

Lawyer Generational Experiences

LEGAL INDUSTRY

1980s

- Approximately 500,000 lawyers in the United States.
- One lawyer for every 400 people in United States.
- Legal profession well-respected and lawyers viewed as respected members of the community.
- Practice of law exclusive domain of independent law firms.
- Clients relatively unsophisticated and willing to accept lawyer advice at face value.
- Sphere of business and social interaction was local community.
- Lawyers given carte blanche to litigate cases.
- Lawyer invoice to client read, "\$15,000 for services rendered."
- Clients more accepting of annual fee increases.
- Marketing activities included lunches, dinners, cocktails, golf outings, sporting events, etc.
- Secretary took dictation.
- Lawyer to secretary ratio = 1:1.
- Legal research tools: Paper library with hardback legal digests, Shepard's, etc.
- Formal dress code preferred. Saturday was considered the only casual day.
- Lawyers worked primarily from the office.
- Lawyers accessible to clients via telephone, facsimile and mail.
- Inter-office memos to get messages back and forth.
- Profession dominated by white males.

2000s

- Over 1,00,000 lawyers in the United States
- One lawyer for every 200 people in United States.
- Legal profession mistrusted and lawyers often ridiculed.
- Incursion of accounting firms, financial planners, HR consultants etc.
- More sophisticated clients, many of whom are lawyers themselves.
- Sphere of business and social interaction is global.
- Budget squeeze in corporations results in profit squeeze in law firms.
- Invoices subject to voluminous billing guidelines, detailed descriptions of billing activities, limitations on billable events (i.e. travel time), etc.
- Clients more sensitive to rising costs of legal services and refuse to subsidize large increases in associate salaries.
- Clients inundated with sophisticated marketing devices.
- Voice recognition software.
- Lawyer to secretary ratio = 3:1.
- Legal research tools: Westlaw, Lexis-Nexis, Internet, etc.
- Casual dress code preferred. Business casual Monday through Friday.
- Lawyers are mobile, with laptops and handheld PDAs, Blackberrys, cellular phones, etc.
- Lawyers accessible to clients 24 hours a day via electronic mail, BlackBerrys, cellular phones, laptops, handheld PDAs.
- Intranet or internal email to get messages back and forth.
- Profession more inclusive of women and people of color.

2020s

- Approximately 1.3 million lawyers in the United States.
- One lawyer for every 250 people in the United States.
- Feelings toward lawyers are mixed at best.
- Competition from Alternative Legal Service Providers; two states allow for non-lawyer ownership of law firms.
- Clients have access to rankings and reviews to drive decisions and electronic data for firm to firm comparisons.
- Sphere of business and social interaction is global and people can work from anywhere with accessible video conferencing.
- Clients sensitive to budget due to inflation and looming recession.
- Most invoicing is electronic and subject to intense scrutiny.
- Clients looking for added value and alternative fee structures.
- Social media and content marketing have eclipsed traditional marketing techniques. Lawyers Clients inundated with sophisticated marketing devices.
- Lawyers are largely self sufficient for document creation.
- Lawyer to secretary ratio = 7:1 or more.
- AI-powered research tools poised to replace or enhance traditional online legal research and more.
- Business casual or casual dress codes are generally accepted except for court or special
- Lawyers can work from anywhere and perform most tasks from their smartphones and devices.
- Lawyers accessible 24-7 with heightened response expectations via text, etc.
- Multiple channels of communication by video and audio.
- Many firms have advanced Diversity, Equity & Inclusion efforts. Still relatively few women and people of color in law firm leadership.

LEGAL CAREER

1980s

- Jobs plentiful at good law firms for good students.
- Invited to law firm partnership after 3 to 5 years of good work.
- Upward mobility to partnership is the only sure sign of success.
- Lawyers looking for rewards in terms of financial success and elevation to partnership.
- Lawyers looking to build lifetime careers in one law firm.
- Moderate billable hour requirements.
- Expected to stay with firm throughout legal career.
- Wait for opportunity for career progression.
- Diversity accepted as the natural progression of the profession.
- Interview process for associate consists of being interviewed by partners in the firm.
- Formal feedback once a year if at all.
- Little or no technology training/experience.

2000s

- Job market extremely competitive; top schools or top of class required for large firms/best paying jobs.
- Possibly invited to partnership after 8 to 10 years of high productivity, development of a book of business, and some participation in firm management and/or administration.
- Greater desire for alternatives to equity partnership. Success can mean a horizontal move (non-equity partnership, staff attorney, etc.) and not necessarily a vertical move.
- Lawyers looking for rewards in terms of financial success, flexibility, freedom, autonomy and increase in opportunities.
- Lawyers looking to leverage their credentials in managing their own careers. A 2000 American Bar Foundation report found that 65% of young lawyers indicated that they would consider switching jobs within two years.
- High annual billable hour requirements to cover associate salaries and increases in overhead.
- Willing to make lateral moves and to transition into new careers.
- More impatient in terms of career progression.
- Diversity expected as the natural way of doing business.
- Interview process consists of associate candidate interviewing the firm and its partners as well.
- Associates expect constant feedback often informally after each project.
- Grew up with computers in home, school and office. Expectation of latest technology tools and gadgets.

2020s

- War for Talent continues; lateral market is very active.
- Possibly invited to equity partnership after 10 to 12 years of high productivity, development of a book of business, and some participation in firm management and/or administration.
- Success defined widely among professionals. Path to partnership is not desirable to many.
- Lawyers looking for rewards in terms of financial success, personal/professional development and growth, flexibility, freedom to work anywhere, work/life balance.
- Lawyers looking for professional satisfaction and willing to take alternative paths in or outside of the law.
- Productivity averages decreasing due to decline in demand for private law firm services.
- Lawyers may practice at three or more firms during their career.
- Little patience for career progression.
- Diversity efforts have evolved to equity and inclusion initiatives.
- Firms investing significantly in culture and talent brand strategy.
- Associates crave informal feedback and are often disappointed.
- Grew up with smartphones/devices, Google search, instant access to information, immersed in technology.

LAWYER PERSONAL FINANCIAL PROFILE

1980s

- Little or no debt at law school graduation.
- Average associate starting salary was \$36,000.
- Less open about compensation and benefit packages.
- Early financial success (earning significantly more than contemporaries with bachelors' degrees or MBAs).
- Expect to pay dues then achieve financial payoff.

2000s

- Large student loan debt at law school graduation (Often \$60,000 to \$120,000 or more).
- Average associate starting salary is \$66,000.
- Financial mediocrity early in career with possibility of long-term financial success (contemporaries with bachelors' degrees, MBAs make the same or more to begin with).
- Expect to receive quicker financial payoff.
- More open with peers regarding compensation and benefit packages.

2020s

- Large student loan debt at law school graduation (Six figures +)
- Average associate starting salary for 2023 was \$200,000 (NALP).
- Transparency for associate compensation systems is expected.
- Relatively few achieve significant wealth (contemporaries in other industries, entrepreneurs have comparable or better financial success).
- Not sure what to expect, particularly re: social structures for retirement, etc.

LAWYER FAMILY LIFE

1980s

- Single income family.
- Little or no childcare outside the home.
- Stay at home spouse handles most or all household and childcare duties. Working spouse devotes evenings to client development, bar and community activities.
- Lawyers lived to work.

2000s

- Dual income family.
- High-cost childcare outside the home.
- Lawyers work to live a balanced life.
- Household and child care duties required by both spouses.

2020s

- Wide variety of individual and family situations.
- High-cost childcare outside the home.
- Lawyers seek a fulfilling professional and personal life.
- Household and child care duties required by both partners.

OTHER SOCIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

1980s

- Don't ask/don't tell society.
- Prefer not to disclose sensitive/important information.
- Sexual identity was private.
- Post civil rights era.

2000s

- Society filled with honest information about sex, gangs, drugs, AIDS, violence, etc.
- Prefer honesty, straightforward information and disclosure.
- Differences in sexual identity more open.
- Diversity efforts begin spreading widely.

2020s

- Information available at all times regarding all topics on personal devices.
- Transparency is expected, and authenticity is prized.
- LGBTQ more open; 20% of Gen Z identify; marriage equality.
- Focus on equity and inclusion; social justice focus intensifies in 2020 and after.



Are you interested in learning more about how to address generational diversity in your firm?

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