

Millennials shake up legal field

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Millennials (people born between 1982 and 2000) focused on finding a work-life balance have changed the legal profession. “It’s a new workforce and they expect different things,” said Peter Marlette, partner at Barclay Damon LLP . “I think that over time they are going to flip the legal profession on its head,” said Joseph Hanna, partner at Goldberg Segalla.

By offering younger employees flexibility from fixed schedules and perks such as a casual working environment, paid child care, early-on courtroom experience and even snacks, firms have made changes to stay competitive. ” From the baby boomers to Gen X and now to millennials, they hear and speak different things,” said Kevin Cross, managing partner at Lippes Mathias Wexler Friedman LLP. Strong mentoring programs are important, too, said Kevin Hogan, managing partner at Phillips Lytle LLP. “Mentoring is a huge point of emphasis and leans toward professional development,” he said. “Young attorneys have probably forever thirsted for training on how to succeed. I get the feeling that millennials now seek it more than ever before.”

Returning to work recently after maternity leave that was mostly paid time off, Megan Bahas a 2012 graduate of University at Buffalo School of Law is easing her way back into the job. “Within a few days I already had a partner check in with me to see if I’m doing OK in terms of the workload,” she said “They don’t necessarily care about money or about becoming partner ... They don’t care about grinding extra work)out on a Saturday or Sunday. They focus on quality of life,” Hanna said.

Bahas is part of the “Next Generation” group that Barclay Damon started in 2017. The group examines issues and trends, determines what associates need or want, evaluates options and then proposes changes to the management team. Thanks to the group, the firm started a policy to allow associates to work from home up to two days a week. “We wanted to make things as productive and as collaborative as we could,” Marlette said. “We have always been open to alternative working arrangements.” The firm also implemented a child-care reimbursement policy and changed the method in which employees are evaluated for pay increases to an accomplishment-based system with tiers. Associates advance through the ranks when they meet certain criteria, regardless of how long they have been with the firm. Associates at Barclay Damon are part of a shadowing program where they can attend depositions and receive credit toward their yearly hours It helps associates see the impact of what they’re working on for a client. “A lot of younger attorneys coming out of school have spent the past seven or eight years with their heads buried in books,” Cross said. “Sometimes we need to really help them to get connected.. “ Company culture is the “top priority” at Goldberg Segalla, Hanna said. The office environment is laidback and the lack of a dress code helps everyone relax more. Working from home more than being in the office is fine, too, he said. “As long as the work is done, as long as the quality of work remains consistent, you can work from the moon,” Hanna said. Goldberg Segalla nixed its billable hours requirement to give younger attorneys some breathing room.

Social networking such as happy hours and monthly breakfast events are “a big hit,” he said. The firm also invites food trucks to the office. “I think that generation likes things a little more casual,” he said