

Foreword



Millennials: We love to poke fun at them, but no one can deny their power and influence on the world today. Much has been written and said about those born after 1980—and some of it has not been positive. *Time* magazine has labeled them the “ME ME ME Generation.”

Some of the commonly held opinions are: They only want to work for themselves. They are materialistic and lazy. They’re addicted to social media and need constant, instant gratification. They’re sensitive snowflakes who can’t handle criticism in any form. The list goes on . . .

As business leaders, however, we no longer can speculate about how this generation will acclimate to the working world. Millennials are not just a distant fear or the source of our eye-rolling. They are an ever-expanding part of our daily professional existence. They are our colleagues and subordinates, as well as our clients and prospects. We engage with these young people from the coffee shop to the boardroom and beyond. In just two years, this generation will make up over half of the U.S. workforce, climbing to nearly 75 percent within a decade. We no longer can ignore the sheer volume of the millennial voice. Their attitudes, philosophies and behaviors are shaping not only their career paths but those of the Gen-Xers and Baby Boomers with whom they work. The time has come to either embrace or reject what they bring to our businesses, but we cannot maintain the status quo.

Law firms are inherently in the talent business. We strive to recruit and retain top people, who we groom and train to be the best in the marketplace. We then ask our clients to invest in these personalities. When your product is people, you not only have to make sure you are presenting smart and capable individuals but you also have to guarantee a true and steadfast ally for your clients to rely upon in times of need. To deliver for clients for years to come, we have to inspire and guide our future generation of leaders today.

But, how do we motivate and inspire this new generation of people who approach everything so differently? How do we ask our long-term clients, in turn, to partner with young people who aren’t willing to be captive in their offices the way we were back in the day?

As we learn in Susan Blakely's new book, the "ME Generation" has grown up. With their growth came change—both in how they see the world and how WE should. For firms to successfully absorb millennial lawyers, we need to gain a clear understanding of how to motivate this particular group relative to other constituencies. We need to make sure we are capturing the best this generation has to offer—their creativity, passions and diversity of mind and spirit—while keeping them engaged and committed. This is not a luxury. It is a business imperative for all law firm leaders.

The question we must ask ourselves next is do we change the new recruits to fit our models or do we change the firm to fit theirs? As a member of my firm's global management committee and someone passionately committed to developing and retaining our talent, this question has weighed heavily on me. Readers of a like mind and position will find Susan's book a veritable road map for navigating this dilemma. She defines this new generation of lawyers, parses out what they most value, and instructs those of us in the older generations on how to step up to the challenge.

Susan does not, however, leave all the hard work to the law firm leaders. Following the words of Leo Tolstoy, "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself," she poses important questions for our millennial colleagues to ponder as they take their own lives and career paths forward. There have been numerous books and articles in the last few years offering advice on how this new generation can, and should, acclimate to the working world. I don't think any authors have been quite as bold, however, as to draw parallels between the Me Generation and the Greatest Generation of the mid-1900s but Susan does here!

Drawing on heartwarming stories featuring Susan's dad and mentor, mid-century lawyer Rex M. Smith, she encourages readers from all ages to reflect on the values and practices of the legal profession of his time. She reminds lawyers of the tremendous impact we can have on our clients and communities, as she shares tales of both professional triumph and personal heartache. Rex Smith and lawyers of his generation understood that to be great lawyers, we first need to be great people.

In the last few decades, many lawyers have neglected this duty. Instead of focusing on our families and being good stewards of our communities, too many of us have kept our eyes on our screens and our brains on our legal matters. The belief that we can adequately serve our clients only with unwavering, 24/7 devotion has not served us well. My generation of lawyers has spent years striving for work-life balance, changing firm policies to increase flexibility—on paper. In reality, telecommuting and other flexible working arrangements have simply given us a longer leash from our desks, making us feel as though we never can fully disconnect from the office.

In the book that follows, Susan Blakely makes the case that, like the Greatest Generation lawyers, millennial lawyers don't want to live their lives this

way. They want well-rounded lives outside the office. They want to be upstanding members of society who are dedicated to service and social responsibility. Perhaps, we can look to our youngest lawyers to drive the change we need to achieve our own goals.

Over the years, Susan and I have been involved in a number of events focusing on diversity and inclusion efforts at our shared alma mater, Georgetown University Law Center, at my firm, and in other settings. I am honored that she asked me to join her in this insightful book. We long have shared an unshakeable belief in the power and influence of the legal profession on society, beginning with the environment we build for lawyers within our firms. We both understand that to serve our clients best, we need to engage lawyers of all ages, stages, beliefs and attitudes in our work. We need to make sure each voice is heard. And now, law firm leaders need to apply these same principles in recognition of this new powerful millennial voice.

I found this book to be a perfect read for busy law firm leaders, who want to gain an understanding of how to most effectively mentor this generation, and for the new generation of lawyers, who strive to realize their own versions of satisfaction. Let us take a cue from Susan and her father and help millennials become the next, greatest generation of lawyers! We might just get swept along with them. . . .

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