

The Millennial Perspective on Diversity

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DRI Diversity Insider

May 6, 2016

Millennials, the name given to the generation born between the early 1980s to the late 1990s, represent a segment of the workforce that, based on numerous studies, is notoriously difficult to retain. Recent statistics from the National Association for Law Placement (NALP) show that minority law firm partners are in short supply. Across all of the employers listed within NALP's 2015-2016 directory, the total number of minority partners was 7.52 percent, with only 2.55 percent of those partners being women. Historically, it has been challenging to retain diverse talent. The fact that millennials are fast becoming the largest portion of the workforce must be taken into account when developing diversity and inclusion initiatives. In this article, we offer perspectives on how firms can provide opportunities for young, diverse attorneys -- and retain them.

What can law firms do to retain the diverse talent of the millennial generation starting on day one?

Patrice M. Turenne: Millennials report that having work-based friendships make it more likely they will stay with an employer. According to a recent study, developing close ties with co-workers is important to millennials, and having friends at work is strongly related to how committed they are to their organizations. These friendships may especially assist in the retention of diverse attorneys because minority attorneys often feel isolated.

To this end, law firms should consider organizing events geared toward affinity groups. Affinity groups can provide a forum to advance diversity within a firm and assist in retaining diverse attorneys. Affinity group events provide diverse attorneys with the sense of community they desire, and provide opportunities to forge work-based friendships. Additionally, they aid in retention because they demonstrate that the firm values diverse millennial attorneys. This is significant, as a recent article in the *ABA Journal* indicated that one of the main reasons why diverse female attorneys leave firms to pursue alternative careers prior to making partner is because they feel undervalued.

Firms should also consider implementing a mentorship program for their diverse millennial attorneys. Mentorship programs are great for facilitating professional development and can be informal or formal in structure. The hope is that the mentor becomes an ally and possibly even an advocate as the attorney moves forward in his or her career.

One common trait of millennials is that they are free thinkers and reject workplace jargon. How can a firm practice what it preaches when it comes to diversity and show that it isn't just paying lip service to the issue?

David Salazar: There are many ways to answer this question, but one approach is to

focus on creating an inclusive environment rather than focusing on diversity for diversity's sake. A firm should focus on creating an inclusive environment where everyone is treated with the same level of respect, regardless of their position. For example, a custodian is treated with no less dignity than an attorney.

Another approach is for firms to build relationships with diverse organizations. This includes providing aid to organizations that help underserved communities, as well as building business relationships with minority-owned businesses. For example, in our headquarters city of Philadelphia, Marshall Dennehey partners with a local inner-city school, Cristo Rey Philadelphia High School. Cristo Rey is an independent, college preparatory school for students of all faiths who cannot otherwise afford a private education. Students job-share a position at our firm and, in exchange, the firm pays a portion of each student's tuition. By committing to programs like Cristo Rey, firms demonstrate that they are willing to do more than just talk about diversity.

The process of business development can be daunting for any attorney, even millennials with their boundless energy and drive. How can young diverse attorneys get involved in such efforts?

Alex B. Norman: Don't take yourself out of the rainmaking game before it starts. Few rainmakers are born with an innate ability to build client relationships and generate business. Those lacking this ability understand that rainmaking is a skill that is learned. They adopt a growth mindset and make the act of business development an integral part of their daily law practice. Anyone can do it with effort and persistence.

There is a common misconception that business development requires a low golf handicap and an affinity for "wining and dining." That may work for some folks, but it will not work for everyone. Potential clients are as varied and diverse as the attorneys pursuing them. Because of that, attorneys should focus on being themselves and delivering exceptional service.

Always have the courage to insert your diverse perspective into your service delivery. For instance, you may have firsthand knowledge of changing demographics in your region. Add value to your case assessments and make them personal by incorporating that knowledge.

Remember that quality work is the foundation of a self-sustaining practice. Strive every day to become a better attorney. This shouldn't be hard for millennials; studies show that we are obsessed with self-improvement. Think about your last performance review or self-assessment. Do not close your eyes and think that ignoring an identified area of needed improvement will make it go away. Attack it like any millennial would and become the best version of yourself.

The ultimate goal for most young attorneys practicing at a law firm is to make partner. However, some attorneys, especially diverse attorneys, may be discouraged by the statistics. How can firms demonstrate to diverse attorneys that there isn't a glass ceiling?

Kaitlin DeCrescio Ding: Many companies have set criteria for making partner or entering leadership positions. Those criteria should be available and fully understood by all attorneys. Follow up with these attorneys throughout the years to ascertain what their goals are, and what the company expects of

them to achieve those goals. Keeping the lines of communication open between management and diverse attorneys ensures that everyone is on the same page. Attorneys will have confidence knowing that they are progressing toward their aspirations and that the company wants to help them reach their full potential.

It is important that law firms have diverse attorneys in leadership and management positions. When women and minority attorneys hold senior positions, this demonstrates that the firm is committed to increasing and maintaining diversity, and shows younger diverse attorneys that the sky is the limit. Even if there are no women or minority attorneys currently in management at your company, it is important to encourage these diverse attorneys to keep striving. By letting diverse attorneys know that there are opportunities for them, you are telling them that there is not a glass ceiling.

In conclusion, by implementing initiatives like those outlined above, organizations can create an environment that effectively attracts and, more importantly, retains diverse millennial attorneys. These initiatives are fairly easy to implement and do not require fundamental changes to a firm's diversity efforts. Although retention of diverse attorneys takes some consideration and work, the payoff is substantial.



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