

**COMMENTARY from The Legal Intelligencer**



June 27, 2018

## **Bridge the Generational Divide by Proving Yourself to Senior Attorneys**

*By Christiana L. Signs and Alexander Scarola*

Starting a career as a lawyer is full of stress, hurdles, and a steep learning curve, especially now with our industry so rapidly changing.

Years of recession-inspired stagnation, a multitude of firm mergers and even closures, and baby boomers heading toward retirement make change inevitable. And today's legal field is under client-driven pressure to deliver even more efficient, high quality, and business-minded solutions than it has in the past. One of the most fundamental ways to make your careers as a new lawyer less stressful and more successful is by learning how to work with those more senior than you (and let's face it, at this point that is pretty much everyone), whether they are firm clients or more senior attorneys.

Using new technology without underestimating good old-fashioned work ethic helps new lawyers do just that. In the end, research by Dr. Jessica Kriegel, an organizational development consultant at Oracle and author of "Unfairly Labeled: How Your Workplace Can Benefit from Ditching Generational Stereotypes," suggests that millennials and younger cohorts are not so different from past generations: no matter what the time period, there is always an adjustment to changing attitudes in the workplace.

That said, in today's atmosphere, we can all benefit from acknowledging—and even learning from—generational differences that exist between more senior and junior attorneys. For more junior attorneys, those determining your work assignments and career paths are the more senior lawyers (like it or not). Echoing their patterns in work habits and production is likely critical to good performance reviews and

assignments. But even so, your first couple of years of practice can be deeply satisfying if you keep a few tips in mind:

**Turn in client-ready work.** Catch typos. Find changes made in a document that can lead to inconsistency with other aspects of that document—or related ones. Fix formatting errors. Be meticulous here. It will be rewarded in more work and better reviews. If you want to prove you are attentive to detail, this is a good way to do it.

**Be THE tech whiz.** If you understand how to use all the software that improves work product— from contract reviews and cite checking to templates and spreadsheets—that adeptness will translate into value. Remember, much of this technology is foreign and scary for those older attorneys who tend to resist change. You are expected to push more senior people into the more efficient future. Show you can lead and you will become indispensable.

**Create effective time entries.** The prehistoric—not to mention least effective and accurate—way of keeping time is keeping scribbled notes on a pad. Worse yet: Going through an inbox and sent box at the end of the month. Don't follow that example. Use software's smart trackers during the day to track what you do instead. More importantly, give enough detail to show how your efforts further the client's goals, rather than just inflate the bill.

**Be flexible and available.** All. Times. Show that your new job is your top priority. More senior attorneys still tend to be of that prove-it-to-me mindset, especially in those first few years. Planning some time off? Communicate that *before* you confirm your plans. Think about it. If you set a trip during proxy season and you are in the securities group, that's just bad timing—and you may wind up frustrating people. If you must be away during incredibly busy times, take a device with you. You may have to cancel that day at the beach to meet the client's demands, but more senior attorneys will expect and appreciate your commitment. We are in a service industry. Client demands, deal urgency and court timelines simply take precedence. Disappearing, whether for a vacation or a yoga class, leaves someone else filling in the gap for you. And likely grumbling all the way.

**Work even harder when working remotely.** Recognizing that more senior lawyers might not understand that when you are working remotely you are actually working will go a long way. Prove yourself first, and then slowly integrate working remotely. When doing so, respond faster than you would when in the office. Check in regularly throughout the day. Provide updates on your work. This will prove to the doubters that you are working just as hard as you do while in the office. In short, embrace your unique skill set as a junior attorney (not everyone grew up with a computer and a cellphone). But do not forget the things that will always matter, like proving yourself, working hard and being reliable. Balancing the old and new will make you an even better attorney than your older cohorts could imagine.



**Christiana L. Signs** is a labor and employment associate and **Alexander Scarola** is administrative shareholder at the Philadelphia office of Greenberg Traurig.

*Reprinted with permission from the April 12, 2018 edition of The Legal Intelligencer © 2018 ALM Media Properties, LLC. All rights reserved. Further duplication without permission is prohibited, contact*

1.877.257.3382 or [reprints@alm.com](mailto:reprints@alm.com).

