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Multnomah Bar Association

Joint Committee of Managing Partners Roundtable and Young Lawyers Section

BRIDGING GENERATIONS: TRADITIONALISTS, BABY BOOMERS, GEN XERS, AND NET GEN

Project Description

The Multnomah Bar Association (MBA), hearing concerns among attorneys about the “Generation Gap,” with some experienced attorneys questioning the work ethic of newer attorneys and some newer attorneys expressing displeasure about the life requirements imposed by their firms, decided to launch a project to understand the challenges and find solution . . . at the very least to replace complaining with constructive discussion.

The Managing Partners and Young Lawyers Section of the MBA formed a joint subcommittee to formulate and implement a plan to study the issue, report findings, and make recommendations. The committee members discussed their own experiences and observations during a lengthy process of developing a membership fact-finding survey. **The survey was sent to 3,609 members of the MBA, 1,325 or 36% of whom responded, demonstrating a high level of interest in this topic by members of the local bar, consistent with the visibility the topic is receiving elsewhere in the country.**

Responses by generation and gender:

- Traditionalists (born before 1946): 142 (88.7% male, 11.3% female)
- Baby Boomers (1946-1964): 636 (65.1% male, 34.9% female)
- Gen Xers (1965-1980): 524 (47.5% male, 52.5% female)
- Net Gen or Gen Y (born after 1980): 8 (50% male, 50% female)*

* Net Gen responses, because of their small number, are not hereafter reported as a subset in this overview, but can be viewed in their entirety at the survey web site (see last page of this report).

Survey Findings

Job Satisfaction

What were the findings? **Attorneys in Multnomah County, by a large majority and across all generations, express satisfaction with their jobs.** 90% of Traditionalists, 86% of Baby Boomers, and 79% of Gen Xers responded “Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat Agree” to the statement “My job satisfaction is high.”

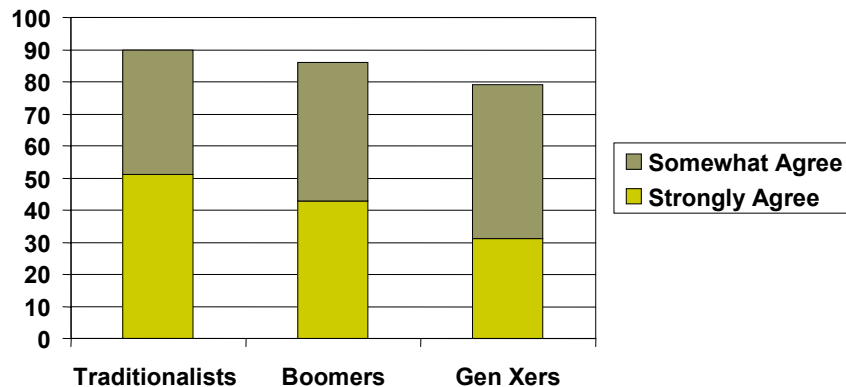
That represents a high degree of job fulfillment, but the level declines from older to younger attorneys.

Furthermore, the degree of agreement declines more steeply than overall agreement.

How much of that declining satisfaction reflects changing conditions and values as compared to evolving practice management skills, expectations, and attrition over time? In other words, how would Traditionalist and Baby Boomer attorneys have responded to the same survey 15 to 20 years ago? While the answer to that question is unknown, the study revealed information that can help attorneys manage the generational blend more effectively.

You might ask, “Why does job satisfaction matter?” The quick answer is that low rates of job fulfillment result in costly turnover, negatively affecting profitability (or other measures of success in the not-for-profit or public sector). The longer answer, which is more difficult to articulate and quantify, is that job dissatisfaction leads to low productivity and low morale, negatively affecting the firm (or workplace) culture, reputation, and recruiting capability—and ultimately its ability to serve clients and sustain itself. Both reasons support sincere efforts to enhance the satisfaction and gratification of all generations within the MBA and workplace.

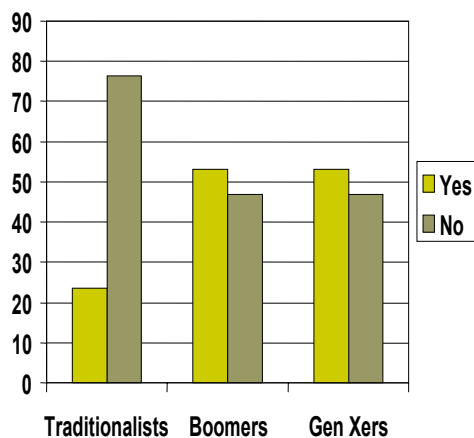
My Job Satisfaction Is High



10-Year Expectations

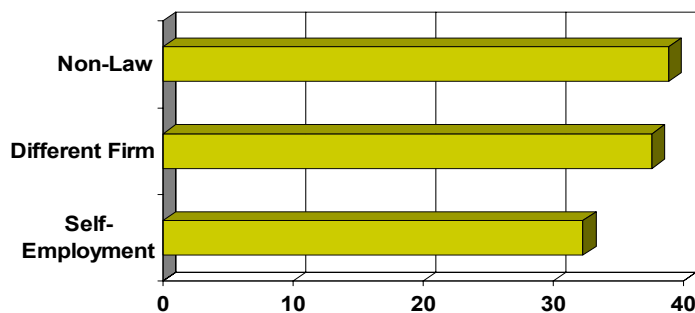
There is additional news of significant interest to those planning for firm stability and continuity. Asked if they expect to be working full-time in their current firm in 10 years, Traditionalists and many Boomers, not surprisingly, expect to be fully or partly retired. Of concern, however, only 53.1% of Gen Xers responded “Yes.”

I Expect to Be Working Full-Time in My Current Firm in Ten Years



Of the nearly 47% who do not, an astonishing 38.9% expect to be working outside the field of law, 37.6% expect to be in a different firm, and 17.5% expect to be taking extended family/personal time. Does this simply reflect the reality that Gen Xers have grown up expecting to make more moves in their careers, or does it reflect dissatisfaction? Probably both. Firms can increase the likelihood of retaining talent, however, by building on commonalities and understanding—even embracing—generational differences.

Alternative Plans of Gen X*



*Percentages of the 46.9% who do not expect to be working full-time in their current firm in 10 years

Commonalities and Differences

Attorneys of all generations share a love of the law. They are highly motivated by the intellectual challenge of the law, working with clients, and solving problems. Other common satisfiers include financial rewards, variety, learning, flexibility, and helping society. Several described litigation and advocacy as high satisfiers as well.

“Work/Life Balance” was the highest ranked motivator across all generations. Gen Xers, however, emphasized it considerably more in their open-ended responses than did their more experienced colleagues. They cited the needs of family, often noting that unlike most of their senior colleagues, they do not have the help of stay-at-home spouses. Many Traditionalists and Baby Boomers questioned the work ethic of Gen Xers, frequently commenting on the hard work necessitated by the profession, thus confirming commonly held perceptions—or misperceptions—of Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, and Gen Xers.

A majority of attorneys across generations agree that pro bono, public service, and professional/bar participation do or would enhance their job satisfaction, with scores ranging from 52% to 74%.

Hindsight (“Do-overs”)

Asked what they would do differently, if they had it to do again, the most frequent response was, “Nothing,” further testament to job and career satisfaction. Many said they would make changes to find their best environment earlier than they had—from a big firm to a small firm, from a small firm to a big firm, from one specialty to another, from a firm to a solo practice, from private practice to public sector, and so on. All generations expressed some regrets about finances: Boomers would plan earlier for retirement and Gen Xers would attend a less expensive school to minimize debt. Many would learn management and business development skills earlier. Only a small minority reported that they would pursue a different field entirely if they were starting over.

Appreciation and Wants

What do Traditionalists and Boomers appreciate about associates?
Overwhelmingly, they appreciate their associates’ enthusiasm, vitality, fresh perspective, technical savvy, eagerness to learn, and intellectual curiosity.

Some appreciate their hard work, teamwork, different approach to life and problems, sense of humor, and their desire for work/life balance:

- “. . . greater concern with living a balanced life than we had at their age.”
- “. . . also appreciate their more healthy life balance.”
- “They take their work seriously, but also understand that there is more to life than the practice of law.”

Managing partners and shareholders want associates to adopt an ownership mentality, learn the business of practicing law, proactively manage their projects and files, and assume responsibility for their own professional development. They want associates to appreciate the professionalism of law, the value of collegial relationships, and the responsibility of community service. They also want associates to know that they worked hard to build their firms, and though none said it directly, perhaps they want to be acknowledged for that contribution.

Following are a few of many reasons why associates appreciate the partners in their firm:

- Open-door policies, mentorship, support of professional development, and respect for associates and staff were repeatedly cited.
- Expertise, knowledge, and experience were also cited often.
- “They are caring, compassionate people who want to do the best for the associates and our clients.”
- “Great people that care about each other, the firm, and our community.”
- “They keep us informed about every aspect of firm life, including financial and compensation information,” expresses the appreciation of one associate for financial transparency.

Gen Xers want more mentoring from experienced attorneys, a clearly understood track to partnership, better communication of expectations, firm financial information, transparent compensation, and more flexibility for part-time, flex-time, and work-from-home arrangements; and a few want more diversity and rewards for pro bono. Some want more compensation, and perhaps an equal number want less compensation for less work. “Abolish the billable hour” seems to capture the view of many.

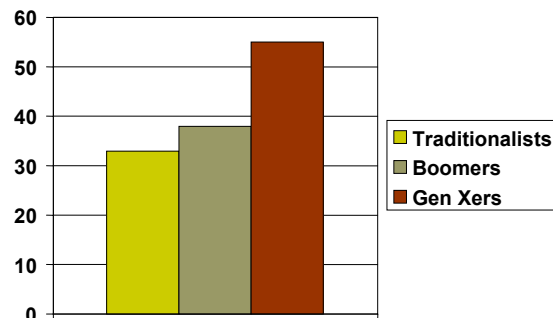
Recommendations

1. Firm/Workplace Discussions. **Conduct firm wide discussions to explore such topics as firm culture, leadership, and work/life balance.** These meetings will be effective only if people can safely express themselves without fear of negative repercussions. Good listening skills are required of all parties, and a facilitator might be helpful if a large number of people participate or if tension exists. An ongoing, cross-generational forum or an associate liaison to leadership might be useful as well. Associates, when you raise concerns, be prepared with possible solutions, or at least a willingness to explore solutions.

a. “Firm Culture” was among the top three motivators across generations, begging the questions: “What does firm culture mean to us?” “Does it mean the same thing to our senior lawyers and our associates?” “What is OUR firm culture?” and “How does our firm culture pertain to acquiring and retaining talent?”

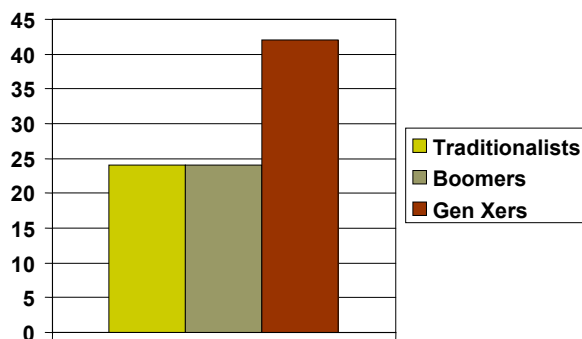
Firm Culture

Among Top Three Motivators & Satisfiers in Each Generation



Supportive Leadership

Third Highest Motivator & Satisfier for Gen X

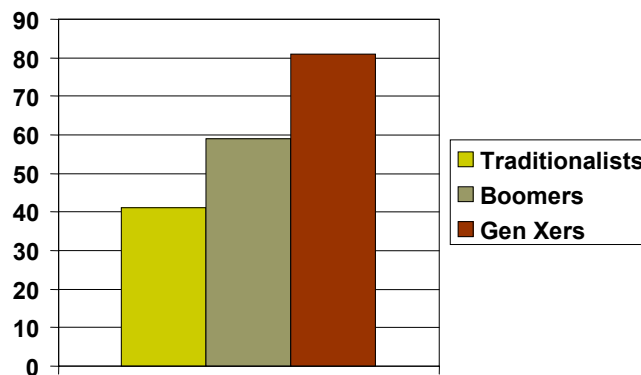


b. “Supportive Leadership” ranked as a high motivator among Gen Xers. What does that mean? Additional mentoring and guidance are clearly part of the answer, but it would be beneficial for the Gen Xers in your workplace to elaborate.

c. “Work/Life Balance” is cited by all generations as their number-one motivator. Does it mean the same thing to everyone? That’s unlikely, making it another excellent topic for team-building discussion that can help define and refine policy to serve all generations. Add to that discussion: 39% of Boomers and 49% of Gen Xers report that they do or would work fewer hours for less compensation. And while only 42% of Boomers think associates in their firms want additional employment models, 58% of Gen Xers think additional employment models are wanted by associates. The high level of interest and significant 16-point disparity in perception calls for additional exploration of alternate work models.

Work/Life Balance

Highest Motivator & Satisfier in Each Generation



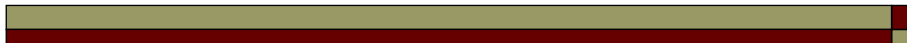
d. The importance of status drops in each generation. What does status mean to us, and does it mean the same thing to each generation? What are the implications of the declining value of status? Perhaps dollars currently invested to achieve status, e.g., expensive office space and furnishings, can be spent in more effective ways to increase fulfillment among younger attorneys and attract younger clients.

2. Alignment and Consistency. After identifying, to the best of your current ability, your workplace culture and values, we recommend that you align your planning, policies, procedures, practices, recruiting, and marketing with that vision. **Your vigilant attention to consistency and alignment will help your firm or workplace attract and retain attorneys, staff, and clients who appreciate your culture, resulting in greater harmony, synergy, and profitability.**

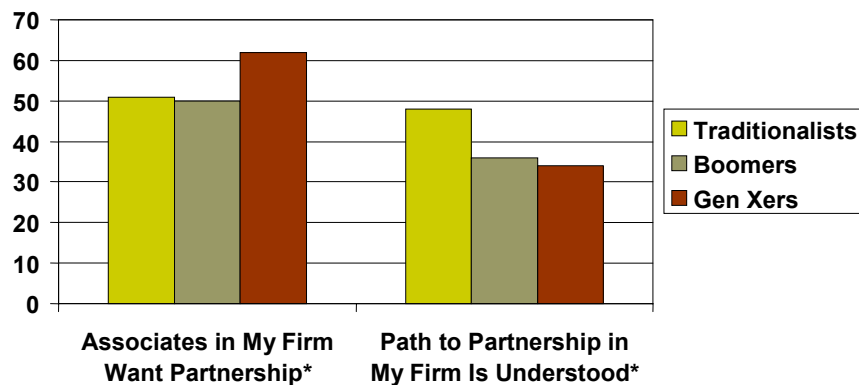
3. Partnership, Firm Success, and Planning. **Clarify and articulate the path to partnership, and provide information that will allow associates to more fully and knowledgeably participate in the planning and success of the firm.**

Associates, ask for the information you want, information that will help you better understand your firm and your opportunities and responsibilities within your firm. Ask how you can learn about and help with the business of your firm, in addition to the practice of law.

- a. While 50% of Boomers and 62% of Gen Xers think associates in their firms want partnership, only 36% of Boomers and 32% of Gen Xers think the path to partnership is clearly understood. The gap presents an opportunity for managing partners and shareholders to engage associates by clarifying requirements and for associates to ask for information that will help them take responsibility for their professional development and career planning.



Partnership

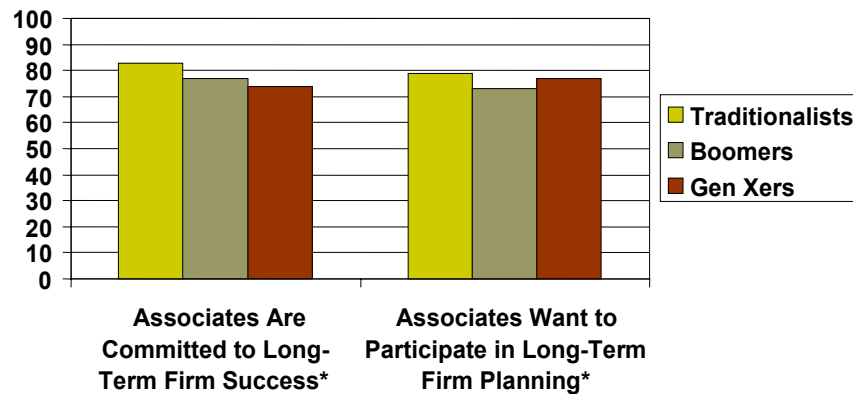


* Combining “agree” and “somewhat agree”

- b. A clear majority of Traditionalists, Boomers, and Gen Xers agree that Gen Xers are committed to the long-term success of their firms and want to participate in their firm’s long-term planning. When those who answered N/A are excluded, agreement levels range between 73%-83%. While associates’ perceived commitment is less than their seniors realize, at 74% it remains strong, and their desire to participate is greater than

Boomers know. This solid level of commitment and desire to participate invites a thorough internal discussion about the definition of firm success and associates' opportunities to help plan for and participate in the firm's success.

Firm Success and Planning



* Combining "agree" and "somewhat agree," excluding "N/A"

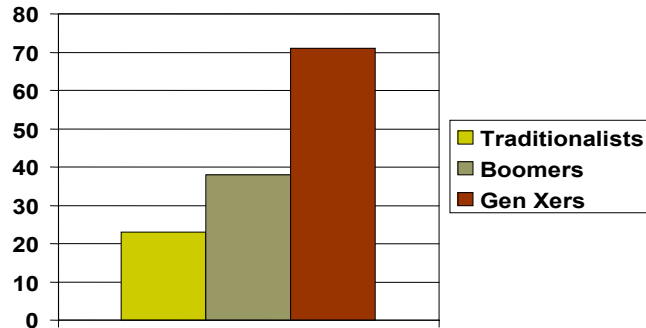
4. Mentoring and Training. **Provide mentoring, training, and coaching in areas of interest and need.** Associates, ask for the mentoring, training, and information you need to improve your *business* knowledge and skills, as well as your legal knowledge and skills. Consider this an investment in your firm and *your future ownership*—ask for it, seek it out, and use it.

a. Traditionalists and Boomers want associates to have an "ownership mentality," to learn the business of law, and Gen Xers want more financial information about their firms. What does "ownership mentality" mean, and what does it require? It requires an understanding of the firm as a business, including its management strategies and financial information. Leadership can help prepare associates for ownership with mentoring, training, coaching, discussing, and informing.

b. All generations expressed a need for business development mentoring, coaching, or training. Aligning individual business planning with firm marketing strategies can further engage associates in the firm's long-term planning and success.

Mentoring

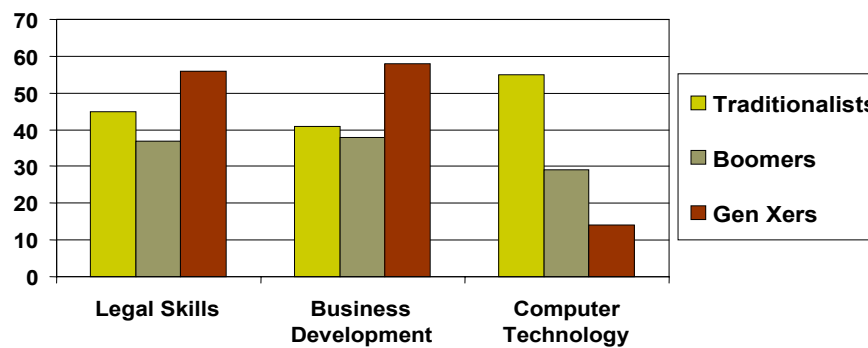
Want and Would Benefit from Mentoring/Training/Coaching



c. Traditionalists expressed a need for technology training. They can enhance their own experience and demonstrate the value of lifelong learning by embracing new technology. Furthermore, new technology, adopted wisely, advances the capabilities of the firm and engages the high-tech savvy of younger generations.

Mentoring

Most Wanted and/or Beneficial Mentoring/Training/Coaching



In conclusion, the above recommendations are neither quick fixes nor easy solutions, but in combination offer a process to improve the cross-generational work experience and strengthen the foundation of your firm or legal workplace.

You can visit <http://www.surveymonkey.com/Report.asp?U=176527343355> to access the complete results from this survey. Instructions for sorting data for further study follow.

This report is respectfully submitted by a joint subcommittee of the Managing Partners Roundtable and the Young Lawyers Section of the MBA:

Valerie Tomasi, President and Managing Shareholder, Farleigh Witt, Co-Chair
Catherine Brinkman, Associate, Schwabe Williamson & Wyatt, Co-Chair
Thomas W. Brown, Managing Partner, Cosgrave Vergeer Kester
Robert Hamrick, Associate, Prange Law Group
Katie Lane, Assistant County Attorney, Multnomah County Attorney's Office
John Casey Mills, Partner, Miller Nash
Thomas Sand, Managing Partner, Miller Nash
Kelly Struhs, Associate, Stoll Stoll Berne Lokting & Shlachter
Jo Smith, JSA Leadership + Development, Facilitator

Instructions for manipulating survey data:

1. Click on "Edit Filter" button.
2. Click on the "Add+" button to add a filter.
3. Select the question you are interested in seeing the results for.
Example: to view Generation X responses, select "Year of birth" for the filter description "Show respondents who answered question." Select "Born between 1965 and 1980" as the answer.
4. Click on the "active" button next to filter(s) you are interested in.
Example: to view Generation X responses only, click on the "active" button next to the filter description showing respondents who answered question "Year of birth" with choice "Born between 1965 and 1980."
5. Click the "Update" button to see the responses.

Note:

1. Multiple filters may be added.
2. More than one filter may be "active" at a time.

For help in viewing the results, contact Kathy Maloney at the MBA at 503.222.3275 or kathy@mbabar.org.

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