enjoy the ride”, and “don’t stress, it all gets done”.

“Personal care is important, and shouldn’t be sacrificed. You work better when you’re well rested and happy.”

**Put your happiness and job satisfaction ahead of money:** “take the weekends off and don’t burn yourself out – you will work a long time, make time for yourself, or you will burn out, in 20 years, you will look back and remember the time you spent with family and friends, but not the times you stayed late in the office just to show your face”.

## THE GENERATIONAL DIVIDE

In the legal profession, partners have been perplexed by their associates' perceived lack of work ethic, initiative and understanding of how to build their practices.

There is no denying that the millennial generation is different than their predecessors. Coming of age after 9/11 with an influx of technology (including the internet) and entering the workforce at "the height of an economic recession" has substantially impacted this generation's choices, outlook and speed to enter previously expected stages of adulthood.<sup>15</sup> These changes have forever altered our society and some demographers believe the delays "represent a new period of the life course between childhood and adulthood, a period of 'emerging adulthood' when young people experience traditional events at different times and in a different order than their parents did."<sup>16</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that these "challenges" and bucking of the trends within the legal profession are not necessarily bad but instead, might push lawyers towards a more balanced, productive and satisfying career and a more client-focused industry. With recent press focused on the rise of mental health and addiction issues in the legal profession<sup>17</sup>, we wanted to find a way to bridge the gap between what Millennials want, what client's need and what their firm's (e.g. Boomers and Gen X mentors) expectations of are of them<sup>18</sup>

### THEY'RE NOT LIKE US...

"These young people have different goals for their working lives than previous generations did. They want a comfortable lifestyle and the money to finance it, but they also want more intangible things from work, like the chance to achieve, and a sense of connection and purpose. They see careers as portfolios of experiences rather than a ladder to be climbed in one organisation, and hence only 18% plan to stay in their current role for the long term."

PWC  
"Old-style strengths, new-style challenges"  
February 2016

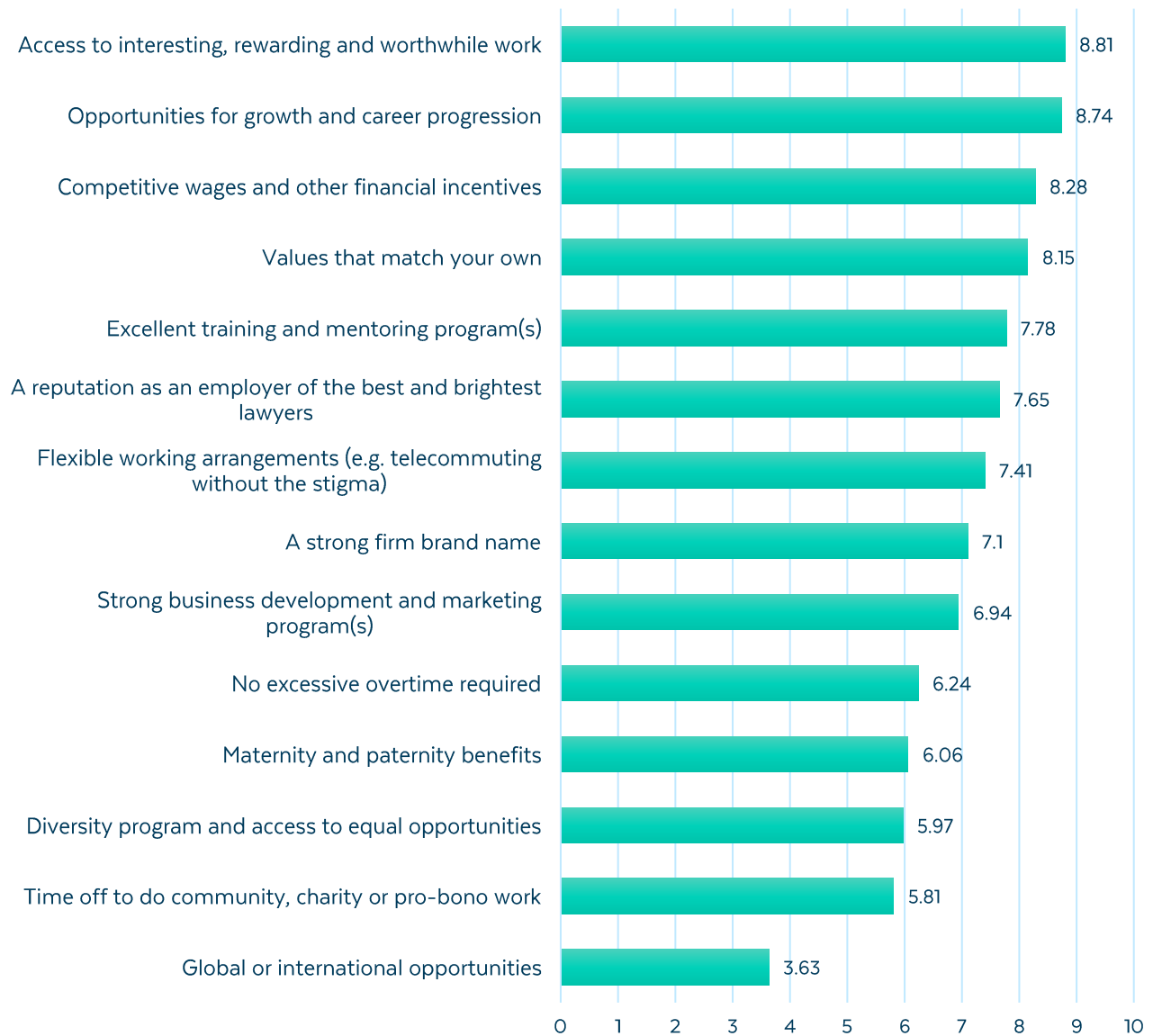
<sup>15</sup> Vespa, Jonathan. "The Changing Economics and Demographics of Young Adulthood: 1975–2016". United States Census Bureau, April 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Vespa, Jonathan, "The Changing Economics and Demographics of Young Adulthood: 1975–2016". United States Census Bureau, April 2017.

<sup>17</sup> "Studies show that lawyers lead other professions in depression, alcoholism, substance abuse, and career dissatisfaction." Source: Stringfellow Otey, Brittany "Buffering Burnout: Preparing the Online Generation for the Occupational Hazards of the Legal Profession" January, 2015

<sup>18</sup> Fish, Daniel. "The mental-health crisis in law". Precedent, March 6, 2018.

**Table 8 – Please rate the following characteristics of what you look for in a law firm (reasons why you did/would choose to work at a particular firm) on a scale from 0 to 10 (with 10 being the most important):**



The most important criteria that associates look for in a law firm is its ability to show “opportunities for growth and career progression” with 65% of respondents giving its importance at least 9 out of 10. A close second, with 63%, is having “access to interesting, rewarding and worthwhile work”. Given the previous comments

about respondents' surprise in the lack of diversity in their work and training or oversight from their mentors, it is no wonder that millennials are increasingly opting to move to in-house legal positions.

Additional commentary included a desire from some to work in a “positive and inclusive [and collegial] work environment”, “being treated as a valuable member of the team”, and “a firm that encourages sharing origination credit with associates”.

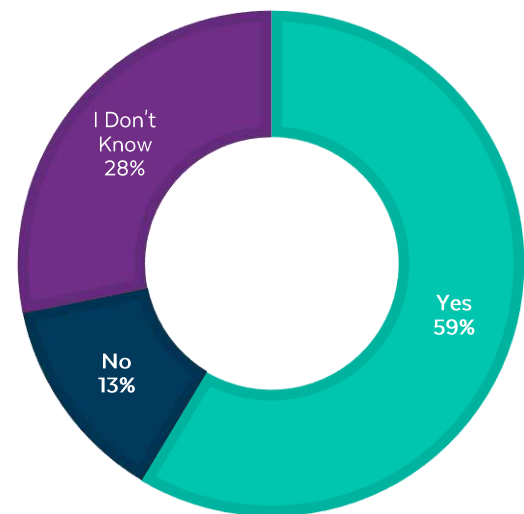
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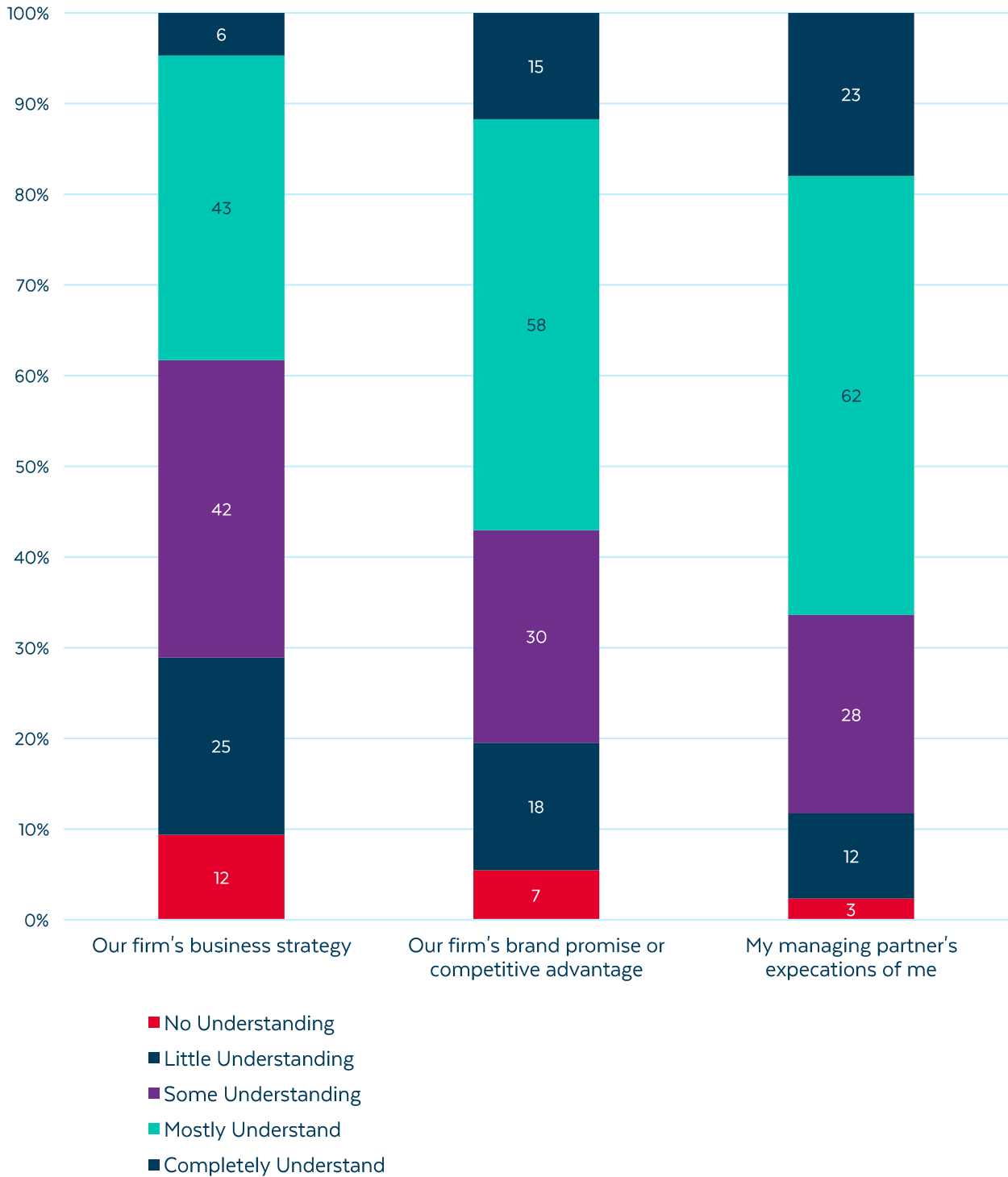


## Do you know what your firm’s strategy is?

Most people want to know what is expected of them, and millennials are no different. Without clear expectations and guidelines, associates struggle to measure up to the hopes and demands of their partners. With this in mind, we wanted to know if firms are successful at communicating their business strategy, however only 6% respondents claimed to “completely understand” what is their firm’s business strategy. Only 15% know what their firm’s competitive advantage is and 58% “mostly understand” what it is. Based on previous responses, millennials believe they understand what their managing partners want of them – to set profit as a top goal. We recommend that firms not only invest in determining and articulating what their strategy and competitive advantages are, but that they spend the time to communicate these to everyone at the firm and ensure that they understand how these play into their roles.

**Table 9 – Does your firm have a clear business strategy?**



**Table 10 – To what extent do you understand...**



## THE CLIENT PERSPECTIVE

### When you first became a lawyer, what surprised you about working with clients?

Many of the challenges in dealing with clients focused on “people management” from expectations and demands, to wide variations in personalities, integrity and sophistication. It is clear from these results that young lawyers would benefit from training and coaching in client and people management. Some of the key findings in this area are:

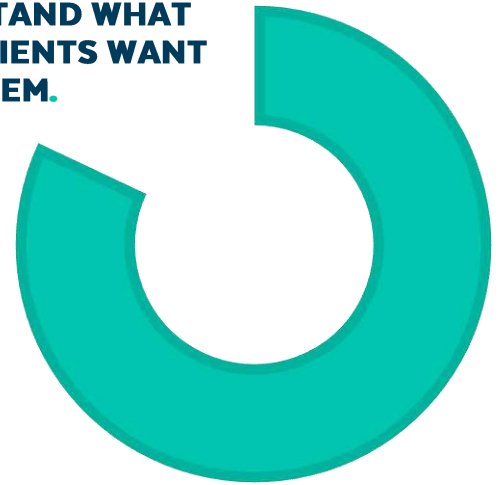
1. **Unrealistic expectations.** Many millennial lawyers see their clients as challenging, demanding, fussy and irrational, and were surprised by the level of client management that comes with practising law. Many weren’t prepared for the unrealistic expectations and unreasonable deadlines that clients placed on them. With comments like “every client thinks they are your only client” to “everything is an emergency”, it is clear that many millennials find client management difficult.
2. **How demanding clients can be.** Millennial lawyers felt ill prepared for the “around the clock” expectations of their clients. Many respondents commented on how clients are demanding and needy, sometimes difficult to get a hold of, require more service during non-business hours than expected, and how much time is spent learning how to manage challenging clients.
3. **How much personalities play into law.** Within their firms, millennial lawyers were surprised by the politics; outside the firm they were amazed by the range of personalities they would deal with. Overall, they were astonished by how much of their job is dedicated to managing personalities, understanding different processes for decision making, and the detachment displayed by some people from issues that might dramatically impact them compared to others who require lots of hand-holding, and how business really is personal.
4. **How much trust a client will place in them.** Doubly pleasing and scary, millennial lawyers are astounded by how much clients trusted and relied on their advice even when they knew they were inexperienced. Appreciating this position of authority, they were also intimidated by how much someone would trust them implicitly.
5. **The level of sophistication between clients varies greatly.** Young lawyers have a big learning curve during their first few years of practice and were surprised by how unsophisticated some of their clients were and how limited their client’s knowledge of the law is.
6. **Some are unprofessional or unethical.** Unfortunately, not all clients are created equal. Some are seen to be rude, lack truthfulness, “twist your words”, or have a

disregard for the law. Others simply don't listen to good advice.

7. **Clients might not always see the value or want to pay.** Although a hard lesson to learn, clients might want the work but are perceived as not always wanting to pay for it. From disagreements in value to clients being “cheap” or hard to receive payment from, billing issues are a stressor for many young lawyers.
8. **How much they still had left to learn.** While many millennial lawyers previously acknowledged there was a huge learning curve in understanding the practise of law as opposed to the theoretical aspects of law, they are also shocked by how much their clients expected them to know about business, finance, and other non-legal aspects of a matter. Some respondents also cited learning to present an option or solution properly as well as telling a client when something simply can't be done.
9. **The collaborative component of practising law.** The ‘relationship factor’ was a big surprise to several respondents as they didn't realize how quickly bonds would form (especially if they were in a similar stage of life) and how important building relationships is to gaining trust. Several also commented on how the client process is much more individualized than expected; from levels of involvement to the way that information was reported back to them, clients want to help shape the process and deliverables.

# 82%

**OF MILLENNIAL LAWYERS  
BELIEVE THEY MOSTLY  
OR COMPLETELY  
UNDERSTAND WHAT  
THEIR CLIENTS WANT  
FROM THEM.**



## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

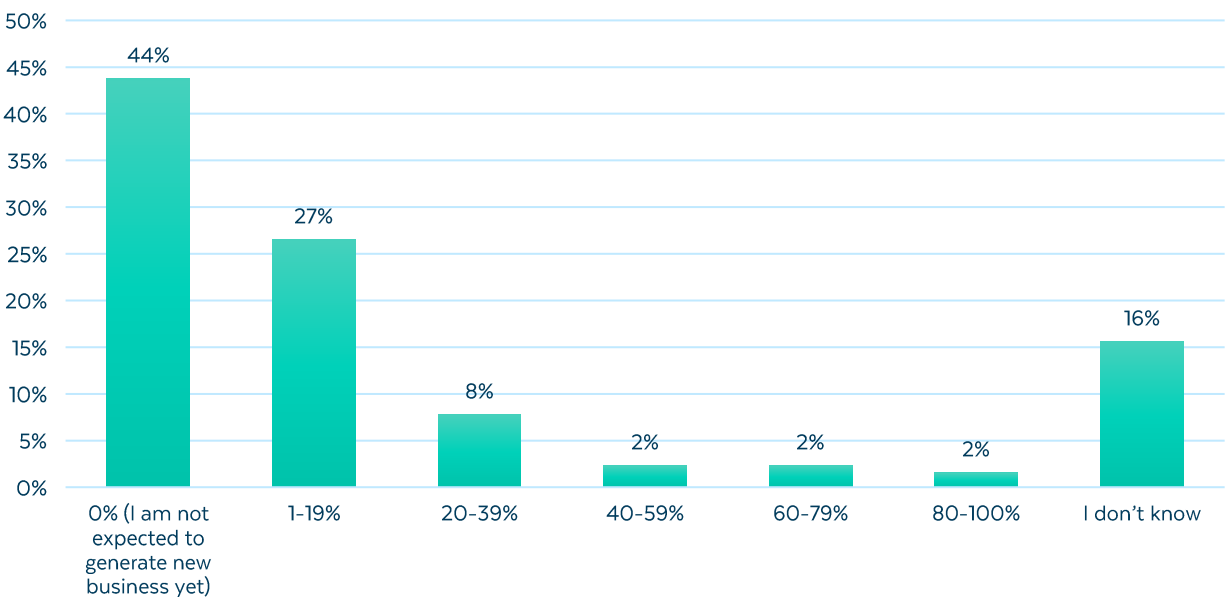
When it comes to business development, it's clear that expectations are not being properly communicated. One of the top complaints we hear from partners about associates is their lack of initiative and commitment to building their own books of business. While partners continue to put an increased emphasis on "billable hours", the desire for "origination of work" may not be clearly communicated to their associates. With 7 out of 10 young lawyers believing they are expected to generate less than 20% of their own business, and 4 out of 10 thinking they don't need to bring in any new business, it is no wonder both sides are frustrated. This is extremely surprising considering

that 72% of respondents have been in practice between 3-10 years.

# 44%

**OF MILLENNIAL LAWYERS  
BELIEVE THEY ARE NOT  
EXPECTED TO GENERATE  
ANY NEW BUSINESS.**

**Table 12 - What percentage of your work are you expected to generate yourself (% of new business or originating work)?**



## Which of the following tactics are/have you used to build your profile and/or book of business?

Of millennials lawyers who are actively marketing themselves, we wanted to know what tactics they use for building their profile to generate new business. Most respondents did not suggest anything too innovative is being done, with most millennials relying on cultivating and reaching out to peer and professional contacts, and using their firm's website and events to generate work. With regards to the tactics young lawyers are using, it is important to note these are the ones that they have implemented for themselves and not necessarily what the firm is doing.

## How effective are the following marketing tactics in generating new business for you?

When looking at which tactics young lawyers deem the most effective, the top five considered "very effective" are: client referrals, peer contacts, professional referrals (e.g. cross-selling from accountants, financial advisors, bankers, etc.), the firm website or a personal one, and cross-selling with other lawyers in the firm.

After years of experience working with associates, we do not find these results very surprising. While firms might be engaging in other highly-effective tactics such as partnership marketing or co-branding of events, producing downloadable educational content, online advertising, etc., the average associate might not participate or be privy to the success of such endeavours.<sup>19</sup>

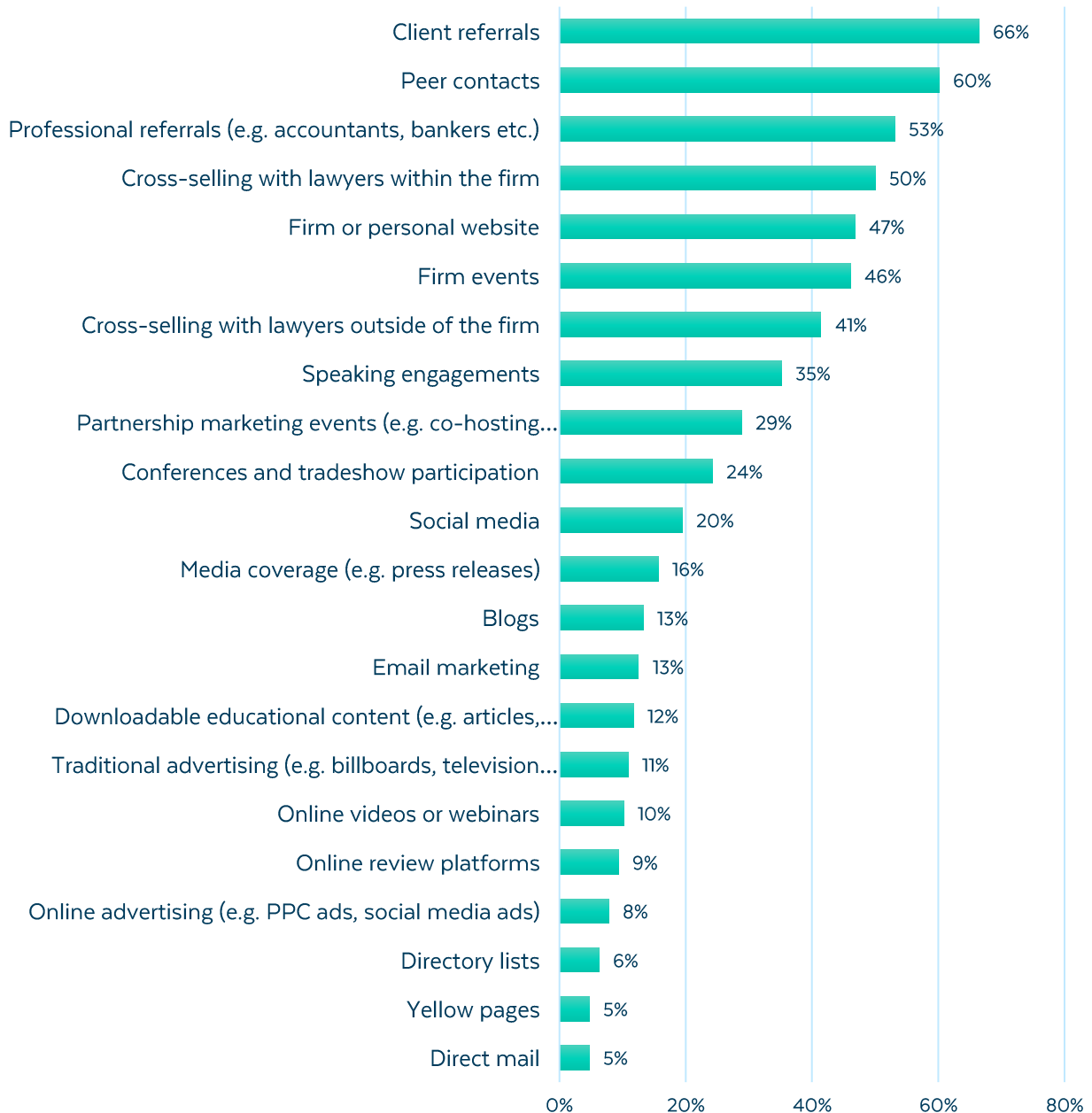
### TOP 10 ACTIVELY USED TACTICS:

1. Peer contacts
2. Firm or personal website
3. Firm events
4. Professional referrals (e.g. cross-selling from accountants, financial advisors, bankers etc.)
5. Social media (e.g. LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, etc.)
6. Cross-selling with lawyers within the firm
7. Speaking engagements
8. Conferences and tradeshow participation
9. Cross-selling with lawyers outside of the firm
10. Partnership marketing events (e.g. co-hosting events with professionals)

<sup>19</sup> As noted in Hinge Research Institute's "2017 High Growth Study", of fast growing firms. These were defined as professional service firms with a median annual growth rate of 34.3%, had a higher median revenue per employee, and were twice as profitable as no-growth firms.

**Table 13 – How effective are the following marketing tactics in generating new business for you?**

**(Ranked by % claimed Effective or Very Effective)**



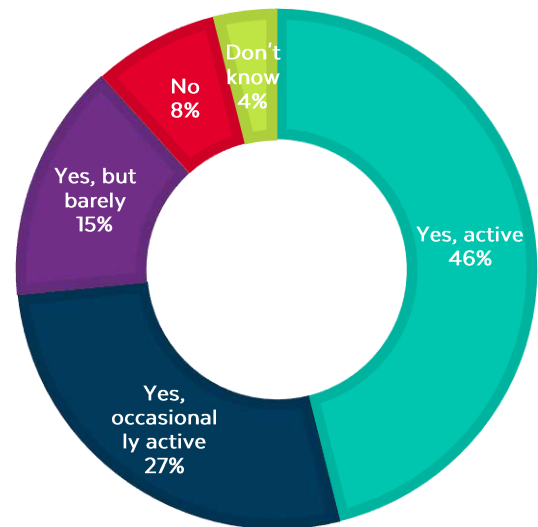
## 87% of millennial lawyers have a professional presence on social media.

For many legal marketers, social media has become an active platform to market their firm's news, events, articles, blogs and insights. While millennial lawyers may not be actively creating content (52% of millennial lawyers note "I don't blog" and only 26% blog sporadically), 46% say their firms are active on social media.

It will come as no surprise to legal marketers that LinkedIn is the top choice for firms with 78% of respondents saying their firm has a presence on the platform. The next closest is Facebook with 47% and Twitter with 45%.

When looking at which platforms millennial lawyers prefer, the clear leader is LinkedIn with 87% using the platform for work. While Twitter is the second most preferred platform, it pales in comparison with only 14% of millennial lawyers using it professionally. Facebook is third with 12%, Instagram 6%, Google+ 3%, WhatsApp 2.5% and YouTube, Snapchat and Facebook Messenger all coming in at 2%.

**Table 14 - Does your firm currently have a presence on social media?**



## THE MARKETING CONUNDRUM

Personal branding and marketing can be challenging for anyone, especially for introverts. As marketers, we often don't know the best way to help or even what our lawyers want help with. We asked millennial lawyers what their challenges were and where they would like more training.

To get the best sense of what they want and need, we asked survey respondents an open-ended question and then grouped the responses by themes. There was a definitive #1 answer: associates want more time to market themselves. Not simply more time in the day, but really a commitment from their firms that marketing and business development is important and should be valued with the same priority as billable hour targets. We took this to mean that they understood that billable hours were important, however there should be leeway in expectations to account for strategic marketing and business development time. This is where one of the greatest generational divides presents itself between lawyers: where should business development time come from and how much time should be allocated?

One of the reasons for the differences in perspective can be attributed to an evolution in family dynamics. Millennial lead households with children under 18 predominantly have two working parents, much more so than previous generations. This leads to increased time pressures as both parents take on more of the responsibility of running the home than previous generations.<sup>20</sup> This is coming at the expense of the traditional lawyer's "business development time" of after-work drinks, dinners, events, and committee work.

The millennial generation is perplexing researchers and demographers around the globe as they challenge many of the social norms of previous generations. They've noted that "what was once ubiquitous [for people] during their 20s is now not commonplace until their 30s."<sup>21</sup> The US Census notes that in almost every way "how much education they have, their work experiences, when they start a family, and even who they live with while growing up," the millennial generation of young adults looks different than their predecessors.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> According to Pew Research Center, in the 1960's, 70% of married couples with children under 18 had only the father employed. In 2012, dual family incomes became the predominant structure in the US, with 60% of households having both parents in the workforce. Households where only the father was employed dropped to 31% and only mother employed homes raised from 2% in 1960 to 6% in 2012. [http://www.pewresearch.org/ft\\_dual-income-households-1960-2012-2/](http://www.pewresearch.org/ft_dual-income-households-1960-2012-2/)

<sup>21</sup> Vespa, Jonathan, "The Changing Economics and Demographics of Young Adulthood: 1975-2016: Current Population Reports." United States Census Bureau, April 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Vespa, Jonathan, "The Changing Economics and Demographics of Young Adulthood: 1975-2016: Current Population Reports." United States Census Bureau, April 2017.

## What is your greatest challenge with regards to marketing yourself?<sup>23</sup>

Clio's 2017 Legal Trends Report noted that "while law firms report spending 33% of non-billable hours on business development, when asked how they would spend additional time if they had it, 41% said they would spend even more time looking for clients".<sup>24</sup> Their feedback on their greatest challenge with regards to marketing themselves came as no surprise to us.

1. **Having time.** Millennial lawyers feel overwhelmed and overworked. As they struggle to meet billable hour expectations set for them (typically 1,800-2,200 per year), they don't see much opportunity to market themselves or make meaningful connections with referrals or prospects outside of work.
2. **Perceived youth and inexperience.** Being new to their legal career, not only do millennial lawyers feel inexperienced when it comes to practising law, but they also feel that they might not have the gravitas to start developing a network or building their own book of business. Several also mentioned that they don't yet have access to the business leaders of today (and may not understand that they should be looking to the business leaders of tomorrow), are worried about over-promising and under-delivering, think that they may not be taken seriously due to their age, and lack the awards or achievements that their partners might have (leading to general insecurity).
3. **Not built to sell.** Many of our respondents noted that their biggest challenge in marketing themselves was that they didn't want to feel like a "sales person" or be "self-promotional" in any way. They see themselves as introverts who are uncomfortable talking about themselves, selling their skills to clients, or asking for work (don't want to be pushy). Some simply don't yet have the comfort level or confidence to market themselves.
4. **View their market as challenging.** Many millennial lawyers believe that connecting with their target market is difficult. Whether true or not, feeling like their target market is a niche can be daunting and finding new prospects (those who are not already clients of the firm) can take a lot of effort. Once they reach prospects, millennial lawyers were challenged to determine how to best engage with them.
5. **Don't know where to start.** Millennials want guidance on what their firm's goals and expectations are, who they should be targeting, learning where to find them, what tactics create the best return on investment, and where to start. Quite simply, they want a strategic marketing plan.

<sup>23</sup> This question was an open-ended question and responses were tagged and organized by themes. These have been summarized and listed in descending order of most common responses.

<sup>24</sup> Clio "Legal Trends Report 2017"



6. **Help determining a competitive advantage.** Lawyers of all ages struggle with how to differentiate themselves from the hundreds (or thousands) of other lawyers while still feeling authentic.
7. **Need help cultivating a network.** A strong network has been the cornerstone of most legal practitioners' marketing efforts and young lawyers want help understanding how to develop one, how best to nurture leads, and how to get referrals. Given a lawyers more introverted nature, it's no surprise they also want help building their networking skills.
8. **Simply aren't interested.** Not every lawyer wants to be a rainmaker. Some respondents mentioned they didn't have the interest, need, or "energy" to market themselves.
9. **Want guidance or support with content development.** They want help delivering valuable, fresh content and most felt that they were limited by not having the time to draft articles or blogs.
10. **Nothing.** Many believe they have more than enough work, have it all covered or don't see marketing as a priority in their role yet.

## What tools do you need from your firm to help you build more business?<sup>25</sup>

Since young lawyers are reliant on their partners along with marketing and business development teams to help them grow in their profession, we asked them what they needed from us (internal and external marketers) to help build their book of business.

Those who do want help want it in the form of:

1. **Training and coaching.** This includes everything from mentorship from partners, personalized strategic plans, training and coaching on business development tactics, networking skills, client pitches and guidance on how to close a deal.
2. **Introductions and connections to the right people.** They want more than just help knowing how to build a network; they want support from their partners in making those critical introductions with current clients and referrals of the firm. Several also mentioned the desire for more opportunities and budget for networking events as well as firm sponsored events tailored to their particular practice. Some even went so far as to request a sales department that would deliver qualified leads.

<sup>25</sup> This question was an open-ended question and responses were tagged and organized by themes. These have been summarized and listed in descending order of most common responses.

3. **Time.** Often named in the same breath as money, millennial lawyers want the time to attend more events, join organizations and network more. They want the flexibility to leave work early to cultivate more business and the time built into billable requirements for marketing efforts.
4. **Money.** Young lawyers want bigger budgets, or “any budget at all”, for building their book of business.
5. **A sense of strategy and clear expectations.** Millennial lawyers want to be included in the planning and have a better sense of their firm’s overall goals and objectives. They want a clear sense of strategy and expectations from their firm, and the support and buy-in to let them build a personalized plan. This includes clearer guidelines on what are their firm’s policies, the do’s and don’ts for social media use, and a willingness to experiment with new tools and tactics.
6. **New technology or platforms to build business.** Everything from wanting more

robust social media platforms, blogs, and more website traffic, to more focused and targeted practice group conferences and speaking opportunities provided or sourced by the firm.

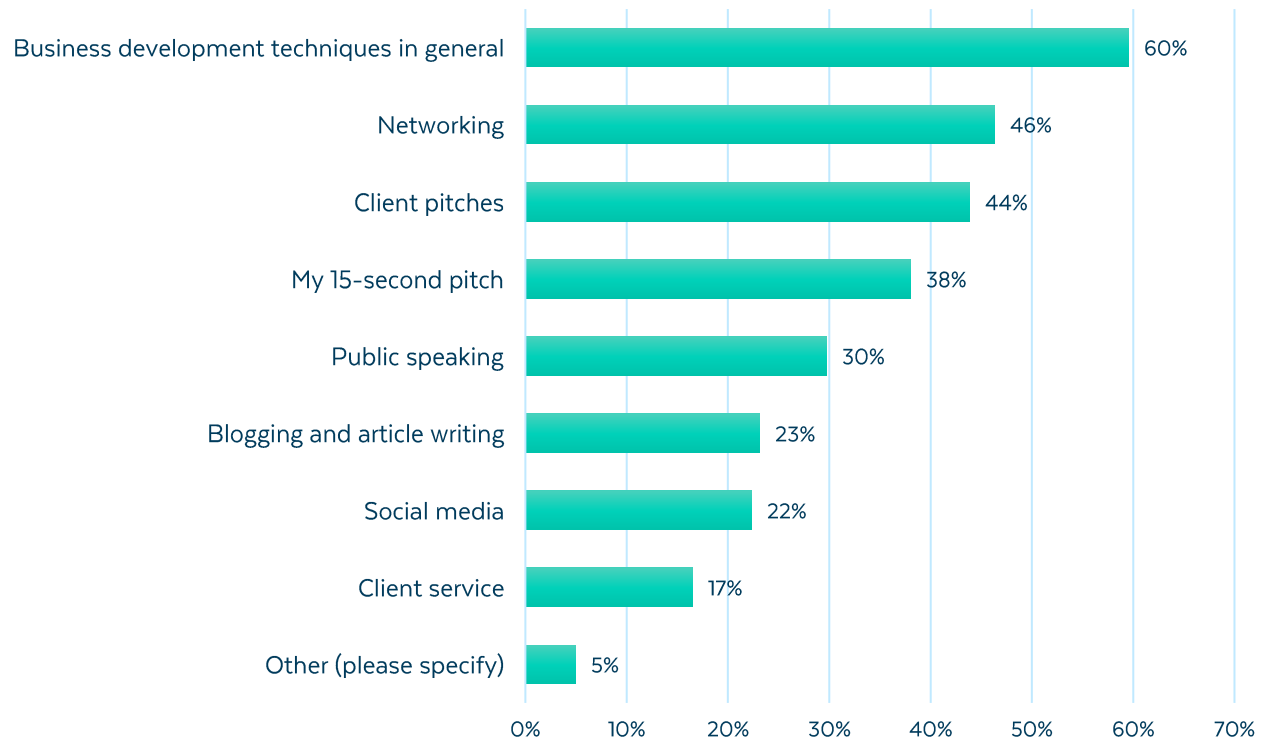
7. **Administrative support.** They want staff who can help them out with more administrative functions of their role.



# 60%

**OF MILLENNIAL LAWYERS  
WANT MORE TRAINING ON  
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT  
TECHNIQUES IN GENERAL.**

**Table 15 – I would really like more training or support with the following marketing and business development tactics (click all that apply).**



## Millennial lawyers want help with training and coaching.

Since we suspected training and coaching would be a top priority, we looked at what specific skills young lawyers wanted to get more experience with. 71% of respondents want more support and training with marketing and business development tactics and most want training or support in employing business development techniques followed by networking skills and client pitches.

We recommend that firms allocate the time, resources and funds to train their millennial lawyers on everything from practice management and the business of a law firm to business development techniques and time management principles. Given that so many young lawyers are also feeling stressed, anxious and depressed, we recommend creating the supports necessary to help them cope and thrive in their roles.

## What more do they want from us?

Overwhelmingly, millennial lawyers simply want guidance, mentorship and help. While it may not always seem that way, we believe many millennial lawyers might not ask for help for fear of seeming ignorant. In previous questions, many commented how they were overcome with how much they were expected to know and how poorly equipped they were to handle their day-to-day job requirements coming out of law school. We asked our respondents what specifically they wanted from their mentors and, separately, their marketing and business development teams.

# 36%

**OF MILLENNIAL LAWYERS  
WANT MORE GUIDANCE,  
FEEDBACK AND TRAINING  
FROM THEIR MENTORS ON  
THEIR WORK AND ADVICE  
ON THEIR CAREERS.**



| What do you want most from your mentors? <sup>26</sup>  | What do you want more from your marketing and business development team? <sup>27</sup>   |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Guidance and mentorship</li> <li>2. Honesty</li> <li>3. Support and advocacy</li> <li>4. Time</li> <li>5. Marketing and business development advice</li> <li>6. Interest in my career path</li> <li>7. Connections and network</li> <li>8. Substantive work</li> <li>9. Knowledge about the business aspects of a law firm</li> <li>10. Clear expectations</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Business development help</li> <li>2. Support and attention</li> <li>3. Guidance and training</li> <li>4. Nothing</li> <li>5. Solid leads</li> <li>6. Inclusion in the process</li> <li>7. An understanding of what we do</li> <li>8. Clear expectations</li> <li>9. Money</li> <li>10. Follow-up</li> </ol> |

<sup>26</sup> This question was an open-ended question and responses were tagged and organized by themes. These have been summarized and listed in descending order of most common responses.

<sup>27</sup> This question was an open-ended question and responses were tagged and organized by themes. These have been summarized and listed in descending order of most common responses.

## TELL US WHAT YOU REALLY THINK

If you could communicate one anonymous message to the partners of your firm, what would you want to tell them?”

We dared to ask: “If you could communicate one anonymous message to the partners of your firm, what would you want to tell them?” The answers were both surprising and insightful. While we thought we might get a few cheeky responses, the feedback was thoughtful and thought-provoking. With approximately 70% of millennial respondents answering, we have narrowed down the comments to those we believe are worth sharing and should be considered.

“Paying people equally and fairly for their work in a positive and forward-thinking business is the only way to keep top talent.”

“A good business strategy requires investing in good people so that they want to stay and grow their business with you. Bad retention culture, inconsistent policies and lack of oversight lead to burn out and high turnover.”

“A short-term increase in billable hours, at the expense of a life well-lived, does not equate with long-term profitability and associate retention.”

“Associates do not thrive in an “everyone is replaceable” environment.”

“If you fail to treat the people that work with you right, they will leave after gaining enough experience. You can choose to be Walmart or Costco. Be Costco.”

“Rainmakers who treat associates poorly and cause high associate turnover aren’t worth it.”

“Take care of your team. Make them feel they are valuable and appreciate them and their work more often.”

“Help us be strategic, profitable partners”.

“Focus more on retention by taking an active interest in the business plans and personal ambitions of each key associate.”

“I may not be in the driver’s seat... yet... but if you want me and my peers to want to be in that driving seat then please steer the firm in a direction we all want to go in.”

“Value your associates and treat them as leaders-in-training, because one day they will be the leaders of the firm.”

**“Times are changing and the old way of doing things will not continue to work forever.”**

“Appreciate their flexibility in work location/presence in office, as long as, work is getting done.”

“Flexibility is most important to me and needs to be available without the stigma attached.”

“Recognize that millennials are in positions where they are the decision makers. Implement strategies to bake business development into the compensation structure from a time standpoint. Money in the door doesn't account for the years it takes to develop a good business source. Finally, if someone is ready to make partner, just pull the trigger. The waiting game and seeing others promoted just because of years spent here is frustrating.”

“What is seen as laziness or lack of drive for millennials is actually just a shift to a belief in work-life balance and working to live versus living to work.”

**“Make expectations and future-plans clearer.”**

“Be more transparent with hiring, firing, expansion, compensation, partnership standards, and other aspects of the firm.”

“More visibility into the profits of the firm and what to expect from partnership.”

**“Billable hours are not a true representation of our worth.”**

“Update outdated policies and procedures, innovate, and fix the broken law firm business model and you will obtain success.”

**“Please communicate with the associates and include us in the conversation. We are capable lawyers (that's why you hired us) and we will one day be the partners of the firm. You have to communicate with us to prepare us.”**

“Billable hours are stupid. Billings should be the metric.”

“Stagger billable hour requirement by year, so younger associates have more billables and older associates can focus on building a book.”

“The bottom line cannot mean everything if the firm wants to build strong future leaders.”

**“Help me, help you.”**

“Don't be afraid to pass off large projects and check up on us.”

“Don't micromanage.”

## “I don’t know what I’m doing”.

“Additional training (rather than solely being ‘thrown into the fire’) is necessary to handle the learning curve and become a competent attorney.”

“The best way to grow your business is to integrate young associates into your client networks.”

“Teaching is important for the future of the firm and the work that is put out by associates.”

“Stop and take the time to explain to an associate what you are thinking about when you pitch to a potential client.”

“Take us to more client pitches.”

## “How am I doing?”

“Give associates feedback, whether good or bad, as to how they are doing and what they can be doing better.”

“Constructive feedback and communication, ideally in person, is essential for improvements with respect to assignments.”

“I really hope that you appreciate what I do for this firm, the employees, partners, etc.”

“I want to help build my clientele, how do I do that while working under you?”

“Just let me do great work for the clients we already have. If you build it, they will come.”

“You don’t have to land the “rainmaker” clients, doing good, meaningful work is just as important.”

## “I’m scared of where we will be in 5-10 years.”

“Have vision and think ahead.”

“Raise awareness of our presence, and go after some bigger clients.”

“Spend more on branding.”

“Upgrade the website, stop shitting on SEO”

“When it’s slow for you, it’s slower for us. Help us learn how to find our own work.”

“Embrace technology.”

“We need to strengthen our social media presence.”

“We should be growing and trying new things more aggressively.”

## “Thank you”.

“Keep up the good work.”

“Keep up the great work and thanks for the support!”

“They are actually doing a great job”

## IN CONCLUSION

As explained in the introduction, the purpose of this survey was to provide perspective on millennial lawyers and to better understand their motivations what they wanted from their firms, their mentors and their marketing teams. While interesting on its own, the true value ultimately comes from determining how law firms can improve loyalty and retention. This ultimately leads to the following question:

### What do law firms have to do to attract and retain millennial lawyers?

We've summarized the answer in eight easy points:

1. Provide clear expectations and an environment that promotes transparency and open communications.
2. Provide quality training and mentorship including practical experience providing legal services to clients.
3. Provide supports for lawyers struggling mentally and emotionally with the stress and pressure of their job.
4. Promote a positive and inclusive office that discourages aggressive internal competition and dramatic internal politics.
5. Empower your innovative young leaders by supporting their efforts to challenge old methods and grow in their careers.
6. Invest in a clear business strategy to guide the work of the whole firm.
7. Provide diverse work that is interesting, rewarding, worthwhile, and educational.
8. Support business development by providing lawyers with time, budget and training in legal business marketing.

Don't forget that millennial lawyers are inherently loyal so long as they are provided with reasons to stay loyal.

We look forward to building on this survey and its results to learn more about what law firms need to do to cultivate millennial lawyers as they grown into their leaders of tomorrow.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Morgan MacLeod

As the co-founder of Cubicle Fugitive, Morgan MacLeod heads up the brand and marketing arm of the agency, including research, strategy, and sales. Combining her strong foundation in market research with a passion for selling the professional service provider, Morgan supports clients with strategic recommendations from which they can make informed business decisions for their law firms. As a business owner herself, Morgan is highly attuned to what professional firms are up against when it comes to being profitable, staying competitive, and creating a healthy and productive workforce. Recognizing the rapidly growing importance of the Millennial generation, she has focused her attention to understanding this unique demographic and how they will shape the future of the legal industry in a not-so-distant future. For more information on this study, marketing strategy or speaking opportunities, Morgan can be reached at [morgan.macleod@cubiclefugitive.com](mailto:morgan.macleod@cubiclefugitive.com).

## CUBICLE FUGITIVE

Cubicle Fugitive is a full-service brand, marketing, and website development agency that specializes in the legal industry. With more than 15 years of experience working in and alongside law firms, we have developed a deep and dynamic understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and nuances of how lawyers and their firms operate. As the legal market continues to shift dramatically, we keep an ear to the ground on emerging trends and changes in order to provide clients with highly-relevant advice and solutions for the short- and long-term.

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